Relations and Rivals:

The Social Worlds of Benjamin Lester, 1760-1775

by

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Abstract

For eighteenth-century merchants active in Newfoundland trade, competition was fierce. This raises the question of why some merchants succeeded when many failed. To answer this question, this thesis analyzes the diary of Benjamin Lester, a Poole merchant who operated out of Trinity during the 1760s. An examination of Lester's diary reveals that his social life played as important a role in his success as did specific business actions and decisions. During the 1760s Lester transitioned from trying to gain a strong foothold in Trinity as a planter, and expand his reach in Newfoundland, to placing greater importance on social connections in England by the 1770s. Since Lester operated on both sides of the Atlantic, and the social wealth that he accumulated in Newfoundland was transferred back to England, this thesis situates Lester within the contexts of the greater Atlantic.

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Chapter One:

Introduction:

The 1760s were a period of success for many West Country merchants involved in the Newfoundland fishery. The conclusion of the Seven Years War in 1763 brought some limitations to the French fishery on the island, while the French loss of Labrador meant that the English cod and seal fishery there could expand. Meanwhile, many fishers and merchants turned to exploiting the offshore fishery where fish stocks remained consistent throughout the decade; combined, these factors allowed the 1760s to be a decade of economic expansion.[1] The tradition of treating Newfoundland as a summer workstation was well established, yet there was an increased reliance by merchants on the growing resident population; either way this meant that there were ample fishers available, and residents to purchase their goods. By all accounts, the 1760s provided opportunities that other periods of the eighteenth century did not, and this phase of growth would be set back as the mid-1770s brought with it the American Revolution and disruptions to Atlantic trade.[2]

For West Country merchants, competition remained fierce in Newfoundland as it did at fish markets in Spain and Portugal. Many failed in their attempt to grow a successful mercantile empire, even within this context of growth. In the latter part of the eighteenth century many

[1] Sean T. Cadigan, *Newfoundland: A History,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 69-72. Here Cadigan demonstrates the role of the church in population increase; C. Grant Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland: A Geographer's Perspective*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1976), pp. 140-141; Patrick O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland: A History to 1843,* (St. John's: Long Beach Press, 1999), 85.

[2] Olaf Janzen, "The Royal Navy and the Defence of Newfoundland during the American Revolution," *Acadiensis* 14, no. 1 (1984): 28; Michael J. Crawford, "The *Hawke* and the *Dove*: A Cautionary Tale: Neutral Ports and Prizes of War During the American Revolution," *The Northern Mariner* XVIII, no. 3-4 (July-October 2008): 65. See also: Olaf Uwe Janzen, Newfoundland and British Maritime Strategy During the American Revolution, (PhD diss., Queens University, 1983), chapter V. The direct threat to Newfoundland trade during the American Revolution demonstrates the importance of Newfoundland to Britain as an economic asset, and as a 'nursery for seamen.'

wealthy merchants spiraled into bankruptcy. The interest of this thesis though is not to analyze why some merchants failed, but rather to question the factors that led some to create a lasting and successful enterprise. This thesis therefore uses the Benjamin Lester diaries as a case study to answer this question by analyzing his social relationships at a crucial stage of his career.

Benjamin Lester was an English-born merchant from Poole who operated out of Trinity, Newfoundland. The Lester family had been involved in the Newfoundland trade by the 1730s and had at least one ship in their employ. Lester became familiar with this trade as he actively travelled to Newfoundland as early as 1737 under the employment of John Masters and his Irish partner Michael Ballard.[3] Following his father's death in that same year, it was likely that Lester had little choice but to make a career for himself in this trade. While Lester worked as an agent for Ballard over the following nineteen years he built a good reputation for himself in Newfoundland. This in turn made him desirable by the naval government, and he became a magistrate in 1749. After Masters and Ballard had died by 1756 Lester was able to take control of much of the Trinity fishery in partnership with his brother Isaac, who ran a lucrative coopering business in Poole, and had already began to employ Newfoundland fishers.[4]

Like the Newfoundland economy, the 1760s represented a transformative period for Lester. Over these years he went from establishing himself in Newfoundland to a very well-established merchant with both high social status and an abundance of wealth by 1775. To quantify this success, from the time that Lester emerged as a Newfoundland merchant to the last

[3] D. F. Beamish, "LESTER, BENJAMIN," in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, (Toronto and Quebec City: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lester_benjamin_5E.html.
[4] Isaac Lester kept his own diary which has been preserved and is most useful (for the purposes of this thesis) to help fill in the gaps left by extended absences of writing in Benjamin's diary.

year of this study he had amassed a fleet of at least twelve ships.[5] One of the most evident reasons for his success in an analysis of the diaries was his social life. Lester was able to use various relationships to his advantage and this provides an essential key in the story of his success.

One result of growth in Newfoundland, both of economy and year-round inhabitation, was that it led to greater record keeping.[6] Merchant diaries, including those of Benjamin Lester, church records, and naval government documents, have all helped historicize this period and remains one of the reasons that there is still much to be understood. From 1752 to 1815 naval government was it its "apex" of operation in Newfoundland and this mode of government – though its effectiveness in carrying out law and order is debated – was very successful in producing records.[7] Court proceedings from Trinity bound in the "Trinity Minute Book" help to paint a fuller picture of Lester's relationships, particularly with his rivals.[8] These court records help in understanding the system of naval government that had developed in Newfoundland and the ways in which Lester could use that system to his advantage; to this end, both the Colonial Secretary's Letterbook, and the Colonial Office 194 dispatches will also be used.[9] These were

[5] Derek Beamish, John Hillier, and H.F.V Johnstone, *Mansions and Merchants of Poole and Dorset,* Vol. 1, (Poole: Poole Historical Trust: 1976), 90.
[6] C. Grant Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland,* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 140; Sean T. Cadigan, *Newfoundland: A History,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 69.
[7] Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland, 1699-1832,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 2003), 24.
[8] *Bound Minute Books of the Newfoundland District Courts,* Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador, GN 5/4/B/1 Court of Sessions, Trinity District 1753-92. Henceforth cited as *Trinity Minute Book,* Transcript prepared by Dr. Jerry Bannister.
[9] Colonial Office Series (CO194), vol. 1-120, (Original Correspondence, despatches, and their enclosures sent from Newfoundland to the Board of Trade), Memorial University – Digital Archives Initiative, https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/cns_colonia/search/searchterm/CO%20194/field/subcol/mode/exact/conn/and/order/title. Henceforth cited as CO194/volume; Colonial Secretary's Letterbook, Volumes 1-15 (Microfilm, Grenfell Campus, Memorial University). Henceforth cited as "Colonial Secretary's Letterbook." Finding aids for both CO194 and the Letterbook can be found at: Olaf Janzen, "Finding Aid to the Colonial Office 194 Series"/"Finding aid to the Colonial Secretary's Letterbook," https://www2.grenfell.mun.ca/~olaf/

copies of letters written by the naval governor in Newfoundland, and copies of communication between the governor and the Board of Trade/Secretary of State in London, respectively. Church records, particularly letters from the minister in Trinity to the 'Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,' can be utilized to reconstruct the social world in Trinity and demonstrate the tensions that existed between different classes, particularly between clergy and merchants.[10]

As a result of these various primary sources, there is a wealth of literature which also historicizes Newfoundland in this period and helps us understand Lester's world. Given that we have a more thorough understanding of Newfoundland in these years, and that Lester kept a consistent record, the 1760s remains an appropriate time span in which to conduct more historical research.

From 1761 to 1775 Lester regularly made daily entries in his diary, though a gap exists between 1765 and 1767 as well as 1771 and 1775. Gaps in the diary pose some problems for conceptualizing Lester's social world but other primary sources like the 'Trinity Minute Book,' and Isaac Lester's diaries help to fill in details about Benjamin's activities during these years. These years are productive to analyze not only because they reflect an important stage in Lester's career, but also because he regularly travelled between England and Newfoundland during this time. For this reason, conclusions and comparisons can be drawn about how Lester spent his time while he was in England versus Newfoundland. Lester wrote about a variety of things in his diary but there were many consistencies. On the one hand, Lester continually wrote about business transactions, gave lists of goods, quantities that he traded in, and provided information regarding the daily work that was carried out. On the other hand, who Lester spent time with and

[10] *United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Calendar of Letters*, 1721-1793, Vol. 5, (London: List & Index Society, 1972). Henceforth cited as SPG.

the activities they engaged in was written about almost daily. In this way, the diary was a calendar of his social life. An analysis of the diaries reveals the reason for this is was because the people he socialized with played a crucial role in the success of his business. In writing his diary Lester appears not unlike what others have written about eighteenth century diarists in that he was not "introspective" but rather his life "was measured in doing. Nothing was trivial."[11] Given the idea that nothing Lester wrote was trivial, this means that he understood socializing was an important action that helped advance his career, and thus deemed it important to keep a record.

Since Lester wrote much of his account from Newfoundland he created a rich historical text that has been subsequently used by Newfoundland historians to understand various facets of that world. While many survey texts of this period include the Lester diaries, they are typically used as evidence to historicize the fishery, naval government, or the labor recruitment process. Far less academic work has looked at the diaries with a more holistic lens to situate Lester and his diary within the context of the wider Atlantic world, and other British merchants. While the diaries are a staple source in Newfoundland historiography, in a broader sense they are typically not the focal point of research. The approach of this thesis is not to separate Lester from these bodies of literature but rather to expand the dimensions of how we conceptualize Newfoundland merchants by examining Lester in Atlantic contexts also.

While historians have continually used the Lester diaries, they have not done so as a means to study Benjamin Lester himself; they have instead used the diaries as a way to study other aspects of Newfoundland history, particularly the fishery. There are some exceptions: Allan Dwyer's 2012 PhD dissertation, "Atlantic Borderland: Natives, Fishers, Planters and

[11] Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary 1785-1812,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 9.

Merchants in Notre Dame Bay, 1713-1802," along with other work that stemmed from this dissertation, uses the diaries to demonstrate how Lester took advantage of the French losses in Newfoundland to project his business into Notre Dame Bay. By using the records of two Newfoundland merchants Dwyer can compare their business strategies as well as their rivalry with one another.[12] Jerry Bannister's 2003 article, "Citizen of the Atlantic: Benjamin Lester's Social World in England, 1768-69," analyzes Lester's ability to traverse and exist in two very different worlds – in Newfoundland, and in England. Bannister's article focuses on Lester's connections and how he cultivated his social and political wealth in England.[13] Though these sources focus on Lester's social life, the value of this thesis is that it devotes time to analyzing Lester in Newfoundland, and then in England, and can offer a fuller comparison of the two.

Historians have analyzed and re-analyzed eighteenth century West Country merchants and their role in Newfoundland over the past century and that body of literature has taken many different directions. In more recent times, Gordon Handcock has used the Lester diaries to demonstrate his economic contributions to Trinity, and in his 1989 book *Soe longe as there comes noe women: Origins of English Settlement in Newfoundland* he discusses the business practices of the Lesters. In particular, Handcock describes the labor recruitment process that the Lester's used, which played no small part in fueling the growing Newfoundland population.[14] Other Newfoundland historians such as Shannon Ryan and Sean Cadigan have analyzed the role

[12] Allan Dwyer, "Atlantic Borderland: Natives, Fishers, Planters and Merchants in Notre Dame Bay, 1713-1802" (PhD diss., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2012).
[13] Jerry Bannister, "Citizen of the Atlantic: Benjamin Lester's Social World in England, 1768-69," in *The Newfoundland Quarterly* XCVI, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 32-37. See also: Jerry Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor": Law and Authority in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland," In *The Face of Justice on Newfoundland's Northeast Coast,* ed. Christopher Curran and Melvin Baker, (St. John's: The Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2012).
[14] W. Gordon Handcock, *Soe Longe as there comes noe women: Origins of English settlement in Newfoundland*, Newfoundland History Series 6, (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1989). See also: "The Poole Mercantile Community and the Growth of Trinity 1700-1839," *The Newfoundland Quarterly* LXXX, no. 3 (Winter 1985): 19-30.

of merchants within the economy, though often in different periods.[15] Although this literature does not always focus on the Lester diaries it represents a trend of Newfoundland historians overlooking merchant social lives.

On the other side of the Atlantic, historians have analyzed merchant social and domestic lives, often to explore their place and roles within British society. Works like David Hancock's *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785,* goes beyond looking at merchants' business dealings and explores the roles they played in their communities, the social ties they maintained, and the expectations placed on wealthy merchants.[16] Historians such as Sheryllynne Haggerty, on the other hand, have demonstrated that eighteenth century merchants used "trust, reputation, obligation, and networks" to create a unique business culture.[17] Though it was created for a popular audience, *Mansions and Merchants of Poole and Dorset* remains one of the few sources that provides an in-depth look at West Country merchants' domestic lives, and includes an examination of the Lester family.[18] English historiography that discusses merchants will help to demonstrate how Lester conducted his social life, like many other eighteenth century merchants, as a way to legitimize his place in a growing elite society, and operate his business in accordance with an emerging business culture.

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[15] See: Shannon Ryan, "Fishery to Colony: A Newfoundland Watershed, 1793-1815," *Acadiensis* XII, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 34-52; Sean Cadigan, Hope and Deception in Conception Bay: Merchant-Settler Relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

[16] David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See also: Keith Wrightson, "Class" in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, 2nd ed., eds. David Armitage & Michael J. Braddick, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); See also: Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* revised edition, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1990).

[17] Sherrylynne Haggerty, *Merely for Money?: Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750-1815*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 236.

[18] Derek Beamish, John Hillier, and H.F.V Johnstone, *Mansions and Merchants of Poole and Dorset,* Vol. 1, (Poole: Poole Historical Trust: 1976).

Terry McDonald's work provides an invaluable crossroads between these two bodies of literature. His work will be particularly important for exploring the degree to which merchants used the Newfoundland fishery to propel their social lives and personal finances as a means to take on new career directions in England.[19]

Given that colonial fish merchants went through a general increase of wealth and power in the years prior to the American Revolution it is important to situate Lester within the American literature that discusses merchants at this time.[20] This body of work typically either analyzes merchants as a means to understand their economic contributions and the rise of capitalism, or their role in the prelude to the American Revolution.[21] A book like Christopher Magra's, *The Fisherman's Cause: Atlantic Commerce and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution* provides an intersect between these two themes. Magra explores the reasons behind increased productivity for American fish merchants during the 1760s and 70s, and the way in which this productivity "contributed to tensions" between continental America and Britain.[22] Phyllis Whitman Hunter's *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World: Massachusetts Merchants, 1670-1780,* will be used as it analyzes the business culture of merchants on that side of the Atlantic.[23] More specifically, this book helps to compare Lester's social life and actions with colonial-American merchants. Works like this help establish Lester

[19] Terry McDonald, "The One in Newfoundland, the Other in England: Ledgard, Gosse and Chancey, or Gosse, Chancey and Ledgard?," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 20, no. 2 (2005): 210; Terry McDonald, "'I Had Better Be Without Him...' Rivalry, Deception and Social Status within the Poole-Newfoundland Trade," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* XVI, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 135-150

[20] Christopher Paul Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause: Atlantic Commerce and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19.

[21] For more on the rise of capitalism see: Naomi R. Lamoreaux, "Rethinking the Transition to Capitalism in the Early American Northeast," in the *Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (2003): 437-461.

[22] Christopher Paul Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 48; See also: Jacob M. Price, *Perry of London: A Family and a Firm on the Seaborne Frontier, 1615-1753* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[23] Phyllis Whitman Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World: Massachusetts Merchants, 1670-1780,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

within a greater sea of West Country fish merchants operating in America, where the way wealth and power were generated shared many similarities. Moreover, it allows us to see the tensions that existed between the different sites of the Atlantic fishery. With merchants' wealth and power increasing, restrictions to their growth were met with great opposition. Comparisons can be drawn between colonial-American fish merchants who fought against restrictions to their trade, and Lester, who used his power to influence political decisions about Newfoundland and his interests there.

The subject of loyalty is particularly important for analyzing merchants in this time frame. Patricia Rogers's article, "Rebels' Property: Smuggling and Imperial [Dis]loyalty in the Anglo-American Atlantic" aids in understanding the dimensions of loyalty in merchants living outside continental America as she uses the diary of a Nova Scotia merchant for her study.[24] Loyalist literature often dismisses Newfoundland as it was further removed from the American Revolution and saw few loyalist refugees, however, as Lester engaged in many commercial activities that seem to undermine British authority, the dimensions of *his* loyalty to the crown deserves some analysis.

Thus, Anglo-American literature that analyzes merchants is important for reconstructing the world in which Lester lived as he spent time on both sides of the Atlantic. Just as Newfoundland represented a site between Britain and America this literature can be used to show how Lester existed between these two worlds. He shared similarities with the colonial-American mercantile community, but like Newfoundland and West Indies merchants, remained firmly a part of British society.

[24] Patricia Rogers, "Rebels' Property: Smuggling and Imperial [Dis]loyalty in the Anglo-American Atlantic," in the *Journal of Early American History* 2, no. 1 (2012): 33-57.

Some work that has discussed non-mercantile aspects of Newfoundland history have placed particular importance on the Lester diaries. Jerry Bannister's 2003 book *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland 1699 – 1832*, for example, uses the Lester diaries to explore the system of naval government. Mark Humphries, on the other hand, has used the Lester diaries to explore the French raid on Newfoundland during the Seven Years War in 'A Calamity From Which No Relief Can Be Expected': Empire, Authority, and Civilian Responses to the French Occupation of Newfoundland."[25]

There are a multitude of ways that this set of diaries can be used for historical research, but most have done so while looking at Newfoundland in a vacuum. This is important for understanding many historical systems within a Newfoundland context but elides Newfoundland's place in the wider Atlantic. The framework this thesis relies on has been described by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick in the introduction to their edited volume *The British Atlantic World 1500-1800.* They write: "many of the chapters of this book pursue this kind of Atlantic history: learning both what was general and what was particular by placing differing local historical experiences in a larger, comparative, context."[26] The aim of this thesis is to remain committed to understanding Lester in a local Newfoundland context; he was a merchant involved in the Newfoundland fishery after all. However, Lester should also be situated within different bodies of literature that places him within the greater Atlantic. Chapters in the Armitage and Braddick volume such as Braddick's chapter on "Civility and Authority" help in our understanding of how Lester used his wealth to affirm himself as an authority figure

[25] Mark Osborne Humphries, "'A Calamity From Which No Relief Can Be Expected': Empire, Authority, and Civilian Responses to the French Occupation of Newfoundland, June-September 1762," *Acadiensis* XLIII, no.1 (Winter/Spring2014): 35-64.
[26] The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800," 2nd ed., eds. David Armitage & Michael J. Braddick, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 4.

in Newfoundland, and how this occurred throughout the Atlantic.[27] Peter Mathias' article "Risk, credit and kinship in early modern enterprise," help situate Lester amongst larger economic trends in the Atlantic.[28] Finally, Stephen Hornsby's *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America* analyzes Lester specifically and rightfully places him within a wider Atlantic context, using Lester to demonstrate the degree to which Newfoundland was "integrated into the British Atlantic."[29] Hornsby sets out to examine the British Atlantic world by shedding the "boundaries of modern nation-states, which have served too long as the contexts for studying colonial North America, and replac[ing] them with the historically more appropriate frontiers of the European colonial empires."[30] Apart from adopting this kind of framework, Hornsby's book will be particularly important for demonstrating the similarities between Lester and merchants of the West Indies, insofar as they also treated those islands as a temporary home and workstation. Hornsby helps to reconstruct the highly connected Atlantic world in which Lester lived. This thesis will act as bridge between local Newfoundland history and these kinds of Atlantic scholarship.

Each chapter of this thesis looks specifically at the Lester diaries to ascertain who he was spending time with. Chapter two provides some background on the social structure of those involved in the Newfoundland fishery and the local context in which Lester was writing his diaries. The chapter then looks at Lester's relationships with family, friends, and members of the

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[27] Michael J. Braddick, "Civility and Authority," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, 2nd ed., eds. David Armitage & Michael J. Braddick, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

[28] Peter Mathias, "Risk, Credit, and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise," in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* eds. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, (Cambridge University Press, 2000); See also: David Hancock, "Rethinking the Economy of British America," in *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions*, ed. Cathy Matson, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2006).

[29] Stephen J. Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America,* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005), 43.

[30] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 1.

naval government in Newfoundland. In analyzing these categories some conclusions can be drawn by comparing Lester's relationships in the early 1760s and the latter part of that decade. Changes over the decade paint the narrative of Lester's formative years and show how he placed greater importance on relationships that played a direct role in the expansion of his business.

While chapter three still focuses on sections of Lester's diary written in Newfoundland, it focuses on relationships that did not pose any obvious advantage: namely, his rivals and enemies. This chapter opens by exploring the expectations for eighteenth century merchants, and specifically how Lester was expected to act in accordance with his growing status. Duties projected on to him through his position as a magistrate served to exacerbate these expectations. The chapter then analyses Lester's relationship with the church in Trinity, other merchants, and some enemies of the state: the French and colonial-Americans. With Lester's less useful social relationships, particularly his relationship with the church and its minister there in the 1760s, historical conclusions can be drawn according to what Lester chose *not* to write. A result of the competition that existed in Newfoundland was that it pushed Lester to lobby for less government regulation in Newfoundland while encouraging enough social support and regulation to allow the resident population to continue operating in Newfoundland. As Lester increasingly relied on his growing status to influence Newfoundland affairs, it shows how he shifted from overseeing operations from Trinity to looking at Newfoundland and its operations from a broader and more political standpoint. This chapter demonstrates how Lester was able to move within the arena of his expectations and maintain productive relationships even with his rivals. Examining Lester in Newfoundland gives opportunities to compare him with other merchants in colonial-America and the West Indies.

Chapter four, on the other hand, takes a different approach, one that has been more often overlooked by Newfoundland historians and analyzes Lester during his time in England. Two notable episodes during the winters of 1763 and 1769 are used as a sample for this chapter. Lester's relationship with his family, friends, and working relationships in England are explored. Not only can this chapter draw conclusions based on a comparison with the diaries written in Newfoundland, but when the winter months of 1763 and 1769 are compared there are notable differences in Lester's work activities, and who he spent time with. This comparison shows how Lester managed to increase his wealth as well as his social status. Furthermore, comparisons of 1763 and 1769 demonstrates that his interest and involvement in political affairs grew throughout the decade. This foreshadows another period of Lester's life outside the time of this study, but in which Lester had an impressive political career in England. Examining Lester in England provides an opportunity to place him within common trends there, particularly within the context of the growing merchant elite.

The analysis from these chapters demonstrates that a merchant's social relationships played a crucial role in the success of their business. This was especially evident during this period of Lester's life as he attempts to gain a strong foothold in the economic, social, and political worlds that governed Newfoundland. By 1775 we see Lester has developed the wealth, status, and influence that will allow him to remain profitable throughout the rest of his life. Work-related relationships with employees and purchasers played the most direct role in his success, however, friends and family also played important but different roles on both sides of the Atlantic. Likewise, relationships with members of the naval government helped him develop influence and overcome obstacles. As time passed Lester shifted from cultivating his business and gaining territorial expansion in Newfoundland to using his economic and political ties in

England to expand his career directions; he transitioned from a Trinity planter to increasingly running his Newfoundland operations from Poole. The fact that Lester could transfer his reputation, influence, and power back and forth across the Atlantic illustrates that these two worlds were not as disparate as it may often appear. Lester used the transatlantic nature of this world to his benefit. By situating Lester amongst the local Newfoundland contexts, as well as various Atlantic contexts and trends, this thesis adds to various bodies of literature.

Chapter Two:

Benjamin Lester in Newfoundland: Context and Social Sphere, 1760-1770

The expansion of Benjamin Lester's mercantile empire depended on the time that he invested into living in Trinity. Overseeing mercantile operations from England carried a much higher economic risk for Atlantic merchants who preferred to have "face-to-face" relationships, and Lester therefore opted to oversee Newfoundland operations directly.[31] He used Trinity as a base to gain a strong foothold and then expand outward into different areas of Newfoundland.[32] This territorial expansion is one measure with which to track his success throughout the 1760s. As Lester worked and lived in Trinity his social interactions played a decided role in this success. The question remains: who did Lester interact with there, and why was it that social interactions played such an important role both in his diary, and in how he created his success during this time? This chapter demonstrates how Lester's relationships with family, friends, and members of the naval government all provided commercial advantages. This chapter compares Lester's diary in the early 1760s to the late 1760s to ascertain on which social connections he placed more importance as his wealth and social status grew. Ultimately, Lester was able to operate his business on both sides of the Atlantic (and increasingly out of Poole) due to the connections he made during his time in Trinity.

2.1: The Taverner Family

In the mid-eighteenth century the Taverner family of Poole had been amongst the most prominent planter families in Trinity. Their "extended family," which lived on both sides of the

[31] Peter Mathias, "Risk, Credit, and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise," in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy,* ed. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16.
[32] Allan Dwyer, *Business Rivalry in the Colonial Atlantic: A Five Forces Analysis*, (Administrative Sciences Association of Canada), 2013 Annual Conference, 30.

Atlantic, was heavily involved in maritime commerce and the cod fish trade from the late seventeenth century onward.[33] Many who married into the Taverner family was, or became, involved in the Newfoundland trade. Francis Lester, (Benjamin's father) and John Masters (who Benjamin worked as an agent) both married daughters of William Taverner and remain good examples of how interconnected the planter/merchant class of Trinity was.[34] The family was instrumental in how the location developed. In the 1740s Trinity remained unremarkable in terms of production, trade, and population when compared with other areas of the Avalon peninsula. By the 1760s, however, while many other areas retained only regular migratory fishing numbers, Trinity increased in both summer and winter populations, and so production increased.[35] This increased productivity was largely a result of Jacob Taverner dying in 1748 and leaving property to his son in law, Benjamin Lester, and to his four sons: Benjamin, Jacob, Andrew, and Joseph.[36] As Benjamin and these other family members became independent merchants they helped facilitate a period of growth for Trinity. Moreover, an increased number of winter inhabitants were engaged in wintertime furring, sealing, and firewood production, which seems to have moved further south of Trinity in the 1770s, but for a short period added another dimension to the trade centered in the area.[37]

Having already been related to the Taverner family, and through a marriage to his cousin, Susannah Taverner in the early 1750s, Benjamin Lester was doubly legitimized as a Trinity

[33] W. Gordon Handcock, Newfoundland history series 6: *Soe longe as there comes noe women: Origins of English Settlement in Newfoundland,* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1989), 50.
[34] Handcock, *Soe longe as there comes noe women,* 47.
[35] Jeff Butt, *Three Eighteenth Century Newfoundland Towns: Trepassey, Trinity, and St. John's*. Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998, https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/exploration/trinity-trepassey-st-johns.php
[36] Handcock, *Soe longe as there comes noe women,* 50.
[37] C. Grant Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland: A Geographer's Perspective* (Toronto: McClelland and Stuart, 1974), pp. 172-173.

based planter and merchant.[38] Understanding the Taverner planters is important since this side of the family offers a contrast to how Lester ran his business. As Lester became increasingly established he placed greater importance on his connections in England, and this made him different from the Taverner planters who continued to have a presence in Trinity and had "spawn[ed] a permanent Newfoundland branch."[39]

2.2: Trinity: Social Structure and Historical Context

Those who were present in Trinity during this period, and the social structure that existed, determined what Benjamin Lester's social world looked like. Fishers, or the servant class, made up most of the population. That included both migratory fishers and inhabitants. The next class, planters, lived in Newfoundland and had servants in their employ. They regularly acted as middlemen between a group of fishers and the merchant. Finally, the merchants were those that could extend credit to the inhabitants and planters, while most of the migratory servants were paid direct wages. Because the fishery was a seasonal operation, inhabitants and planters needed supplies and provisions before the season began so merchants provided goods upfront in exchange for their catch of fish. One direction the Newfoundland merchant literature has taken is to emphasize the degree to which merchants used Newfoundland primarily as a place to sell their goods, beginning with Keith Matthews in 1973.[40] In these years Lester was both a planter and a merchant.

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[38] D. F. Beamish, "LESTER, BENJAMIN," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, (Toronto and Quebec City: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lester_benjamin_5E.html.
[39] Handcock, *Soe longe as there comes noe women,* 50.
[40] Keith Matthews, *Lectures on the History of Newfoundland, 1500-1830* (St. John's, 1973); Terry McDonald, "The One in Newfoundland, the Other in England: Ledgard, Gosse and Chancey, or Gosse, Chancey and Ledgard?," in *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 20, no. 2 (2005): 209.

The relationship between the servant population and the merchant elite has often been reanalyzed by Newfoundland historians. More recent scholarship has turned away from the notion that master's continually exploited the servant class. Now the view is one that "emphasizes interdependence and the rule of law." Servants, as well as their masters used the legal system to protect them "physically from violence and economically from exploitation."[41] Nevertheless, punishment of the servant class remained a threat throughout the British Atlantic, and Newfoundland was not exceptional.[42] Overall, Lester fit the patriarchal model of rewarding and punishing servants based on their conduct. He was keen to hand out holidays and give small gifts, but found no issue having servants corporally punished when they undermined his authority, misbehaved, or engaged in business deals with other merchants.[43] While he was a powerful and influential fish merchant, servants and the naval government of Newfoundland helped to keep this power in check.[44] Not to be understated was the fear of bankruptcy. Between 1767 and 1769 at least three merchants that went bankrupt were discussed by the naval governor (during an episode of general prosperity).[45] This shows how the custom of extending credit before the fishing season, and the dependence on good market conditions, could quickly indebt both merchant and fisher. Furthermore, it demonstrates why merchants relied on the authority of

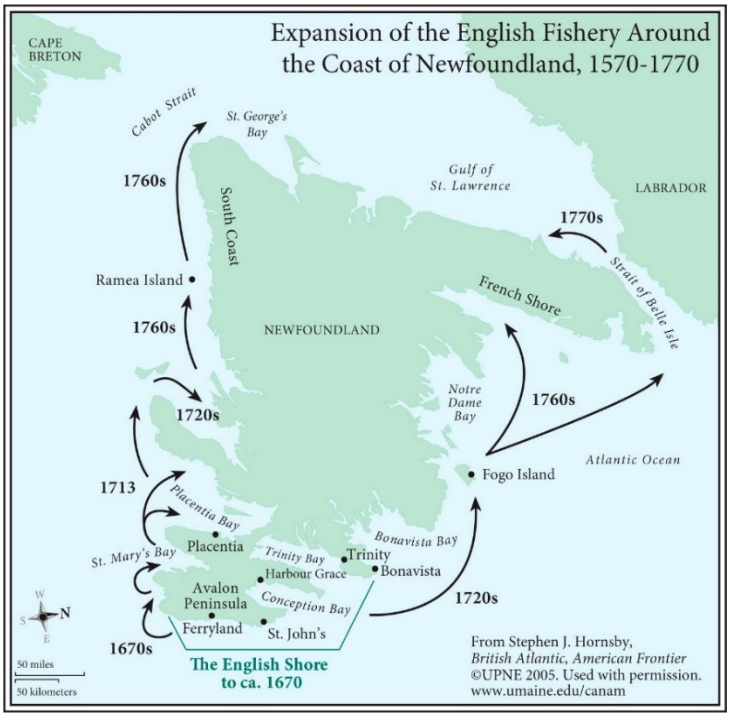
[41] Jerry Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor": Law and Authority in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland," In *The Face of Justice on Newfoundland's Northeast Coast,* ed. Christopher Curran and Melvin Baker, (St. John's: The Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2012).
[42] Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals,* 244.
[43] Dorchester Records Office, [DRO] D / LEG D365 / F8, Records of the Lester-Garland Families, Diary of Benjamin Lester (1761-1802), March 17, 1763. Henceforth cited as *Benjamin Lester Diaries.* While I have used a transcript that includes all years of the Benjamin Lester diaries, readers should be aware that most years of the diary (1767-1802) have been digitized (with transcripts). It can be found online at: *Benjamin Lester Diaries 1761-1802, St. John's: Memorial University – Digital Archives Initiative,* https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/m_lester/search. Here Lester gave his employees a holiday for St. Patrick's Day; *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* October 12, 1768. On this day Lester went to court when a servant sold part of his catch to another merchant in Trinity. This case is explored further in chapter three.
[44] Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor," 18.
[45] "Colonial Secretary's Letterbook," vol. 4, Governor Hugh Palliser, August 18, 1767 pp. 55-56/September 1, 1768, 108; Governor John Byron July 29, 1769, 170.

the naval government to collect their debts – they often walked a fine line between prosperity and bankruptcy.

Though he regularly interacted with members of the servant class, they were not a large part of his social life and were not typically singled out by name in his diaries. What is clear is that Lester did not fail to see the importance of the group of servants that he employed. He was quick to complain about idleness but showed concern about things like the conventional view of Newfoundland as a 'nursery for seamen' since it encouraged naval impressment gangs to recruit from this population at times of war.[46]

Figure 2.1: Expansion of the English Fishery Around the Coast of Newfoundland, 1570-1770.

Source: Stephen Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* Hanover: UPNE, 2005.



Another group that receives attention in the Lester diaries, but remain difficult to write about comprises of the masters and captains in his employ. These were the men most often recorded for bringing supplies, provisions, and passengers, and leaving with cargoes. In their hands rested a vital role in the success of Lester's enterprise as this group was also responsible for overseeing operations in places outside of Trinity.[47] While Lester used Trinity as a base, he employed servants and collected fish from

[46] Keith Mercer, "North Atlantic press gangs: Impressment and naval civilian relations in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland," (PhD diss., Dalhousie University, 2008), 226. A concise explanation of the 'nursery for seamen' is provided in: Olaf U. Janzen, "The 'Long' Eighteenth Century, in *A Short History of Newfoundland and Labrador,* (St. Philip's, NL: Boulder Publications for the Newfoundland Historical Society, 2008), 53.

[47] The University of Maine Canadian-American Centre, [Map from] Stephen J. Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005), https://umaine.edu/canam/publications/maps/british-atlantic/

many other communities including Fogo Island, Silly Cove , Old Perlican, Greenspond, Tilting Cove, and the coast of Labrador - where Lester took part in the sealing industry.[48] Lester often recorded dealing with these men and dispatching them as they came into Trinity. Unlike most of the servants, their names appear repeatedly but it is difficult to include a greater discussion of their relationship, as there was little recorded other than what work Lester had them do, where they were sent, or where they were coming from. As David Handcock has suggested in his book regarding London merchants: "Their business dealings were usually conducted in conversation, not on paper; business men seldom wrote about their work unless forced by distance or law."[49] While this was not entirely true for Lester, who seemed eager to record the work he had done, it was certainly the case that he was engaged in some form of business with many of the passing names recorded in his diary. There was often the implication that Lester did business with certain people, but he left out the explicit details of their engagement with one another; to him it would have been obvious. Understanding that this group was present, but discussed seldomly, is useful since it provides contrast to those within this group whom he does discuss at length, which could indicate a friendship, or a more meaningful connection.

Another important presence within Trinity consisted of visitors. As an extension of the naval government, fishing admirals would travel to communities around Newfoundland to hold courts. In the 1760s this usually happened in the summer and fall months, as the naval government returned to England before the winter. Traders, too, were a regular presence in Trinity and allowed for better conditions, and more abundant provisions. There were many

[48] Allan Dwyer, *Atlantic Borderland: Natives, Fishers, Planters and Merchants in Notre Dame Bay, 1713-1802*, (PhD Diss., Memorial University, 2012), 173; Stephen J. Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America,* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005), 30.
[49] David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9.

British traders who brought goods from England and Ireland, or the West Indies, and colonial-American traders who typically brought goods from the continent or the West Indies. Many of these goods were traded in exchange for refuse fish which was sold to the West Indies to feed the growing slave population there.[50] Up until the American Revolution the trade between Newfoundland and the West Indies was substantial given that there was a considerable amount of direct trade, and a considerable amount of trade done via colonial-American traders.[51] As we will see, Lester regularly entertained and socialized with visitors in Trinity.

The people who were written about in Lester's diary cannot be divided into neat categories. Instead, they existed on a spectrum between meaningful relationships and useful relationships. Meaningful relationships are being defined as those that offered Lester no obvious advantage, but who he sought out to spend time – basically, his friends and family members. On the other side were useful relationships which typically had a clear mercantile purpose. Nonetheless, not only did these categories lay on a spectrum, but they often overlapped. Family and friends would play an important role in his success during his time in Trinity.

2.3: Family

For most who travelled across the Atlantic at this time to work within the seasonal fishery, it meant leaving behind family. This was not the case for Lester, however, who was

[50] "The Colonial Secretary's Letterbook," vol. 15, William Waldegrave to William Fawkener, May 9, 1799, 219-227. Here Governor William Waldegrave provides a detailed explanation of the different grades of salt fish exported from Newfoundland, all intended for different markets.
James Candow, "Salt Fish and Slavery in the British Caribbean," in *The North Atlantic Fisheries: Supply, Marketing, and Consumption, 1560-1990*," eds. David J. Starkey and James E. Candow, Studia Atlantica 8, (Hull: North Atlantic Fisheries History Association, Maritime Historical Studies Centre, University of Hull, 2006), 170. The export of refuse salt fish should not be understated as a source of revenue, this fish was sold at only 50% of the price of first grade fish. Without this market, the fish likely would have been wasted.
[51] James Candow, "Salt Fish and Slavery in the British Caribbean," 170; Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland,* 117-121.

regularly accompanied by his wife and children during the time he spent in Newfoundland, and it was where all his children were born.[52] Having his family with him offered comforts and stands as a reason he could remain in Newfoundland for long periods of time during the 1760s.

Lester's decision to spend so much time in Newfoundland and live as a planter seems not unlike the Taverners, and those sons who had inherited property at the same time he did. Lester surely would have observed the logic of using Trinity as a mercantile base from the Taverners and adopted it as an early business model for himself. Even in the way that the Taverners utilized their "extended family" in England, Lester's brother Isaac was able to maintain affairs in England, like the procuring of men for the fishery.[53] Therefore, during the early 1760s it may be useful to think of him not primarily as a West Country merchant, but as a planter and member of the Taverner family.[54] It was his social relationship with the family, combined with his wife's even closer familial relationship, that allowed him much of his early success.

Referred to consistently as 'Mrs. Lester,' Susannah, did not take up any large space in Lester's diary. The degree to which eighteenth century diarists discussed their personal life and marriages certainly varied between writers but was less typical. As Daniel Vickers argued, "In the early modern period, many of the journals were designed as… *aides-memories* to help them keep track of their obligations."[55] This certainly was the case for Lester's diaries when it came to writing about his family as only notable events are mentioned, such as an illness that seems to

[52] Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor," 16.
[53] *Trinity Minute Book*, August 1756. During the 1750s servants recorded Isaac Lester as their employer, rather than Benjamin; Stephen J. Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America,* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005), 30.
[54] Handcock, *Soe longe as there comes noe women,* (Breakwater Books, 1989), 49. Here Handcock does list Lester as a Trinity planter.
[55] Daniel Vickers, "Errors Expected: The Culture of Credit in Rural New England, 1750-1800," *The Economic History Review* 63, no. 4 (2010): 1035.

have affected most of the family in January of 1764. During this period Lester recorded his wife and daughters' condition almost daily. Later his son and many other members of the community would be afflicted.[56] That Lester recorded this shows the seriousness of the situation. It was their lack of attention elsewhere in the diary that indicated some level of importance or notability on instances where they were written about.

Having grown up in Trinity, with many connections and close familial ties, it was advantageous for the business that Susannah remained in Trinity while he was there. Many of Lester's relationships could have been facilitated via his wife and her connections. This is evidenced by the fact that Susannah would sometimes travel with Lester during his trips to nearby communities. Lester often travelled around Trinity Bay, and other nearby places, to trade with residents and keep an eye on his operations there. In 1767 Lester set out for Old Perlican, accompanied by his wife and daughter Amy. Susannah and Amy remained at Old Perlican while he travelled to Hearts Ease, Rider's Harbor, and Hants Harbor to inquire about the fishery there.[57] Though Lester had frequently been in Newfoundland for much of his life, Susannah had a natural connection with not only members of her own family, but also the greater planter and inhabitant class. She likely helped foster many useful relationships for Lester. Throughout the Atlantic, much of a merchant's ability to do business relied on trust from employers and suppliers; thus, being married into a well-established family in Newfoundland could only have helped his business dealings.[58] That his wife and children remained in Trinity with him for this period helped solidify and legitimize his place in Trinity and remain there year-round like many

[56] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January 1-31, 1764.
[57] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* Aug 6, 1767.
[58] Sheryllynne Haggerty, *Merely for Money?: Business Culture in the British Atlantic 1750-1815*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 7.

of the Taverners. This is not to suggest Lester only wrote about his family in the context of business. His writing during the episode of illness, for example, shows a great deal of concern for his family, and a sense of anxiety as sickness spreads through the community. Episodes like this also give a glimpse into Lester's personality; in a rare introspective passage he wrote, "thank God I retain my health very well."[59] Alas, instances such as these were rare, and their infrequency proves that his diaries were used primarily to write about work and the social relationships that aided or ailed his business.

To establish semi-permanence in Trinity, Lester had a large brick house built. The house offered enough comfort for himself and his wife to overwinter and raise their family in Newfoundland. As a result, the house allowed him to retain more direct control over the Newfoundland side of his enterprise. Moreover, it provided a place for friends and visitors to stay and be entertained. As David Hancock wrote about merchant estates: "they reflect[ed] the tightrope of that successful men of affairs had to walk in the eighteenth century if they were to integrate themselves into society."[60] Like merchant houses in colonial America, Lester's house "shaped new forms of self-identity and led to a redrawing of social boundaries."[61] Lester's house displayed his permanence in Trinity and helped to confirm his place as a Newfoundland planter. To both visitors and residents, it signaled where the wealth was and reaffirmed the social structure of the community. Since various relationships in Trinity provided the ability for Lester to succeed in his early years, the construction of his house was an investment in his success.

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[59] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January 21, 1764.
[60] Hancock, *Citizens of the World,* 381.
[61] Phyllis Whitman Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World: Massachusetts Merchants, 1670-1780,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 118; Michael J. Braddick, "Civility and Authority," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800,* eds. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 130.

2.4: Friendships

Defining and discussing friendships by use of the Lester diary is occasionally difficult since so many with whom he interacted transcended neat categories of social groups. It appears that many people that he interacted with were at certain times treated as friends, and at other times as employees or business associates. The ambiguity surrounding what defined friendship has much to do with the difference between the contemporary meaning of friendship versus the eighteenth-century definition. Naomi Tadmor argues that, "in the eighteenth century, the term 'friend' had a plurality of meanings that spanned kinship ties, sentimental relationships, economic ties, occupational connections, intellectual and spiritual attachments, sociable networks, and political alliances."[62] For Lester's diary, the easiest way to identify a friendship was through the activities he engaged in with others. Dining together, attending parties, and playing cards were all activities that Lester engaged in with his friends, on both sides of the Atlantic. Lester often described it as "spending the evening." Though the activities often remained the same, there are contrasts between friendships Lester had in Trinity and those in England, which will be analyzed further in chapter four.

The most pragmatic time for analyzing friendships is during the winter season when Lester wrote less about work as he did in spring, summer, and early fall.[63] For this section,

[62] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 167.

[63] This was because of the cyclical-seasonal activities that Newfoundland inhabitants engaged in. In the spring, fishers and workers arrived, and provisions were sold on credit. In the summer fishing activities were the primary focus . In the fall, ships with cod were sent to market-places, while migratory fishers returned to England or Ireland. Residents often moved further inland for the winter months for greater shelter, though the Lester diary suggests that firewood and lumber production was also an important reason for this. These seasonal activities are known as the "Seasonal Round," a concise explanation can be found at: Olaf U. Janzen, "The 'Long' Eighteenth Century," 55.

therefore, the winter months of 1762 will be used as a sample for understanding more about his friendships.

In the very first entry of 1762, Lester wrote about Captain Glover. Glover continued to make regular appearances in the diary for several years. It appears that his main occupation was sailing to various locations around Newfoundland where Lester did business, and sometimes to the West Indies. Lester sometimes accompanied Glover to communities near Trinity. Glover's main appearance in the diary is in discussion of time spent dining together, playing cards, and with other company. Out of 31 days in that January (in which Lester wrote everyday) Glover is mentioned 14 times. It seemed that Lester would often visit him at his fishing room in the afternoon after finishing up his own work. This might have been to discuss business, but it often led to Lester and Glover dining together, often accompanied by Glover's son. It was evident that his son was being groomed in the work of his father, and he once accompanied Lester up the south west arm of Trinity Bay.[64] Lester dined with Glover seven times in January, and often wrote that he stayed well into the night. The diary suggests that working together was one part of the relationship, but also that a friendship had developed between the two. They also appear in a circle of friends, on a very cold January 20th when Lester travelled with Glover and Jacob Taverner to a Mr. Jones's house in English harbor and ate "beef steaks."[65] The three went to Mr. Jones's twice during January to dine there.

Many friendships were formed through family ties. Susannah's brother, Jacob, was accompanied by his wife twice when they dined at the Lester's. Another time, Lester, his wife,

[64] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January 18, 1762.
[65] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January 20, 1762.

and daughter Betsey, traveled to Jacob's where they dined on "Roast Beef, Pork, and Birds."[66] Likewise, Mr. Jones was often accompanied by his wife when he visited the Lester's. On the 11th and 12th of that month, Mr. Jones and his wife travelled from English Harbor and stayed with Lester. Lester recorded their meals together and wrote that he and Mr. Jones went for a walk after dinner.[67] While activities with Glover seemed to be either one on one or in the company of other men, time spent with Mr. Jones and Jacob Taverner regularly involved the whole family. This reinforces the idea the Lester's wife helped him to form relationships in Trinity.

Lester also held functions at his house during the month. On the 11th he wrote that "Wm Jones & Wife, And Jacob, Steven Jones & Wife, Bens Wife & Andrews daugr Nancy all at Dinner, on Roast Beef & a Boil'd Toung & Dry Ham & Green Tart."[68] Lester held another large function in February when friends had come from the north side of the harbour to dine and then were stuck there due to bad weather. The next day Lester had Kate Jones entertain the guests by playing the 'whisk' until 9pm, while Mrs. Lester visited a Mr. Fitzherbet (*sic*) whose son had fallen ill.[69] In recording the meals he had prepared for friends, and those eaten at friends' houses, Lester reveals an important social ritual of merchant hospitality. Meals Lester took alone or with his family tended to be simpler. Pea soup, corned beef, and dry fish were regular entrees during January 1762. With his friends and guests, however, meals tended to be more elaborate. One large dinner with friends and family consisted of lamb, beef, pork, greens, and birds.[70] Since he distinguishes between beef and corned (preserved) beef his diary suggests that he often had fresh

[66] *Ibid.,* January 11-12, 1762.
[67] Often, Lester only includes last names in his diary with the prefix Mr., Miss., Mrs., Capt., etc. Where possible, by using other records such as the Trinity Minute Book, CO194, or the Colonial Secretary's Letterbook I will include the first and last name of those people.
[68] *Ibid.,* January 11, 1762.
[69] *Ibid.,* February 6, 1762. The whisk was likely a washboard played with a whisk broom.
[70] *Ibid.,* January 10, 1762.

beef prepared for friends, whereas he and his family regularly ate the corned beef. Another notable trend was that dessert was often only written about during meals with friends, and there were many mentions of "berry pudding."[71] An example of this is seen particularly well in March of 1762 when Lester's meals that week consisted of two dinners of maggoty fish, one of boiled herrings, and another of corned beef.[72] Yet, when Captain Glover and his son dined at his house later that week, they ate "boiled breast leg of beef, greens, and berry pudding."[73] While Lester seems not to have regularly gone without food, he and his wife certainly had more elaborate meals prepared during times when their friends were present. The Lester's were also the recipient of these elaborate meals, such as at Jacob Taverner's. Showing generosity and hospitality through "the flowing bowl, and the pipe of tobacco… were the ways people sought… to keep neighbours sweet."[74] Displays of hospitality through dining helped affirm Lester as part of an elite class in Trinity and maintain friendships there.

Another important point that arises from Lester's record of food during this month is its relation to Newfoundland culture. It is noteworthy that many dinners seem to combine elements of what was available in Newfoundland, with typical British cuisine. Pies filled with Newfoundland game birds, like turrs, are a good example and appear many times throughout this month. Food combinations of what was locally available, together with food that could be most easily imported, like Irish butter and North American flour, certainly would have helped to create

[71] This was likely made with cranberries from Newfoundland which were considered a delicacy in England. Beamish, *Mansions and Merchants of Poole,* 98.
[72] Maggoty fish was literally "...improperly cured and infested with the larvae of blow-flies; spoiled, unsavoury (*sic*). *Dictionary of Newfoundland English,* eds. G.M Story, W.J Kirwin and J.D.A Widdowson, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).
[73] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* March 23-28, 1762. The fact that Lester ate "maggoty fish" twice during that week and the week prior suggests that food stores were likely running low after the winter.
[74] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1990), 155.

foods that were unique to Newfoundland.[75] Many foods that have remained staples of Newfoundland cuisine like wild birds (partridge, turrs, ducks, etc.), pea soup, berries, and salt cod appear during this month in Lester's diary. The role merchants played in influencing the local cuisine that became an important part of a unique Newfoundland identity is not well understood. Besides the elaborate meals that his wealth allowed, that many game birds were traded to him by residents, and that he ate many of the same imported foods that were sold to the resident population, suggests that many of his meals were like those eaten by residents.[76] In this way it is possible learn more about the diet of the growing resident population. Moreover, in their attempt to purchase food more cheaply merchants often dictated which foods became staples in Newfoundland.[77] The Lester diary can certainly be used to further explore the connection between merchants and food culture in Newfoundland.

What is most important about these friendships was that Lester was tied to Trinity through them, and they allowed him to live comfortably through the winter months and provided plenty of social interaction for himself and his family. As work diminished during the winter months recording social interactions became more important to him. This was evidenced by the way that Lester described at length who he was with and what they did. Descriptions of Lester's social life with friends and family, especially of parties that he attended, show the degree to which merchants brought elite social rituals and civility to Newfoundland. Drinking tea, was another important example of an elite British social practice. In Newfoundland, as well as

[75] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* October 1, 1769. Here Lester purchased butter from an Irish brig; *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* August 20, 1768. Here Lester purchased flour from a New York vessel.
[76] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* February 19, 1762. Here Lester traded a pound of tea for eight game birds.
[77] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* August 20, 1768. Here Lester indicated that it made more pragmatic to purchase flour from continental traders rather than take cargoes from England, for example.

England, Lester regularly recorded who he drank tea with.[78] As Michael Braddick has argued, "as societies developed and diversified… they did not do so in isolation from their homeland. In fact, in many ways they drew on English values and practices…"[79] While the focus for studying merchants has often been on what they brought back to England, namely: money, in traversing the Atlantic they also brought social rituals, culture, and aspects of elite society to Newfoundland.

Throughout the eighteenth-century planters in Newfoundland and the West Indies often returned to England, but there was no doubt that having a physical presence on these islands helped to improve trade. The Pinney family of Dorset help to illustrate this point: In the 1760s the Pinney family had a plantation in Nevis and when they found themselves sliding into debt the solution was for John Pinney (who had just inherited the family business) to oversee the plantations himself and transfer income back to England. He went on to not only restore "the family fortune but increased it many times over."[80] For Lester, friends and family helped him invest time into Trinity and have the "face-to-face" business that merchants desired.[81] By lowering his economic risk these friends played an important role in his success.

2.5: Naval Government

By the time that Lester emerged as an independent merchant a unique system of naval government had developed in Newfoundland. The way in which this local government operated

[78] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* (London: Penguin group Ltd., 1990), 303. In the eighteenth century "greater value was laid upon *sociability,* the ability to mix... in common company. The arts of conversation and the tea-table graces were spruced up;" *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* April 2, 1762." Here Lester drank tea with his wife and a Mrs. Walter.
[79] Braddick, "Civility and Authority,"126.
[80] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 47.
[81] Peter Mathias, "Risk, Credit, and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise," in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy,* eds. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan,(Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16.

afforded Lester the opportunity to develop relationships with many of its officials. Since Newfoundland was treated primarily as a fishing station, the system of government that developed was a reaction to the unique issues faced by those involved in the fishery. After 1729 the structure of the naval government consisted of the naval governor, his officers, or the surrogates, and the magistrates in each district.[82] Disputes outside of St. John's were typically dealt with by travelling naval officers who visited communities, such as Trinity. Lester had become a magistrate in 1749 while still in the employ of John Masters and Michael Ballard, and in 1750 became the provisioner for the Trinity garrison. Through these appointments Lester established an early relationship with the naval government. Lester tried to maintain this relationship with visiting members of the government throughout this decade, and his house provided him with a place to interact with and entertain these visitors. A good example of this behavior is when Lester himself was under scrutiny following the French attacks on Newfoundland in 1762.

In June and July 1762, four French ships under the command of Charles-Henri-Louis d'Arsac, Chevalier de Ternay, attacked and captured St. John's and other outports in Newfoundland. The invasion was a desperate attempt to harm the British economy and its ability to continue the war since the on-going Seven Years War had seen severe setbacks for France in the Caribbean.[83] Since Ternay's objective was to occupy and destroy the British fishery he was directed to the Avalon peninsula and then to move on to Cape Breton where his objective -- to

[82] Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 104.

[83] Mark Osborne Humphries, "'A Calamity From Which No Relief Can Be Expected': Empire, Authority, and Civilian Responses to the French Occupation of Newfoundland, June-September 1762," *Acadiensis* XLIII, no.1 (Winter/Spring2014): 35-36; Olaf Janzen, "The French Raid Upon the Newfoundland Fishery in 1762 – A Study in the Nature and Limits of Eighteenth-Century Sea Power," Reprinted in Olaf U. Janzen, *War and Trade in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland* ("Research in Maritime History," No. 52; St. John's, NL: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2013): 129-132; See also: André de Visme, *Terre-Neuve 1762: Dernier combat aux portes de la Nouvelle-France*, (Les Editions André de Visme, 2005).

occupy and destroy -- remained the same. The fleet's highest necessity, therefore, was to provision its ships for a longer invasion. Forces that were sent to Trinity, Conception Bay, and Bonavista were ordered to collect provisions.[84]

Since Lester was acting as a magistrate at this time he was directly involved with the situation. When the French fleet attacked Trinity in 1762 Lester recorded a light exchange of shots between the Trinity garrison and the ships before the French landed and "order'd the [magistrate] to get all the Arms of every kind, Powder & Shott from every one in the Harbour & bring to him."[85] During the time the French had taken control of Trinity they destroyed some property and demanded provisions from the people there. The French seemed eager to maintain British social structure and therefore, as magistrate, Lester acted as intermediary between the French and the planters, whose goods they demanded.[86] He wrote, "Recd a Note of Demand from the Commanding officer a Shoar to furnish 6 Beefs 6 Calves 5 Sheep & 30 fowls, as I thought it to much for one Day I went on board the Commadore to petetion but instead of hearing me he order'd me out of the Ship Immediately, & to comply with his Demand by 12 a Clock or he would set fire to my House, first & all the Harbour, & also the same Quantity next Day, or suffer as mention'd & order'd me ashore, shov'd me by the Shoulder."[87] Ultimately, Lester's property was spared but after the French had left Trinity he was accused of colluding with them by planters in Trinity who had lost provisions and cattle to the French under Lester's orders. Mark Humphries wrote, "in co-operating, Lester was able to preserve his life and property while profiting from the new trade he carried on with the French... Lester noted in his

[84] Humphries, "'A Calamity From Which No Relief Can Be Expected,' 51.
[85] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* July 18, 1762.
[86] Humphries, "'A Calamity From Which No Relief Can be Expected,' 51.
[87] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* July 19, 1762.

diary that the French refused to take anything from him without paying for it – even gifts of beer and wine intended to win their favour... he sold brandy, malt, soap, and other goods to the French."[88] After seventeen days in the harbor the French left, only after burning the garrison barracks, destroying the last two cannons, and gifting Lester a "French musket" for his trouble and cooperation.[89]

As a result of these accusations, the governor at the time suspended Lester's commission and sent orders for a surrogate court to be held in Trinity to deal with the allegations against him.[90] Captain Brown arrived in Trinity on October 6th, and Lester went onboard his ship to meet with him. He wrote only, "was well received considering the number of complaints against me he intends to hold a court tomorrow eight o'clock." Later that day, however, Lester expressed concern when his fellow magistrate, Samuel Harris, reported that Captain Brown would not come to Lester's house until after the courts were held, or presumably, until his name was cleared.[91] Lester's eagerness to socialize with a naval officer shows that he felt he had some measure of influence over naval government. Jerry Bannister writes about this instance, "in effect, the surrogacy created in the outports a layer of authority separate from, though not necessarily adverse to, the fish merchants and the civil magistracy."[92] Lester's role as magistrate and merchant gave him the ability to develop a unique and close relationship with the naval government which in turn provided him with influence. Recognizing this, Brown's solution was to distance himself from Lester until after a trial could be held.

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[88] Humphries, "'A Calamity From Which No Relief Can be Expected,' 52. Lester capitalizing on the French occupation was not a singular incident, this situation was mirrored with merchants in St. John's as well.
[89] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* August 1, 1762.
[90] Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 145.
[91] *Ibid.,* Oct 6, 1762; Banister, *Rule of the Admirals,* 145.
[92] Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals,* 146.

After holding more courts in Trinity, dealing mostly with servant wages, Captain Brown spent the evening with Lester, Samuel Harris, and the other magistrate John Blake, as well as a 'young' Mr. Green.[93] It was at this gathering on the King's schooner that Lester recorded Brown's question to the company: "[whether they] did not think if I had left this place whether all the Bay would not have it & that I had not been usd ill which they readily agreed too."[94] Essentially, the other magistrates agreed that Lester had actually spared Trinity from further destruction by appeasing the French. This conversation certainly helped further convince Brown of Lester's innocence in colluding with the French and his name was officially cleared with a meeting between Lester and the governor in St. John's a few days afterwards. He was, however, ordered to pay for gunpowder which he sold to the French.[95] The men stayed aboard talking with Brown until 12 o'clock, and he left Trinity the following morning accompanied by Lester in his own sloop. Despite his initial objection to socializing with Lester, there was little doubt that the informal conversation abord the King's schooner helped clear his name. This instance demonstrates that both Lester and the naval government understood the influence that fish merchants had developed in Newfoundland. The fact that Brown initially distanced himself from Lester evidences the idea that it was Lester's social life that helped to obtain influence and power.

During the time of the French occupation Lester's status and authority helped him in two major ways. During the occupation he was able to avoid having his property destroyed or taken and was even able to capitalize on the invasion. Secondly, his relationship with the other

[93] *Ibid.,* 145.
[94] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* 10 Oct. 1762.
[95] Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 145-146/341; *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* October 13, 1762.

magistrates of Trinity, and the more informal socializing with Brown after the trial helped him successfully contest the accusations against him.

This episode offers a unique opportunity to assess Lester's loyalty to Britain. Analyzing Lester within the context of loyalty is useful since it allows us to understand more about the time in which Lester was living. In many ways Lester, as a magistrate, represented British authority in Newfoundland and is therefore easily dismissed as promoting British dominance and values there; however, Lester's actions during this episode offers some evidence that he also acted in a way that undermined British authority.[96] The fact that Newfoundland was treated as a workstation rather than a colony helped separate it from continental America, where ideological and political factors played their part in creating the tension that would generate the American Revolution. Nevertheless, Newfoundland, like Nova Scotia, represented sites between the "metropole" and the colonies, and therefore loyalism deserves some analysis in those places.[97] As Patricia Rogers has demonstrated, the dimensions of loyalty went beyond stirring up a rebellion, and how undermining British authority to any extent (her article focuses on smuggling) could be seen as an act of disloyalty.[98] Profiting from French invaders could easily be seen as undermining the British in Newfoundland especially since there existed an idea that colonial merchants had a rising sense of "self-interest" which could out-weigh their loyalty.[99] Yet, as Lester's diary demonstrates, the other magistrates believed that the situation would have been

[96] *The Loyal Atlantic: Remaking the British Atlantic in the Revolutionary Era,* ed. Jerry Bannister and Liam Riordan, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), ix-x. As they explain in the preface to the volume: "Loyalism should be understood not as a literal description of a particular group or party but rather as an amalgam of values, practices, laws, and policies that distinguished between who was loyal… and who was disloyal."
[97] Patricia Rogers, "Rebels' Property: Smuggling and Imperial [Dis]loyalty in the Anglo-American Atlantic," *Journal of Early American History* 2, no. 1 (2012): 32.
[98] Patricia Rogers, "Rebels' Property," 32.
[99] *Ibid.,* 47; Christopher Paul Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause: Atlantic Commerce and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 47.

worse if it had not been for his acting as a conduit and appeasing the French. Moreover, the fact that other merchants in St. John's profited in much the same way indicates that it was more customary and due to the insistence of the French to pay for goods. Lester acted, as he always did, in economic self-interest, but his economic interest was protecting the fishery, the same fishery that Britain was protecting and fighting to limit the French presence in. Ultimately, their goal was the same. Lester's profiting was a consequence of avoiding more calamity.

In terms of loyalty, what is more telling about this episode is the quick reaction by the naval government. Lester's appointment was immediately suspended upon waiting for trial, and his very future in Newfoundland was put into question. This demonstrated, more than anything, the fears that British authorities had in terms of disloyalty within their overseas sites and the measures they would take to protect those interests from disloyal subjects. The attempt to impose authority by the Royal Navy in their overseas interests was also a reaction to an increasing "political crisis" that in continental-America was marked from 1765-1775 with the Navy's "incapacity to quell political unrest among British subjects."[100] Outside of continental-America, Patricia Rogers calls this "intense imperial scrutiny."[101] Ultimately, it was because of his relationships with fellow magistrates that it was surmised that this was not an act of disloyalty.

Lester's relationship with the naval government also offered an important economic advantage. Although it is unclear how much was paid for Lester to provision the Trinity garrison it can be assumed that it was an easy way to make money and sell surplus goods. Moreover, Lester was offered contracts to build ships for the Royal Navy in 1770.[102] The advantages that a

[100] Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals,* 146.
[101] *Ibid.,* 35.
[102] Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor," 29.

good relationship with members of the naval government who visited Trinity were not only limited to social visits, but also provided him a good reputation that brought with it important economic benefits.

Lester's ability and desire to maintain his relationship with the naval government does not seem to have diminished during his time in Newfoundland. In July 1769 Lester wrote a considerable amount when the new governor, John Byron, visited Trinity. Though Lester had already met with the governor that winter in London, he echoed his original thoughts by writing that he was a "good Natur'd Man, offer'd to render me any Service in his power."[103] The naval officer, Lieutenant John Cartwright was also visiting Trinity at this time on his way to the north. Lester already had a relationship with him from at least 1766, when he had held courts in Trinity for the first time.[104] The governor and Cartwright accompanied Lester on a walk up to Riders Hill, and around the harbor to "Hogs Nose."[105] The following day Lester dined with a group of "gents" in the gun room aboard the ship. He then invited all the men to his house for dinner the following day. He wrote, "All the Gentn of the Gun Room came to Dine with me at 6 the Governour, Capt Gayton & Secretary came in his Barge to the Warf, came up to House, Sot with me, in the outer room till 8. Gave an order on Williams, at B. Vista, to pay the Balance & talk'd of several other matters, took his leave to Sail tomorrow & went off, the Rest of the Gents staid till dark & went off."[106]

This extended interaction with the governor made it clear that Lester could indeed bridge the Atlantic. While his wealth and influence were transferred back to England he first cultivated

[103] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* July 27, 1769.
[104] *Trinity Minute Book*, September 27, 1766.
[105] Gordon Handcock, *The Story of Trinity,* (Trinity Historical Society, 1997), 22-24. Gordon Handcock provides a useful list of placenames in and around Trinity, many of which are mentioned in the Lester diaries.
[106] *Ibid.,* July 28, 1769.

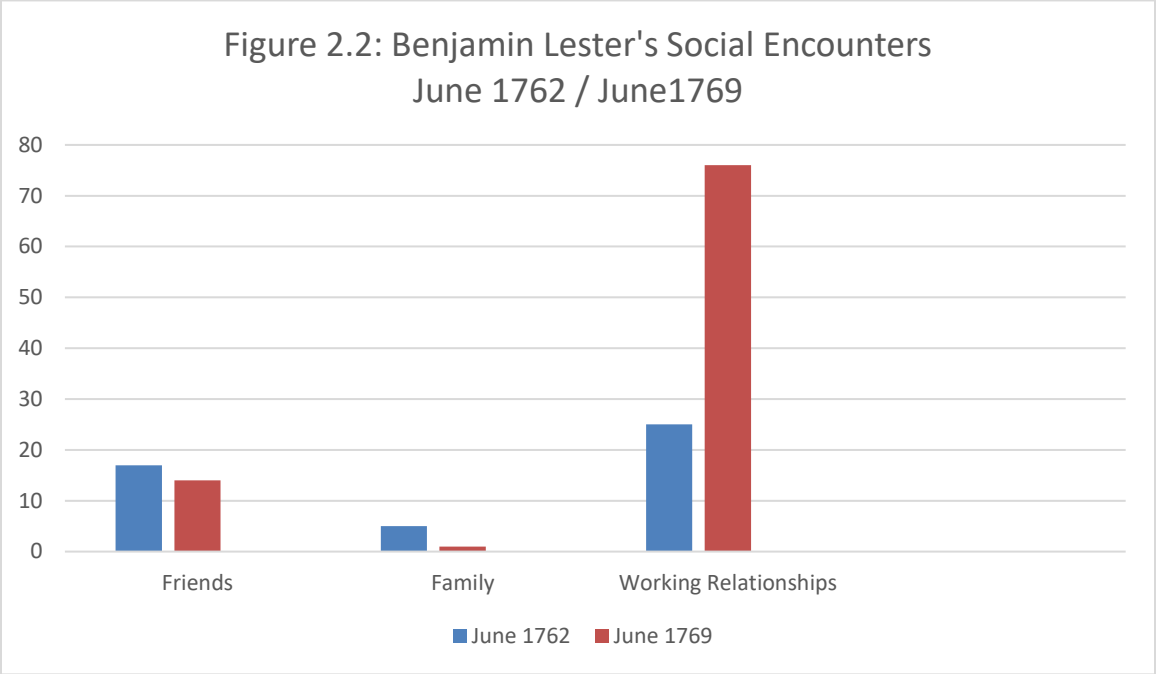
this influence in Newfoundland. Moreover, like entertaining guests at his house, it shows how aspects of elite society were imported to Newfoundland. The image of Lester and the governor walking around 'riders' hill was reminiscent of leisurely walks through London, an activity which was common among English elites.[107] That Lester used the word 'gentlemen' was also significant in that it showed the presence of this class in Newfoundland – and his eagerness to interact with them. His interest in socializing with the naval government was not limited to the fact that they represented a class of English elites though, these interactions were ultimately purposeful; they allowed him to take care of business, such as drawing up orders for outstanding bills and 'several other matters.' Yet, this relationship was a symbiotic one. Since the role of naval governor regularly changed hands, they sought out merchants (as they had a consistent presence) for "advice and assistance."[108] That Lester was a magistrate helped open the door for socializing with the naval government; once he was through the door, the benefits to his mercantile operations were numerous.

2.6: Changes over the Decade

The most formulative time in Lester's career was during this period, when he regularly worked in Newfoundland. It was during this time that he expanded his territory, hired men, sought provisions and shipped goods out of Trinity. He worked not within the centre of his trade but at the point of production, and it was his success during this time that allowed him to increasingly operate out of England. This is evidenced by the fact that between 1761 and 1764 the diary suggests that Lester only travelled back to England once, but between 1767 and 1771 he spent each winter in Poole. That this time was a developmental one for Lester becomes even

[107] Hunter, *Purchasing Identity,* 115.
[108] Olaf U. Janzen, "The 'Long' Eighteenth Century," 62.

clearer when data from the first year of his journal in 1762, is compared with 1769. For both years, the month of June provided an adequate sample since Lester was settled in Newfoundland during both times.



Source: *Benjamin Lester Diaries*

Figure 2.2 contains the number of people with whom Lester met over the course of the months.[109] The first thing that is striking about this comparison is the steep increase in Lester's working relationships. He wrote about where he dispatched employees, who he sought out to buy goods from, customers of his storeroom, and reports from various people on the conditions in other communities where he had interests. Since letters from his employees in other communities indicated prior or future interaction, they are included in the numbers here. This increase in numbers is in keeping with the increase of wealth and business that Lester saw over these years. The rate at which his business grew over these years is exemplified by the number of ships he

[109] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* June 1762/ Jun 1769.

owned. In 1769 Lester had around twelve ships in his employ, and when the diary resumes in the 1780s he had thirty.[110] The increase in his social interactions with captains, mates, and masters is certainly indicative of the increase of business throughout this decade.

One reason for this success, and the great a great deal of his working social interactions in 1769 came as the result of Lester's expansion of goods he was trading. Seal oil was a product that he had been involved in trading from his early years, and next to cod fish it was the most profitable good for him to trade in this period. In June of 1762 Lester mentioned shipping seal oil only once throughout the month. In 1769, however, the word 'oyle' appeared twenty-seven times during the month. Like many merchants, this was a result of taking advantage of the French loss of Labrador following the Seven Years War, and thus English fishing and sealing increased on that coastline.[111] The rise in the resident population both made increased winter sealing possible, and was one of the reasons for it, as sealing helped increase employment during the winter. Many interactions in June 1769 were the result of Lester purchasing of oil from planters in the community and bargaining for a suitable price. On Thursday, June 15th, for example, Lester wrote, "Din'd at G Riders, went to Cove, talk'd to Williams about his Oyle which he Refus'd, talk'd to other about their Oyle but to no purpose."[112] Likewise, Lester's expansion into fishing off the coast of Newfoundland on the grand banks was evident in a comparison of these years. In 1762 he records no vessels fishing there, but in 1769 reports that 13,000 fish were caught on the banks in a three-day period.[113] As Christopher Magra argues, the economic expansion of fish

[110] Derek Beamish, John Hillier, and H.F.V Johnstone, *Mansions and Merchants of Poole and Dorset,* Vol. 1, (Poole: Poole Historical Trust: 1976), 100.
[111] Olaf U. Janzen, "The 'Long' Eighteenth Century, 1697-1815, in *A Short History of Newfoundland and Labrador,* (St. Philip's, NL: Boulder Publications for the Newfoundland Historical Society, 2008), 52/68.
[112] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* June 15, 1769.
[113] *Ibid.,* June 10-13, 1769.

merchants in the eighteenth century coincided with a period where they were taking on greater economic risk. For Lester, exploiting fish stocks on the grand banks meant his ships were out at sea longer and this increased the likelihood that his ships would be lost or damaged.[114] This was a calculated risk, though, which evidently worked out in Lester's favour; it does, however, show the logic of trading with other planters for seal oil. Assuming Lester could bargain for a reasonable price he could avoid the risk of sending extra crews and ships to Labrador. In any case, Lester's rise in working relationships went together with his expansion into new territories and industries.

Many of the friendships that are seen in 1769 are determined because of who he dined with. On the one hand this is typically a good indication of who his friends were (as was demonstrated in an earlier section), but it was evident during this later period many of these interactions had other motives behind them. For example, though he dined with Joseph Walkham on June 17th, a few days later he purchased oil from him.[115] Whether or not the purpose of this meal was to strike a deal was unclear, but it at least indicates that Lester was more interested in cultivating relationships that brought him benefit. Earlier in the decade the most obvious benefit that his friends brought him was that they helped him establish his presence in Newfoundland. It should be noted that the two people who present most frequently as friends in the earlier period were 'the doctor'- Samuel Harris, and Captain Glover. While there was no mention of Glover at this time, his friendship with Harris seems to have dwindled since he does record in November 1769 sending for him to tend to an ill relative, though not interacting with him otherwise.[116]

[114] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 36.
[115] *Benjamin Lester Diaries.,* June 17, 1769.
[116] *Ibid.,* November 1769.

Though Lester retains a regular number of friendships in Trinity, by 1769, many of his interactions have obvious business motives behind them.

The contrast in his writing about family between these two times was largely a result of his wife and children remaining in England in 1769. The reason for this remains unclear, but it is surmisable that Susannah had a growing social circle in England by this point, and certainly the comforts of living in England could have been an important factor for them remaining there.[117] The only mention of family that is recorded in the diary, and noted in the graph, was a letter sent from Lester's brother Isaac. What this does indicate is that Lester no longer required his family's presence in Trinity to establish himself there. Susannah and their children could remain in England while Lester oversaw work in Newfoundland.

Though Lester had no dealings with the naval government in either of these months it was in 1762 that Lester entertained and spent time with Mr. Brown, and it was in 1769 that the governor and Cartwright had visited Trinity. His desire to cultivate these relationships did not fail over this decade, and perhaps nor did his desire to have friendships. On the other hand, the steady increase of his work takes precedence in the diary. This underlines the way in which it was social relationships that directly facilitated the growth of his mercantile empire with which he was most concerned.

Overall, Lester shifted away from the Taverner model of living in Newfoundland to having greater permanence in England. Lester's decline in friendships and the fact that his family was finding more permanence in England precipitated his final return to England in the 1770s.

[117] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 191. Girouard discusses the rising sociability and expectations for the elite classes during the eighteenth century.

As Terry McDonald has argued, it was still possible to operate a mercantile business in Newfoundland at this time from two bases: Newfoundland and Poole. The steep population increase in the early nineteenth century brought with it the end of running fishing operations from England.[118] Nevertheless, for the latter half of the eighteenth century it was still possible to do so. Lester carved out his territory in Trinity and expanded his reach in Newfoundland during these years; all the while, cultivating important relationships.

2.7: Conclusion

Over the course of the 1760s Lester used a combination of economic skill and his social life to further his career and create a strong foothold in Trinity. Lester's network of family and friends cemented and legitimized his place there. Since friends and family helped him invest more time in Trinity, they helped to significantly lower his economic risk, as the alternative was to run his Newfoundland operations out of Poole. Though Lester would eventually make a final return to England in the 1770s, in this period his presence in Newfoundland was necessary for the growth of his business. His relationship with members of the naval government in Newfoundland provided him with economic advantages and influence. Overall, through references about his social life in his diary we can witness Lester's expansion in Newfoundland. From the time that Lester began writing his set of diaries he placed importance on writing about who he interacted with. As his enterprise increased, he wrote about working and business relationships more often. This fits into a greater trend of Atlantic merchants' success depending

[118] Terry McDonald, "The One in Newfoundland, the Other in England: Ledgard, Gosse and Chancey, or Gosse, Chancey and Ledgard?," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies,* 20, no. 2 (2005): 226.

on the "intellectual capacity for keeping a thousand details under constant control."[119] As business increased, Lester had to keep track of a growing number of details.

[119] Jacob M. Price, *Perry of London: A Family and a Firm on the Seaborne Frontier, 1615-1753,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 100.

Chapter Three:

Benjamin Lester in Newfoundland: Rivals and Enemies, 1760-1775

As we have seen, Benjamin Lester worked hard to surround himself with useful relationships that played important roles in the development of his career, and subsequently appeared in his diary. On the other end of the social spectrum, however, was an entirely different group made up of rivals and enemies. Those people also significantly impacted Lester's life, while having offered no obvious advantages. Other merchants operating in Newfoundland were Lester's most obvious rivals, but this group could also include anyone who directed resources and manpower away from the fishery, thus creating a different kind of competition. Lester also competed with the French and colonial-Americans who fished in Newfoundland waters and often sold fish to the same markets. Despite Lester being a powerful fish merchant who was going through a rapid expansion of wealth and social influence in this period, this power was constantly, as Jerry Bannister has argued, being "contested and negotiated."[120] Rivals were often responsible for this. Many of the rivalries that existed in Lester's life arose because of contextual factors in Newfoundland, while others were the result of events in the wider Atlantic during this time.[121]

Lester did not write about these types of issues often. When he did so it makes the significance of those incidents stand out in contrast. The way in which Lester then chose to interact with his rivals provides insight into three main things: First it enhances our

[120] Jerry Bannister, "'I shall show it to the Governor:' Law and Authority in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland," In *The Face of Justice on Newfoundland's Northeast Coast,* eds. Christopher Curran and Melvin Baker, (St. John's: The Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2012), 18.
[121] Terry McDonald, "'I Had Better Be Without Him...' Rivalry, Deception and Social Status within the Poole-Newfoundland Trade," *Newfoundland Studies* XVI, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 148.

understanding of Lester's personality and gives a view into some of the social expectations of his class and political appointments. Secondly, it gives another explanation to Lester's success at a time when many other merchants went bankrupt. Thirdly, it allows us to situate Lester among other Anglo-American merchants who used many of the same tactics to deal with similar issues. Commercial competition in Newfoundland was fierce; merchants had to deal with a myriad of rivalries. This was evidenced by the necessity of the naval government to deal with the variety of issues that regularly arose for those working on the island, and Lester was no exception. Given that many merchants in this period failed to develop wealth and influence makes the question of Lester's methods for dealing with undesirable people more important. This chapter analyzes Lester's relationship with the church in Trinity, competing merchants, the French fishery, and the colonial-Americans.

3.1: Expectations

One overarching theme that this chapter engages with is expectation. Even when there was no obvious advantage to be had in a relationship, or if a good relationship were to turn sour, Lester was pragmatic about maintaining a good and socially acceptable relationship with that person. Why he did so can largely be explained by expectation. The first of these expectations was as a merchant trying to establish himself as part of elite society. For most merchants, the Newfoundland fishery was a convenient trade to engage in to grow wealth and social status in order to join the ranks of the social elite.[122] As David Hancock argues, "Certain characteristics of behavior became marks of gentlemanly status: a good education, a genteel dress and carriage,

[122] Terry McDonald, "The One in Newfoundland, the Other in England: Ledgard, Gosse and Chancey, or Gosse, Chancey and Ledgard?," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 20, no. 2 (2005): 210; Stephen J. Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America,* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005), 40.

refined external behavior, and the financial wherewithal to support this polished style of living."[123] Lester needed to embody these values in order to be accepted as a member of a group which was inhabited first by men of noble birth. In Newfoundland, Lester had little need of a carriage and we do not know how he dressed; therefore, what defined him as a person dedicated to "improvement," or as part of the merchant elite, was largely through the way he interacted with others.[124]

The business culture of the period also needs to be taken into consideration. Sheryllynne Haggerty argues that "trust, reputation, and obligation," (among others) were elements that maintained this culture. She goes on to write, "merchants… carefully constructed and managed their personal reputations and used community reputations to their advantage. They tried their hardest to fulfil their obligations but found that the more successful they were, the more obligations were placed upon them.[125] Success depended on adhering to the social practices of this growing culture.[126] Nowhere was this so evident as with Lester's interactions with his rivals.

One of the major obligations that was placed on Lester was through his appointment as a magistrate, an appointment that had its own expectations embedded into the position. By the 1760s, there was a well-established tradition of appointing magistrates to hold quarter session courts in Newfoundland, which allowed for order especially after the naval government had left

[123] David Hancock: *Citizens of the World: London merchants and the integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785,"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 280; Michael J. Braddick, "Civility and Authority," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800,* eds. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009), 114.
[124] Hancock: *Citizens of the World,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 279.
[125] Sheryllynne Haggerty, *Merely for Money?: Business Culture in the British Atlantic 1750-1815*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 7.
[126] Phillis Whitman Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World: Massachusetts Merchants, 1670-1780,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 107.

for the winter.[127] The role of the magistrates was important: firstly, they allowed for a smoother operation of the fishery. Secondly, the naval government helped to "strengthen Britain's territorial claim over Newfoundland."[128] As an extension of the naval government, magistrates represented a part of Britain's attempt to gain military supremacy in the Atlantic. Newfoundland, like the West Indies, required a consistent military presence to maintain order and prevent attacks by the French.[129]

It has been written that in Newfoundland, "magistrates ensured that those who broke the peace either found sufficient security or were imprisoned; they were empowered, for example, to convict those who committed fraud through false weights and measures or sold found contrary to English ordinances. They were also required to hold general quarter sessions according to common law." Magistrates were significantly constricted in their power, though, and they could not judge "robbery, murder, or any other capital crime… Magistrates were never to contravene King William's Act in the course of their duty."[130]

Magistrates were responsible in answering to the rest of the naval government, and their power was limited by this. Despite any restrictions imposed on magistrates, this position of power provided those merchants who were appointed as magistrates with a unique advantage.[131] Most importantly, for Benjamin Lester, his position as a magistrate helped him to create many

[127] Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland 1699-1832*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for the Osgoode society of Canadian Legal History, 2003), 46.
[128] Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 46.
[129] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 62.
[130] Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 70. King William's Act (also known as the Act to Encourage the Trade to Newfoundland) was written in 1699 and regulated the fishery in Newfoundland. It also gave directions for how fishing admirals should keep order in their respective harbors. This act codified Newfoundland's position as a seasonal fishery rather than a colony, 31.
[131] *Ibid.,* 147. It should be noted that it was the surgeons in Newfoundland, not merchants, who were most often appointed as magistrates.

useful relationships within the naval government on both sides of the Atlantic. However, this position also imposed an implicit restriction, which was that it placed certain expectations on Lester as someone who needed to uphold the law while being under the scrutiny of the naval government. As we saw in the last chapter with Lester's dealing with the French navy, unwelcome decisions could easily land him at a meeting before the naval governor. Understanding the expectations that Lester would have had projected onto him is important for analyzing how his relationships with rivals proceeded, and that the world of eighteenth-century merchants was not so straightforward as simply creating wealth. A complex network of expectation existed to demonstrate which merchants could be trusted, and would enhance benefits beyond capital to England, often in the form of charity and good deeds. Merchants who helped to maintain law and order in Newfoundland as magistrates, while helping Britain consolidate control there, certainly fit into this network. Conversely, merchants like Lester were able to take advantage of the influence that this position afforded them.

3.2: Church of England

On September 21st , 1764, a letter was received by Reverend Edward Langman from Benjamin Lester. Langman was a joint missionary and a magistrate in St. John's who oversaw the Church of England on the east coast of Newfoundland.[132] The exchange of letters between Langman and Lester followed the death of William Fotheringham, a minister who had died after spending just one year in Trinity. In the letter Lester promised to take the new clergyman "under his wing."[133] Eight days later, the new minister of Trinity Bay, James Balfour, wrote to Edward Langman saying that the "Future fairly rosy at Trinity, I think these a good natured People. They

[132] Frederick Jones, "LANGMAN, EDWARD," in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 4, (Toronto and Quebec City: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/langman_edward_4E.html
[133] SPG., Vol 5, Benjamin Lester to Edward Langman, September 21, 1764, 44.

may be led, but not Drove."[134] As it would unfold, James Balfour's time in Trinity was neither rosy nor would he send many reports of "good natured People."

Efforts by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) meant that there was a Church of England presence in Newfoundland since the early eighteenth century.[135] A larger presence of clergy was expected with an increasing resident population on the island; a population that merchants were increasingly reliant on to supply them with their fish.[136] Those same merchants, however, could find the presence of clergy to be troublesome. This was for several reasons and the fact that clergy wanted to stop fishermen from working on Sundays (something which merchants and planters alike would not have contended with) was among them. More importantly though, a greater clerical presence on the island was a visible sign that Newfoundland was moving from a fishing station to a colony, which easily posed distractions from fishery, as well as brought greater trade regulations.[137] The tensions between these two classes are exemplified in Benjamin Lester's actions, and what Balfour reported from Trinity, which painted a clear picture of the conflict. This evaluation can be made even though neither person complained directly about the other; rather, it was the social conditions that both were creating that generated tension. Unlike the other rivalries that will be discussed in this chapter, this one is unique since we are looking at the relationship largely through the eyes of Balfour and how he viewed the conflict.

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[134] SPG., vol. 5, James Balfour to Edward Langman, September 29, 1764, 44.
[135] Patrick O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland: A History to 1843,* (St. John's: Long Beach Press, 1999), 93; H.P. Thompson, *Into All Lands: The History of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1950,* (London: S.P.C.K., 1951). For SPG in Newfoundland see chapter 6
[136] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 36. Hornsby writes: "As late as the 1750s, the summer population, numbering perhaps 8000 men, was larger than the year-round population. Yet during the 1760s and 1770s, the resident population gradually overhauled the migratory population."
[137] O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland,* 96.

Lester never mentioned attending church in Trinity, and he never mentioned Balfour by name. It appeared that Lester fell short on his promise. In 1770, Balfour complained that the "rich are Quakers, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics, and will not help to repair the Church."[138] Earlier, in 1767, Balfour complained that "people do not pay their pew-rents and gets very little money from them."[139] There was no evidence of Lester having helped establish or maintain the church in Trinity in any meaningful way. This was greatly different from how he treated the Church and church services in England, which he regularly attended. The promise to take Balfour "under his wing" came likely as the result of an expectation of his class and position as a magistrate. In 1768 a letter was sent from Governor Palliser to the magistrates instructing them to take legal action against those who spent Sunday either drunk or working. He instructed people to spend the day praying instead.[140] This order was likely met with indifference, but the intention was clear: the church and clergy were to be respected and magistrates were to uphold any obligations to the church. In 1769, there was an altercation between a surgeon in Trinity with James Balfour wherein Balfour "received serval blows with Christian meekness."[141] When Governor Byron visited Trinity later that year he and Lester spoke of the affair between Balfour and the surgeon. Lester recorded him saying that "he thinks them in fault, as Parsons are to be Respected above others… Expects that the affair with the Parson will be made up, without its coming to a hearing, & hopes that I will do it.[142] There were clearly expectations for magistrates

[138] W. Gordon Handcock, Newfoundland history series 6: Soe longe as there comes noe women: Origins of English Settlement in Newfoundland, (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1989), 134.
[139] SPG., vol. 5, James Balfour to Richard Langman, November 5, 1767, 48.
[140] "Colonial Secretary's Letterbook," vol. 4, Governor Hugh Palliser to Justices of the Peace, Aug 13, 1768, 100.
[141] SPG., vol 5, James Balfour to Edward Langman, October 13, 1769.
[142] *Benjamin Lester Diaries*, July 27th/28th, 1769.

to uphold and protect the church and its clergy, further evidenced by Governor Byron's eagerness to deal with this issue quickly and out of public view.

The question remains: if the merchant population in Newfoundland had typical issues and problems with the clergy operating on the island, why did Lester not write about specific conflict with Balfour? This is explained by the crossroads at which Lester found himself. On the one hand, there were incentives to having a church presence, and surely many planters and residents expected this service – evidenced by Balfour's small, but consistent, congregation.[143] Likewise, Lester's position as magistrate would have meant that there was an expectation to help establish and maintain the church in Trinity. On the other hand, the church had the potential to pull resources away from the fishery, and it also represented the trend that Newfoundland was moving towards a colony rather than a workstation. A greater church presence certainly had implications in other parts of the Atlantic, like in the West Indies where greater church presence often resulted in raised taxes.[144] Though Lester was eager to work with the small pool of residents, he wanted to maintain the social conditions on the island, especially since they allowed for this period of success. This was evidenced by the fact that in 1773 Lester represented Newfoundland fish merchants in petitioning against the establishment of a customhouse in St. John's.[145] The fish merchants' logic was that the "fishery had been free from time immemorial... and they wondered under what authority the customs house had been set up."[146] This middling position likely explains the lack of written information in the diary. Essentially, Lester could not complain either way.

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[143] SPG., vol 5, James Balfour, November 13, 1779, 52. He wrote: "Church crowded in Summer, it is ruinous."
[144] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 61.
[145] D.F. Beamish, "LESTER, BENJAMIN," in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, (Toronto and Quebec City: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lester_benjamin_5E.html.
[146] O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland*, 96.

There was a parallel between the Newfoundland merchant class, as well as a comment from Balfour about the residents, with the growing tensions in colonial-America. When James Balfour left Trinity to go to Carbonear in 1775, he was met with opposition. It was written that residents "wanted 'a Methodist, or Presbyterian' as their minister and that... If there were men to lead them, Balfour continued, 'they would exactly resemble the Americans on the continent.'"[147] Likewise, in opposing a custom-house in St. John's merchants in 1772 "'entered into agreement' among themselves and flatly refused to pay the fees."[148] While the tensions never amounted to anything more - Patrick O' Flaherty called it "superficial" (and it certainly was) - it was remarkable that both residents and Newfoundland fish merchants were showing signs of rebellion against the crown.[149] While residents wanted social reform for churches in Newfoundland, fish merchants objected to greater colonial regulation and reform. On the continent, greater regulation over their business practices was a contributing factor to why some fish merchants did eventually act in rebellion.[150] The British government was right to be weary of merchants' actions as the fifteen year period before the American Revolution saw North Atlantic merchants grow in prosperity and as a group were typically "profit-oriented" and "exhibited a spirit of individualism."[151] Though it is argued that colonial-American merchants had moderate views towards actions of disloyalty or rebellion, they took exception to the efforts made by the British government to tax colonial-Americans.[152] For Newfoundland and the West Indies, the major difference was that while New England fish merchants more commonly lived

[147] *Ibid.,* 94.
[148] *Ibid.,* 96.
[149] O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland,* 96; Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals,* 129
[150] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 156.
[151] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 47.
[152] Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), chapter 4; Hornsby, *British Atlantic American Frontier,* 228. Custom duties were a trend throughout the British Atlantic world and were viewed as a way to offset the cost of the Seven Years War.

on the continent, and thus became further separated from Britain, Newfoundland merchants like Benjamin Lester retained their English connection.[153] Likewise, "absentee planters" in the West Indies caused merchants there to be reliant on Britain.[154] In not acting in rebellion Newfoundland fish merchants had no choice but to strike a balance between satisfying an important and useful resident population on the island, while trying to maintain limited regulation that would allow free trade of the fishery to continue.

In Trinity, perhaps the biggest source of conflict between the merchant class and Balfour concerned the presence of Irish immigrants. Irish-Catholics were regarded as undesirable by the Church of England generally, and Balfour complained extensively about them. Anti-Catholic sentiments and anxieties were worsened by the Seven Years War, and British subjects feared 'penal' laws that could, as Sean Cadigan writes, "limit property rights, citizenship, and freedom of worship."[155] In 1767, Balfour complained about the Irish as thieves, and then in 1768, complained of the "lawlessness of the people especially Irish immigrants."[156] Benjamin Lester, like other merchants in Trinity such as John Jeffrey, and Thomas Street, played an important part in employing Irish as well as English fishers.[157] There were undoubtedly biases for hiring English men first, but Ireland could supply much of the man power needed for the fishery, and so they were regularly recruited and used in "virtually all capacities – as agents, seamen, tradesmen,

[153] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 47-48; Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 227.
[154] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 62.
[155] Sean T. Cadigan, *Newfoundland: A History,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 62.
[156] SPG, James Balfour, October 29, 1768, 49.
[157] C Grant Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland: A Geographer's Perspective,* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976), 169. "Although the total wintering population had many more England Protestant than Irish Catholic masters, the large numbers of Roman Catholic servants made the balance between the two ethnic and religious groups, over the years, very close to equal." For Irish immigration to Newfoundland see: John Mannion, *Tracing the Irish: A Geographical Guide*, (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland), 2004.

sailors, and fishermen."[158] Throughout the diary Lester seems void of prejudice against the Irish, and he had initially worked for an Irishman, Michael Ballard. Lester continually employed the Irish, while his brother provided a detailed account of their recruitment in his set of diaries.

The presence of Irish fishermen in Trinity clearly posed a problem for Balfour, and his consistent complaints show how he was troubled by their being there. Besides the general bigotry of English clergy towards Irish-Catholics, in Balfour's eyes the increasing Irish presence would only serve to keep his church low in numbers, and therefore constantly lacking resources. Balfour's problem was with the merchant class in Trinity, who persistently hired these men, to his dismay. No doubt he perceived that the Poole merchants acted in such a way that undermined the Church of England mission, and even the crown, in Newfoundland. Lester, on the other hand, saw the recruitment of Irish fishermen as necessary to preserve and expand the fishery in Newfoundland. That Irish-Catholics were continually hired to the displeasure of naval officials and clergy alike shows how this phenomenon was part of a larger and complex trend in the Atlantic. The needs of the crown "as defined in London" could be very different from social and political needs in their overseas sites.[159] As a result, behaviors that could at first be viewed as actions of disloyalty were instead calculated necessities that fit the needs of people in different localities.

[158] Handcock, *Soe longe as there comes noe women,* 134; Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 215. It should be noted, however, that although Lester was eager to hire Irish fishermen he was also part of a naval government that punished Irish immigrants/fishers at a far higher rate than their English counterparts. Ten out of the eleven people hanged in Newfoundland prior to 1792 were Irish.

[159] For naval government opposition to Irish see: CO 194/12, 186. Here Governor Drake complains Irish are disloyal; Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals,* 121; Michael J. Braddick, "Civility and Authority," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800,* eds. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 130.

As with many other clergy in Newfoundland, what Balfour wrote from Trinity was pegged with complaints.[160] What was notable was that although Lester helped to create an undesirable situation for Balfour, he was not complained about directly. Though there was evidence of him having tension with the church in Trinity, and *vice versa*, Lester had done well not to make an enemy out of Balfour. Even if Lester could not see Balfour as a rival because of the need for a church presence in Trinity, he certainly viewed the shift from fishery to colony as undesirable. Balfour saw Lester and the rest of the merchant class as a rival that was undermining the Church of England mission.

3.3: Merchants

Discussion of merchant rivalries was not abundant in Lester's diary, but there were a few which make notable appearances. One of Lester's principal competitors was John Slade, who was also from Poole but operated in Notre Dame Bay. Like Lester, Slade came from a middling background, which helped propel him into the growing Newfoundland-Poole trade. The timeline of his early career follows along much the same lines as Lester, but he entered the trade as a Captain – and is referred to as such in Lester's diary. By working as an agent and master for other merchants in Newfoundland his wealth grew, and he was able to operate as an independent merchant by 1753 when he bought his first ship.[161] John Slade had a modest career when compared to Lester in this period, due to his location which put him at more direct odds with the French fishery. Moreover, he was "overshadowed" by another merchant – Jeremiah Coghlan – who operated out of Twillingate.[162] Lester and Slade had a generally good and friendly

[160] O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland,* 94.
[161] W. Gordon Handcock, "SLADE, JOHN," *in Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 4, (Toronto and Quebec City: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/slade_john_4E.html
[162] W. Gordon Handcock, "SLADE, JOHN," 2003.

relationship at this time – but one that could become easily terse as Slade increased his reach in Newfoundland.

During the 1760s Slade and Lester were competitors, but their relationship was friendly. Lester frequently received letters from Slade which told him how the fishery was in the north.[163] In Poole, Isaac Lester regularly spent time with Slade as they lived near each other on Thames Street.[164] The desire to maintain a good relationship with other merchants was directly linked to expectation, reputation, and capital (since a good reputation increased the prospect of business). Merchants who had bad reputations either by untrustworthiness, their being too aggressive, or through gossip, tended to be less profitable. The contemporary logic of the day was as Daniel Defoe wrote: "if a merchant is slandered in his character, or reputation, 'he is immediately and unavoidably blasted and undone.'"[165] Thus, there was an expectation that merchants be civil to one another.

Respect is one thing, but that a very friendly relationship between Slade and the Lester's existed – shrewd businesspeople in the same industry -- deserves further analysis. This relationship likely only existed in this period because Slade did not have the political or financial influence that the Lester's had, and thus he posed no grave threat to their enterprise. Greater conflict between the two would only arise later in the 1770s and 1780s, when the Slade's business increased in size.

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[163] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* August 15, 1767; July 17, 1769.
[164] Isaac Lester, *Isaac Lester Diaries,* Memorial University of Newfoundland – Digital Archives Initiative, https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/m_lester/search, April 7, 1766. Henceforth cited as *Isaac Lester Diaries.* On this day Isaac smoked a pipe with John Slade, for example.
[165] Quoted in Sheryllynne Haggerty, *Merely for Money?* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 101.

In 1770 a planter based in Tilting Harbour, Thomas Burke, refused to give Lester all of his yearly catch and instead decided to only give him the amount needed to settle his account – essentially just squaring up, leaving Lester with no surplus on which to profit. Lester quickly ordered his agent, William Ryan to "seize Burkes effects."[166] As Allan Dwyer has noted, this demonstrated that even though this was in the territory of John Slade, he had not grown to a capacity yet to offer an alternative to doing business with Lester.[167] And yet, this act of defiance represented an issue Lester faced when other merchants became more stable and prosperous. Merchants could offer an alternative to doing business with him, and as his expansion grew into the territory of other merchants this could happen far more easily.

During the 1762 French raid on Newfoundland Lester specifically targeted two planters, Thomas Lambert and James Terrell, who were emerging merchants and beginning to extend credit. It was these men who Lester chose to provide the French with their livestock and provisions.[168] In acting as conduit for the French, Lester also chose which properties were to be burned, two of which were Lambert's and Terrell's. Not unsurprisingly, Lambert had legal disputes with Lester before.[169] This demonstrates the lengths Lester was willing to take to limit new merchants in his territory who threatened his supremacy there.

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[166] Allan Dwyer, *Business Rivalry in the Colonial Atlantic: A Five Forces Analysis*, (Administrative Sciences Association of Canada), 2013 Annual Conference, 14.
[167] Allan Dwyer, *Business Rivalry in the Colonial Atlantic,* 14.
[168] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* July 21, 1762.
[169] *Trinity Minute Book,* October 3, 1757. Lester (as agent for Michael Ballard) was ordered to pay for goods supposedly bought by Ballard's previous agent in the winter prior; Mark Osborne Humphries, "'A Calamity From Which No Relief Can Be Expected': Empire, Authority, and Civilian Responses to the French Occupation of Newfoundland, June-September 1762," *Acadiensis* XLIII, no.1 (Winter/Spring2014): 52.

The Burke incident and the events arising the French raid, demonstrate the combined legal power possessed by merchants who were also magistrates.[170] Burke did hand over his entire catch, but this was probably only to avoid the court system which would likely have ended in Lester's favor anyhow. In continental-America, fish merchants more frequently suing workers was an important way that they lowered economic risk.[171] That Lester worked to destroy property and limit the capacity of new merchants to conduct business points to the fact that well-established merchants presented a real threat to his business, as we will see:

The relationship between Lester and merchants who were on more equal footing was far different, as with Jeremiah Coghlan in Twillingate. They did not have the same friendly relationship as between Slade and Lester, and at one point Lester wrote:

> Mr Dobeny Din'd with him, he tells me, that in Conversation wth Caughlin a Fryday at Fogo, he talk'd freely of me, & in particular that I need not boast of having 320 Tons Oyle left unsold, that I sent 60 Tons to Bristol, but that I was oblidg'd to take up £1500, of Mr Elton on it, I got him to give it me in writting, which he did, & I shall show it to the Governour, this fellow has shown me many Instances of his bad behaviour from time to time.[172]

Perhaps what is most revealing about this passage is the way in which Lester decided to deal with the rivalry. He first sends a letter to Coghlan regarding the matter – to which Coghlan's reply two weeks later was "full of compliance" - and then says he will show it to the Governor.[173] Lester knew that the situation could either be helped by going through the channels of the naval government, or more likely, that he knew this was an opportunity to disparage Coghlan's name. Whether or not Lester did show the letter to the governor was unclear, and

[170] Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals*, 147. This is not to overstate the legal power of merchants, they "influenced but did not control local government."
[171] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause* 30.
[172] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* August 3, 1767.
[173] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* August 15, 1767

perhaps he felt the issue was resolved by the letter he received. In any case, over the following months there are a few occasions on which Lester wrote about spending time with Coghlan's agents – while he was unable to have a social relationship with Coghlan he could do the next best thing which was to socialize with his employees.[174] By socializing with Coghlan's employees Lester, presumably, could keep a close eye on Coghlan's business and receive useful gossip. When we consider the degree to which Atlantic merchants depended on "networks of independence," witnessed in Lester's diary through things such as the passing of news from John Slade, a bad relationship could be the cause of anxiety. If fellow merchants had a bad relationship they lost allies, were less informed, and those relationships that could have an element of usefulness were replaced with ones that were purely competitive.[175] Regardless of this tense relationship it did not have the opportunity to deteriorate since Coghlan was soon bankrupt and no longer trading within Newfoundland.

Lester tended to not escalate his rivalries with other merchants to the point of being featured in the courts in Trinity. Yet, this was not because of a reluctance to go to court for fear of losing a case – in the period 1766-76 Lester never lost a court case in Trinity.[176] Of the seven court cases in which Lester was involved during this period most were against servants or those in his employ.[177] Nevertheless, Lester was aware of the utility of the courts when it came to dealing with his rivals. In 1767 he pointed out during court that an unruly servant had been a

[174] *Ibid.,* September 27, 1767. Here Lester spent time with Coghlan's 'clark' Mr. Poor.
[175] Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts 1690-1750,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 346.
[176] Jerry Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor": Law and Authority in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland," In *The Face of Justice on Newfoundland's Northeast Coast,* eds. Christopher Curran and Melvin Baker, (St. John's: The Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2012), 27.
[177] Lester's success in the Trinity courts is not to suggest that these courts were not helpful to the servant class in Newfoundland. Rather, it has been demonstrated that: "servants won an overwhelming proportion of their suits to recover wages." Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals,* 244.

runaway from Jeremiah Coghlan. Not unlike the instance of threating to show the letter to the governor, in showing that Coghlan was unable to control the servants in his employ, he was able to disparage him publicly.[178] Considering the importance of reputation for eighteenth-century merchants to succeed, comments against Coghlan to the governor, or at the courts in Trinity, were an underhanded way of damaging his reputation, thus making him look less trustworthy to the naval government and less desirable for residents and planters to do business with.

In 1768 Lester went to court when a servant – David Bailey – who had previously agreed to be employed by him sold fish and oil to Richard Waterman, another merchant in the Trinity area.. Jonathan Cartwright was ordered to oversee the dispute and a decision on the matter was to be made by "12 principal traders."[179] On October 12th, courts were held in Trinity where Lester wrote that "many disputes decided," he summed up the case by writing: "Wattermans affair was ended in my favour entirely."[180] Unlike his relationship with Slade in Notre Dame Bay, Waterman operated closer to Lester, and at this time did offer an alternative for those who either wanted to back out of their promise entirely, or be in employment of two merchants in the same fishing season.[181] Either way, Waterman represented the kind of merchant rivalry that could contest his power, and Lester dealt with the issue through what were the most appropriate channel – the district courts.[182] Not only were these courts the most appropriate channel, but as the sample of ten years show – they worked consistently in Lester's favor.

[178] *Trinity Minute Book,* September 30, 1768; Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor," 23.
[179] Colonial Secretary's Letterbook, vol 4, August 25, 1768.
[180] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* October 12, 1768.
[181] It could be assumed that a servant could gain credit from two merchants and if his catch were large enough provide each merchant with half his catch; Lester does indicate that this was a particularly good fishing season.
[182] Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor," 18.

Lester was ready and willing to have a good relationship with John Slade. A poor relationship would have been bad for business and for Lester's image. Nevertheless, Lester seemed more than willing to sacrifice a relationship if that merchant overstepped his boundaries. As Allan Dwyer writes, "Benjamin Lester kept an eager watch throughout his career for attempts by other merchants, especially Slade, to move in on his commercial or physical territory. The threat continued after John Slade himself died and his business was being conducted by his nephew, Thomas. In 1798 Lester wrote in his diary that Slade's men... had done physical damage to one of Lester's salmon posts."[183] Dwyer goes on to write, "Benjamin Lester made his mark through careful strategy and a manipulation of his connections to Atlantic elites." While Slade remained profitable, he did not cultivate the wealth of influence that Lester did.[184] If this had not been the case, a very different relationship would have developed between the two in the 1760s. Merchant rivalries increased with Lester's expansion into new territory as he crossed borderlands with other English merchants, however, as he expanded he also shared a borderland with the French in Newfoundland.

3.4: French Presence in Newfoundland

Following the Treaty of Paris in 1763, which formally ended the Seven Years War, the French fishery had resumed in Newfoundland on the French Shore and St. Pierre and Miquelon.[185] This was not the outcome British merchants had hoped for, but as the French demonstrated in their raids on British fishing stations in Newfoundland and Cape Breton, fishing

[183] Allan Dwyer, *Business Rivalry in the Colonial Atlantic: A Five Forces Analysis*, (Administrative Sciences Association of Canada), 2013 Annual Conference, 19.
[184] Allan Dwyer, *Business Rivalry in the Colonial Atlantic*, 30.
[185] O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland,* 84.

rights were an asset they were willing to continue the war over. Eager to conclude a war that had cost double Britain's gross national product, they ceded certain fishing rights.[186] Since the treaty coastline lay to the north of Trinity there was no significant French fishery near Lester; therefore, he did not have regular interaction with French merchants or fishers. During a trip outside of Trinity, however, Lester encountered a French fisher staying at Gooseberry Isles. Although Lester did not often directly oversee the fishery in the north, many of his employees worked and lived at this borderland between the French, English, and Beothuk in Newfoundland.[187] The power contest in these locations were part of a larger struggle at borderland areas throughout the Atlantic following the Seven Years War, often marked by conflict and competition.[188] Through what Lester wrote we gain insight into how they were contemporary rivals for Lester, and why he regarded them as having a significant advantage over the English fishery in Newfoundland. In a particularly long entry Lester wrote:

Map 3.1: French Shore 1713-1783

Source: Heritage NL, 1997. Map by Tanya Saunders, 2001.

> Doctor & me to the Frenchmans Room, the Capt Went Yesterday for Twilengate, but his Son a Sensible young Man about 21 yrs old, was very Polite, ask'd us to walk in to

[186] CO194/14, Principal Merchants (Bideford) to Lords of Trade, November 24, 1758, 16. Here is a petition of around twenty merchants desiring that the French should have no "footing on the island;" Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 228.

[187] See: Allan Dwyer, Atlantic Borderland: Natives, Fishers, Planters and Merchants in Notre Dame Bay, 1713-1802, (PhD diss., Memorial University, 2012); [Map 3.1 from] *The English Fishery and Trade in the 18th Century,* Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador, 1997, Map by Tanya Saunders, 2001, https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/exploration/18th-century-fishery.php

[188] The approach of studying borderlands in Atlantic history is explored in: Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States and the Peoples in Between in North American History," American Historical Review 104, no. 3 (1999): 814-841. See also: *New England and the Maritime Provinces,* eds. Stephen J. Hornsby and John G. Reid, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

> his Appartment & would press us to Eat, Drink & c staid there about an Hour & came away, they have abt 1000 Qtl on shoar, & have given up Fishing havg no Salt left, they have the advantage of us in the fishery by Cheapness of Servants Wages & provissions, they goe 3 Men in a Battoe their allowance a Week is, Bread plenty 2½ lb Meat for Sundays & all, ½ a lb Butter pint Syder ea Man P Day, 1 Qt Brandy P ea Man the Week, neither are they allow'd to carry a Kittle in the Boats, or to Eat a Fish on any Score, only, the Heads & Bones, such treatment as this, would hardly goe down with the English & Irish, as they have by common allowance for 4 Men, 16lb Pork 8lb Beef, 28lb Bread 2lb Butter, besides Oyle nay many has more P Week, & not Contented & not to be deny'd dressing fish when they please both fresh & after in Salt, its no Wonder the French beat us in the fishery, their Wages is not quite to ours by one Quarter, their Boats & Craft, not half the Expense, & their Crews under such Regularity, that if a fisherman Sleeps on the Ledge & is Caught, he is liable to have what punishment the Capt please to inflict on him, even to Break a Limb, if done while he is a Sleep, & no Law to injure him, This is a Vast differance, when our Villians will Neglect going out & when out, Sleep when they please, can give Surly answers if the Master finds fault, & at last be oblidg'd to pay them Wages, not withstanding such Neglects.[189]

What this passage demonstrates was that Lester was eager to understand the reasons behind the advantages he perceived the French to have over the English fishery. Lester's comments regarding servant wages were indicative of a trend throughout the North Atlantic where manufacturers and merchants were paying more attention to servant wages. This attention suggests that these merchants "felt a growing social distance from their workers."[190] This distance, as exemplified in merchant records, has been used as evidence to show the shift from a moral economy to a capitalist economy. Wage complaints such as this also suggest that the

[189] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* July 30, 1767.
[190] Naomi R. Lamoreaux, "Rethinking the Transition to Capitalism in the Early American Northeast," in the *Journal of American History* 90, no.2, (2003): 461.

exercise of extending credit, or the "truck system" was becoming increasingly preferrable to wage labor before the nineteenth century, when it would become the predominant way fishers were paid. In this way we can surmise that Lester not only increasingly relied on the growing resident population because of their presence in Newfoundland, but because it may have been a cheaper option than paying out servant wages. Nevertheless, comments about servant conduct, as well as the price and availability of provisions, show that the 'threat' to Lester was not actually in Newfoundland; rather, it was at the markets where their fish was sold.[191]

Unlike other merchants that could threaten fishing operations on the island, this represented a different kind of rivalry. Lester was very much aware that markets were the location at which his money was generated and was constantly concerned about market prices and the race to get fish to market before there was a surplus. In the 1720s when his father had entered the Newfoundland trade Lester's eldest brother, Francis, was stationed in Lisbon for the marketing of salt fish. Regrettably for the family, Francis renounced his protestant faith, became a Catholic, and consequently disappeared from the family record.[192] Lester did manage to stay informed about the fish markets, however, this typically happened in the form of letters when ships and crews were returning.[193]

Lester's comment that the French were "not to be deny'd dressing fish when they please both fresh & after in Salt," was particularly telling. What Lester was referencing was that the

[191] For more on Spanish markets see: Olaf Janzen, "The Logic of English Saltcod: An Historiographical Revision," in *The Northern Mariner* XIII, no 2 (2013): 123-134. Santiago Piquero and Ernesto López, "New Evidence for the Price of Cod in Spain: The Basque Country, 1560-1900," in *The North Atlantic Fisheries: Supply, Marketing and Consumption*, 1560-1990, eds. David J. Starkey and James E. Candow, (Studia Atlantica 8; Hull: North Atlantic Fisheries History Association, Maritime Historical Studies Centre, University of Hull, 2006), 195-211.
[192] Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor," 15; Derek Beamish, John Hillier, and H.F.V Johnstone, *Mansions and Merchants of Poole and Dorset,* Vol. 1, (Poole: Poole Historical Trust: 1976), 86.
[193] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* December 26, 1768. On that day Lester received letters from Cadiz and Naples.

French had a good market for both dry-cured and wet-cured fish. Wet-cured fish was not as desirable at the Spanish markets but was preferred at French markets.[194] Lester's comment shows that when time and the availability of salt allowed the French could produce either cure and have a viable market for that fish. When they did produce dry fish, it would often go to markets in Spain and Portugal where the abundance of fish could lower prices.[195]

Lester's competition with the French had much to do with the speed their fishery could operate. Greater punishments for fishers who were idle, and the cheapness of provisions helped the speed at which the French could get their dry fish to market. The French presence therefore was troubling to Lester.

Evidently, Lester did not have to travel outside of Trinity to be informed of the French fishery, he could also rely on the naval government. In mid-August 1767 the *Spy,* a man of war, came into Trinity and brought Lester a personal letter from Governor Palliser, "advising me the French Dry Cod fishery is on The Decline, & they now turn to making mud fish."[196] Governor Palliser took particular concern in the French presence in Newfoundland during his term of as governor, and both the Colonial Secretary's Letterbook, and the letters he sent to officials in England reflected this. In the winter of 1767, Palliser wrote many letters to the Earl of Shelbourne (as secretary of state) regarding the French presence, complaining that they were encroaching and trading with the English.[197] Palliser also wrote to French captains at this time,

[194] Janzen, "The Logic of English Saltcod," 132-134.
[195] *Ibid.,* 132; For example: CO194/14, Merchants from Barnstaple to Lords of Trade, December 20, 1755, p. 23. Here is petition from merchants stating that the French undercut prices at Spanish markets.
[196] Mud fish refers to wet-cured fish that was "partially split, salted and placed in a pickle." *ma*; Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor," 21; *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* August 19, 1767.
[197] Colonial Secretary's Letterbook, vol. 4, Governor Palliser to the Earl of Shelbourne, February 9, 1767/December 5, 1766.

asking them to respect the treaties in place.[198] Palliser wrote to Lester regarding the French decline, which was no doubt happily written by Palliser whose efforts to limit the French to their treaty coastlines had aided in diminishing their fishing season, and happily received by Lester who was now aware that there would be less dry-cured cod at markets in the Mediterranean.[199]

Another reason that Palliser likely deemed it important to pass on this information to Lester was because he was a magistrate. As an extension of the naval government, magistrates in Newfoundland helped to legitimize Britain's place in Newfoundland, and especially since Lester so often overwintered there.[200] Following the Seven Years War, France was eager to regain control in the Atlantic, illustrated by complaints of the French encroaching on British coastline, but Palliser was intent on enforcing the terms of the Treaty of Paris. This was seen through his stationing five war ships around Newfoundland, and his personal trip to the West Coast.[201] Palliser was one of many that played the role of exercising English authority over French residents in borderland areas in North America.[202] Throughout the Atlantic, it has been suggested that "British politicians increasingly had become aware of the link between geopolitical ascendancy and commercial power." The logic was that any economic decline in the British Atlantic would lead to military decline.[203] As a merchant, Lester represented Britain's

[198] Colonial Secretary's Letterbook, vol. 4, Governor Palliser to Captains of the French ships, July 10, 1767.
[199] It could even be speculated that this information would have been important since if Lester was aware that the French fishery was in decline he could hold his ships in Newfoundland longer, thus garnering a larger cargo, and then sending them to the market countries.
[200] Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals,* 46.
[201] Palliser was the first Governor to be recorded travelling to the West coast. See: Olaf Janzen, "Showing the Flag: Hugh Palliser in Western Newfoundland, 1764," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du Nord* 3, no. 3 (1993): 3-14; Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals,* 149.
[202] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 227.
[203] *Ibid.,* 228.

commercial supremacy in Newfoundland; as a magistrate, he represented Britain's military dominance. Palliser evidently thought it wise to keep Lester informed.

As his wealth and influence continued to grow throughout the 1770s and 1780s Lester would use later use this influence in the peace negotiations of 1783 when he lobbied against French concessions on the treaty shore and the retention of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon.[204] Early incidents such as his interaction with a French fisher, as well as the letter from Palliser, show why he was concerned with the French presence. The French fishery was not the only fishery that Lester competed with at market though.

3.5: Colonial-American Presence in Newfoundland

In the 1760s it was clear from Benjamin Lester's diary that the presence of colonial-American ships in Trinity Bay was expected.[205] Lester and other merchants showed little reason to refrain from participating in this trade. In July of 1769, a ship came into Trinity Bay from Philadelphia with a cargo of goods. Lester wrote, "Capt Cooper [of the American ship] with me this Day, cant agree for his Cargoe, offer'd him 12 p, he wants a Cargo Fish, but that wont do, till I see how the Voyages will turn out."[206] This captain likely wanted a cargo of refuse fish to deliver to the West Indies. But since the in-shore fishery had been in decline that month, and he was unable to know how the bankers, or "voyages," were faring, Lester would not part with the fish he had. Expecting his banking vessels to return soon, he instructed Cooper to check back the

[204] D. F. Beamish, "LESTER, BENJAMIN," in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, (Toronto and Quebec City: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lester_benjamin_5E.html
[205] John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). Chapter five of this volume demonstrates the degree to which the economies of New England and Newfoundland depended on trade between one another; though the assertion that Newfoundland fits into a "greater New England" ignores the extensive trade, and social ties, that existed between Newfoundland and England/Ireland, (p. 114). This idea was first expressed in, Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 43.
[206] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* July 23, 1769.

next day. By the time that Lester's bankers had arrived, however, he learned that "Mr Landers, Flinn & Wiseman [on the North side of the bay] has Bought the Philladelphia Mass Cargo that came in last Saturday... am told at 12/6, Bread & Flower Bills."[207] After spending seven nights in the bay the brig never did receive the desired fish, but at least attained a good price (at least higher than Lester was willing to pay) for their cargo. Instances such as these were not rare. From 1767 to 1770, at least, they occurred regularly. Lester socialized, negotiated, and traded with colonial-American vessels. In 1768 he recorded: "many N. England men come down this Year, Bread & flower has been Sold this Year for 13 p & now may be bought cheaper than that to take a whole Cargoe... Wrote Mr Bache at New York & sent a Certificate for the Rachells Cargo.[208] The ability to trade with colonial-American ships certainly would have offered a respite at times when market or fishing conditions were low, particularly because traders would accept either fish or bills of exchange for their cargoes.[209]

Whether it was via continental traders sailing to Newfoundland, or ships sailing from Newfoundland to pick up cargo on the continent, a great deal of trade occurred between the two locations. So long as continental imports to Newfoundland were consistent it was a logical trade in which to partake. This was because merchants could hold off taking cargoes from Britain and rely on more cheaply purchased colonial goods.

In these years, there was little evidence of reluctance by Lester to trade with colonial-American ships. Yet, in London at the House of Lords in 1775 Lester was recorded as saying:

[207] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* July 25, 1769.
[208] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* August 20, 1768.
[209] Especially because Bills of Exchange would not be tendered until later; one did not need the money at that specific time.

> That the Newfoundland fishery carried on from Great Britain is the beneficial nursery for seamen: that he would not have the fishery confined only to the Ports of Pool and Dartmouth, but would have it confined to Great Britain only: that if the American fishery was stopt, other places in Great Britain besides Pool and Dartmouth would engage in it. That if New England was restrained for ever from this fishery, it would be a benefit to Great Britain...[210]

Colonial-American ships in Newfoundland ports meant that there was direct trade between these traders and the resident population. Without Lester playing the role of the intermediary and profiting off this trade one would assume he had little incentive to encourage this interaction. Yet, that Lester did not explicitly state that colonists should not be allowed to trade at Newfoundland was evidence that this trade was beneficial to him; Lester and his agents were still able to conduct business with colonial traders, and he saw this trade as useful.

Even if colonial-American trade was done directly with residents this trade helped residents and planters reside in Newfoundland, this was still likely viewed as beneficial to Lester. Since his commercial activities increased throughout this decade he was becoming increasingly reliant on the resident population. The degree to which Newfoundland relied on this trade was evidenced by poorer conditions on the island during the American Revolution, when their trade was virtually cut off.[211] During Lester's formative years his main priority was selling fish at market, not in the provision trade to Newfoundland. It was only in the 1780s as his wealth continued to grow, and the resident population rebounded after the American Revolution, that greater priority was put on his provision trade.[212] It was then that he would he lobby for the

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[210] *The parliamentary history of England from the earliest period to the year 1803*, compiled by William Cobbett and John Wright (London, 36 volumes, 1806–20), vol. 18, pp. 426–27.
[211] Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland,* 196-197.
[212] Olaf U. Janzen, "The 'Long' Eighteenth Century, 1697-1815, in *A Short History of Newfoundland and Labrador,* St. Philip's, NL: Boulder Publications for the Newfoundland Historical Society, 2008), 51. It is written, "Ironically, that same prosperity enabled the West Country merchants to shift out of the fisheries and increasingly into trade, particularly when the fishing industry found itself in difficulty."

exclusion of American trade at Newfoundland.[213] This complicates the assertion that West Country merchants were displeased with the New England trade to Newfoundland. For Benjamin Lester, it offered advantages prior to the American Revolution.[214]

Lester was clearly more concerned with the colonial fishing activities carried on at Newfoundland than their trading there. This concern comes at the right time to be explained by a market glut in 1773, during which he had done poorly. He, at least in part, blamed the French and American fishery.[215] The New England fishery was no small threat – in the eighteenth-century cod fish represented 35% of New England trade, making it the single most valuable good.[216] Lester's statement given before the House of Lords shows his fear of this system repeating itself in future years.

Others who made statements before the House of Lords in 1775 were concerned with additional aspects of the colonial-American presence. Hugh Palliser was far more concerned with the consistent out-migration of residents, conflict with indigenous peoples on the West Coast of Newfoundland, and the coast of Labrador, as well as a general pattern of lawlessness exhibited by men on the visiting vessels. Palliser had fought to limit the colonial-American presence in Newfoundland from as early as 1766.[217] Out-migration was a substantial way that Newfoundland's position as a 'nursery for seamen' was being jeopardized as potential naval

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[213] D. F. Beamish, "LESTER, BENJAMIN," in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, (Toronto and Quebec City: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lester_benjamin_5E.html; Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland,* 201.
[214] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 108.
[215] *The parliamentary history of England from the earliest period to the year 1803*, compiled by William Cobbett and John Wright (London, 36 volumes, 1806–20), Volume 18, pp. 426–27.
[216] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* IV.
[217] *The parliamentary history of England,* vol. 18, pp. 427-28; Rainer Baehre, "Newfoundland's West Coast and the Gulf of St. Lawrence Fishery, ca. 1755-83: A Case Study of War, Fish, and Empire, in *The Greater Gulf: Essays on the Environmental History of the Gulf of St. Lawrence,* eds. Claire Campbell, Edward, and Brian Payne, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2019), 79.

recruits fled for the continent. In these years, estimates show that every year around 1,200 men (mostly indebted servants) were leaving Newfoundland for the mainland aboard trading vessels.[218] Once on the continent, fishers could work in the agricultural industry, or fish aboard banking vessels on which fishers were getting paid increasingly higher sums.[219] Though Lester reminded the court that Newfoundland was a "nursery for seamen," this can be viewed as a bargaining tool for the court to recognize the benefit of endorsing the Newfoundland fishery, rather than New England's.[220] Many Atlantic merchants met the logic of the fishery as a training ground for possible naval recruits with opposition, since it meant that they would lose fishers to naval impressment gangs in times of war.[221] Even with the loss of some of the resident population due to out-migration, Lester continued to not complain about the colonial-American trade at the House of Lords, or in his diary. This proves the importance of this trade for Lester in these formative years, and points to the degree to which he was relying on Mediterranean markets for revenue during this stage of his career. Lester's reason for appearing before the court was commercial and had more to do with limiting the Americans at European markets, rather than preventing colonial ships from frequenting the ports at Newfoundland.[222] When we compare Lester to continental merchants this is an important phenomenon since in America, though merchants tried to establish good relationships with merchants in their own communities, traders from other port towns were met with opposition. Merchants in Marblehead, Massachusetts, for

[218] Baehre, "Newfoundland's West Coast and the Gulf of St. Lawrence Fishery, 100.
[219] Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850,* (Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 272-273.
[220] Olaf U. Janzen, "The 'Long' Eighteenth Century," 53. Here it is written, "The merchant-venturers who invested in the Newfoundland fisheries encouraged this image of a "nursery for seamen" because they could use it to pressure government into providing measures to safeguard their interests – measures like the warships accompanying the fishing fleets to and from Newfoundland." Evidently, they could also promote this image to encourage the Newfoundland fishery over other fisheries.
[221] Keith Mercer, "Northern Exposure: Resistance to Naval Impressment in British North America, 1775–1815," *The Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 2 (2010): 202.
[222] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* October 20, 1769; Bannister, "I shall show it to the Governor," 17.

example, contested all forms of trade with towns like Boston and Salem.[223] Lester's relationship was more complicated. Unlike the French, the colonial-American presence in Newfoundland held an advantage for Lester, but only to a certain extent. Past that, they were another rivalry that was in competition with Lester at market.

Lester's petitioning for the restriction of the colonial-American fishery in Newfoundland demonstrates his shift away from the Taverner model. By 1775 it was clear that Lester was transferring his influence back and forth across the Atlantic, and no longer simply acting as an overseas representative in Newfoundland. As his wealth grew, so did his influence. This representation by British merchants in government was common in the Atlantic staple regions of Newfoundland and the West Indies.[224] On the continent, however, as colonial merchants increasingly lived and worked on that side of the Atlantic, they lost representation in parliament and the divide between Britain and America grew.[225]

3.6: Conclusion

Lester's relationships with his rivals were the result of the contexts in the wider British Atlantic. With certain rivalries Lester was conforming to contemporary expectations of his class and position as a magistrate. Keith Wrightson argues that by the mid-eighteenth century the British Atlantic world used largely a "common language to... express social tensions."[226] Lester's reputation was not confined to the small town of Trinity, but would have been carried like his trade throughout the Atlantic World. It was for these reasons that Lester did not often succumb to

[223] Heryman, *Commerce and Culture,* 346.
[224] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 62.
[225] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 108.
[226] Keith Wrightson, "Class" in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, 2nd ed., eds. David Armitage & Michael J. Braddick, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 171.

petty rivalries but dealt with issues through the most appropriate channels. Other rivalries, like the French and colonial-Americans show that he acted in such a way to protect his economic interests. As a result, Lester succeeded both financially, and in influence, and it was his influence that allowed him to have some measure of control over Newfoundland's political affairs.

Chapter Four:

Benjamin Lester in England: 1763/1767

During the winter months of the 1760s, Benjamin Lester spent a considerable amount of time in England. Most of his time was spent in Poole, but he also went on important trips to London. This chapter focuses mainly on diary entries from January/February 1763 and 1769 since they offer some contrast to each other as Lester's empire grew over the decade. His trips to London during both these winters can also be used as points of comparison. While Lester navigated these two worlds with ease, there were important similarities and differences between how he ran his business and who he interacted with while he was in England versus Trinity.[227] In Trinity, Lester was at the source of his trade, and he could oversee and regulate its operations as he saw fit while keeping a watchful eye on the political situation there, as well as other merchants. Lester's social life was dictated by where he was, and the social connections that would be the most lucrative to him there. Despite the draw factors that staying in Newfoundland year-round had, especially as winter inhabitation and activities increased during this period, Lester clearly felt his returns to England were important. In England, Lester was at the center of his trade, at the financial and political hub, and physically at the center between where his fish were caught and sold in Mediterranean countries.[228] These trips allowed him to engage in work he could not in Newfoundland and maintain important and useful relationships there.

[227] Jerry Bannister, "Citizen of the Atlantic: Benjamin Lester's Social World in England, 1768-69," in *The Newfoundland Quarterly* XCVI, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 33.

[228] Terry McDonald, "The One in Newfoundland, the Other in England: Ledgard, Gosse and Chancey, or Gosse, Chancey and Ledgard?," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies,* 20, no. 2 (2005): 226-227. McDonald points out that having two 'centers' of this trade was still viable in the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century brought with it social and political changes that ended management of the fish trade from England.

There was an overall increase in social activity that Lester wrote about in his diary during his trips to England. There were far more instances of dining, drinking, smoking, and 'spending the evening' with others. This increase had several causes. Firstly, his family resided in Poole, including his brothers Isaac and John. Secondly, Poole was home to many people who were of Lester's class with whom he seemed eager to spend time with. Thirdly, as in Newfoundland, Lester regularly interacted with those who worked for him. Returning captains and masters, from Newfoundland, or from the markets in Spain spent time with Lester and were regularly invited for dinner. Lester also made efforts to socialize with local politicians and those involved in the naval government of Newfoundland. Mirroring chapter one, this chapter analyzes change over time in Lester's diary. The analysis shows that Lester had indeed gone from establishing himself to being established and this was especially demonstrated through his influence and interest in English political affairs. The interest in shifting his influence from the naval government in Newfoundland to the government in England (indeed, as another way to influence control of Newfoundland affairs) was another step away from the Taverner/planter model of business.

In developing his wealth and influence Lester became part of a larger movement of wealthy merchants establishing themselves as elite gentry in Georgian England. Merchants like Lester were both developing the social models that would define this class and influenced by them as the class developed in port towns within the West Country and London.[229] While Lester was in Newfoundland comparisons were made between the way Lester displayed his wealth and social status with other merchants who planted in continental-America and the West Indies. Since Lester regularly travelled or lived in England, he can also be analyzed within the contexts

[229] Phyllis Whitman Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World: Massachusetts Merchants, 1670-1780,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 107.

of this growing class there.[230] This is not to overstate the wealth or influence this emerging class had, it is easily argued "when participating in Georgian social rituals in London, [merchants] willingly joined the lesser gentry or middling sort rather than ape landed noblemen."[231]

Though Lester displayed his wealth through his Trinity property, and created influence through socializing with the naval government, in England, Lester's wealth and growing social status were always in full display. Lester conformed to the ideals and actions of this class when he socialized to establish himself within its ranks. His political life, and other aspects of his trips to London especially, demonstrate the degree to which he became an accepted part of that society.

Always the pragmatist, in England Lester worked hard to surround himself with useful relationships. The fact that so much of Lester's career rested on social relationships in Newfoundland and England alike was merely one reason that supports what has been previously written about Lester that: "…he treated Newfoundland as essentially an English back country… Lester treated Trinity as an extension of his operations in Poole…"[232] While the Taverner family treated Newfoundland and Poole as two disparate places -- some family members taking care of business in England while others remained planters in Newfoundland -- Lester opted to move throughout these two worlds. The notion of "dual identity" in the British Atlantic was likely confusing to even those who lived within this world.[233] These two worlds had major differences

[230] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 60/125.
[231] Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World,* 108.
[232] Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland 1699-1832,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for the Osgoode Society of Legal History, 2003), 158.
[233] H.V. Bowen, *Elites, Enterprise and the Making of the British Overseas Empire, 1688-1775* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 125-126; Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 158. This is not to overstate this point. As Bannister wrote: "For Lester the Atlantic passage was in no way comparable to the psychological break experienced by most New England settlers."

but existed in the same social continuum and required the same recipe for success; an important part of which was maintaining relationships and social obligations. Although a great preponderance of his wealth would continue to be invested in England, the record of his social calendar demonstrated that his thoughts never left the Newfoundland trade.[234]

4.1: A Working Family

One aspect of Lester's business that was not always evident from his diaries written in Newfoundland was just how much it was a family enterprise. Diary entries from England made it clear that this was a Lester family operation, and that his brothers played a vital role in how his business was run. Moreover, Lester more regularly mentioned his wife and children during these times when compared to what he wrote in Newfoundland. In only looking at the Newfoundland sections of Lester's diary the importance of his brothers to the family business are easily overlooked. Merchant family partnerships were common in the Atlantic world, and there was logic in operating as a family proprietorship. It has been written that, "Personal family wealth with accumulation through the continuity of generations... meant that well-established kinship groups enjoyed the benefits of cumulative advantage."[235] Just as the Taverner family had done after Jacob's death in Trinity, in Poole, Isaac and Benjamin were able to expand on their father's wealth. In Poole, Isaac operated a lucrative coopering business and extended credit to fishers during the years that Lester was building his reputation in Newfoundland. Once Lester was established in Trinity, their combined wealth made the transition to operating as a planter/merchant much easier. Lester's relationship with his family, and the way they contributed

[234] Stephen J. Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier, Spaces of Power in the Early Modern British Atlantic* (New England: University Press of New England, 2005), 40.
[235] Peter Mathias, "Risk, Credit, and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise," in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy,* eds. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16.

to the business, tells us much about how Lester's travel to Newfoundland was a necessary extension of their operations in Poole and allowed for easy oversight on that part of the industry. Meanwhile, his brothers took posts in England but also watched over vital parts of the business. A good relationship between family members was evidently necessary for the survival of their business.

The evidence that this was a family operation is demonstrated through the positions each brother held. As we know, Benjamin Lester operated usually out of Trinity and oversaw the fishing operations. Meanwhile, maintaining a nuanced social life that allowed the business to succeed. In the years that he remained in Trinity his brother Isaac oversaw the recruitment of men, and the shipping of goods in and out of England. Though he would not serve a term as mayor, as his father and two brothers had, he did act as sheriff in 1751.[236] Isaac played an important role in maintaining the family's reputation in England – in this way Isaac not only helped pave the way for Benjamin's success in Newfoundland but allowed him to diversify his career more easily once he returned to Poole. More ambiguous is the role of Lester's brother John within the family trade, but it is said that John focused on the timber and iron trade from Scandinavia and Russia. He served as mayor of Poole for one term in 1744 which certainly would have helped to solidify the family's place in the Poole political sphere.[237] During the sample time being analyzed, he accompanied Benjamin to London, and was present at various meetings and social events at Benjamin's house.

[236] Derek Beamish, John Hillier, and H.F.V Johnstone, *Mansions and Merchants of Poole and Dorset,* Vol. 1, (Poole: Poole Historical Trust: 1976), 87.
[237] Beamish, *Mansions and Merchants,* 86.

What made Benjamin stand out as the leader of the family business was owed substantially to his ability and desire to bridge the Atlantic and work on both sides. In both he maintained social ties that were crucial to the life of the business, and his political career. His long political career in the 1780s and 1790s would continue to set him apart from his family.

One episode that demonstrated just how important family was to Lester's business was in the winter of 1769. On January 11th and 12th Benjamin and Isaac had a serious argument. Lester wrote that, "Isaac went out to Linchet, out of order, went home and settled my family accounts to this day."[238] The following day Lester wrote that he "had a great dispute with IL this day but when ended, we were very friendly."[239] This argument was likely financial in nature and had something to do with Isaac desiring Benjamin to pay for their brother John's duty fees at the customhouse, since this was the first thing Benjamin did following their argument. In the days after their argument Lester did see more of his brother John than was typical – once to smoke a pipe with him, and once to dine with him.[240] Either way, by the 22nd Benjamin and his wife were dining at Isaac's, and there was nothing else mentioned about their argument. What this demonstrated was Lester's eagerness to smooth over conflict with his brother and business partner. As David Hancock explains, one of the most important aspects to partnership was personal compatibility; after that was established, the benefits of having partners were numerous.[241] In other contexts, we have seen Lester prolong arguments and rivalries but clearly he acted in such a way to quickly quieten this one. His eagerness to do so likely went beyond

[238] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January 11, 1769; Beamish, *Mansions and Merchants* 90. Isaac had a farm built at Lytchett Minister in 1766.
[239] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January 12, 1769.
[240] *Ibid.,* January 14/20, 1769.
[241] Hancock, Citizens of the World, 107.

fraternal kinship and suggests the importance that the brothers' positions held in maintaining their collective trade and wealth.

To ignore Lester's brothers and their contributions to the family trade is to situate Lester as an individual merchant residing in Newfoundland. He was part of a much bigger family organization. Lester's Newfoundland presence in the 1760s was necessary to oversee that part of business as it grew. This provides one explanation behind why Lester had not returned to Newfoundland after Isaac's death in 1778.[242] Lester would have had to take over important duties in England. Moreover, his foothold in Newfoundland was great enough by this time that he could shift more responsibilities to his agents there. Whether or not his final return to England was premeditated remains unclear, but it was certainly not an uncommon practice for merchants.[243] Benjamin Lester shares a parallel with other West Indies merchants such as the Pinney family who owned a plantation in Nevis. As discussed in chapter two, Pinney managed plantations in Nevis himself for years as a way to accumulate wealth and influence. Like Lester, he became increasingly wealthy once he returned to England and expanded his investments and operations.[244] Merchants operating out of England could be far more profitable than planters, but clearly in both sites an initial presence to establish oneself was important. This does not contradict an argument made in chapter two that merchants lowered their economic risk by planting as a way to establish face-to-face business. By moving back to England merchants were indeed increasing their economic risk by not overseeing plantations and fisheries directly. Nevertheless, like expanding into new forms of trade, or new territory, this was a calculated risk.

[242] Beamish, *Mansions and Merchants*, 87.
[243] The catalyst for Lester's final return to England were circulating rumors that the American's had a bounty on his head due to his efforts to limit their activities in Newfoundland. *Isaac Lester Diaries,* October 20-21, 1776.
[244] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 47.

If successful they could continue to expand their wealth. Both Pinney and Lester took this gamble and increased their business size and wealth exponentially.

The practice of stationing an "overseas representative" at this time was an important part of running a successful mercantile business.[245] As further evidence of this, it is notable that prior to 1757 it was Isaac Lester's name that appears more often in the Trinity district courts.[246] Evidently, while Benjamin acted as an agent for Michael Ballard, Isaac began shipping men and selling supplies from England. Once Benjamin was established in Trinity as an agent he easily transitioned to the "overseas representative" for his family and became a Newfoundland planter. As Lester became increasingly established there was an opportunity for less of his own oversight in Trinity.

Stationing a representative in Newfoundland while having another on the other side of the Atlantic was common. Besides the Taverner's and Lester's, the Kemp family also followed this model. In the early nineteenth century the partnership of Ledgard, Gosse, and Chancey also operated in this way, and their partnership was not one of familial ties. As Terry McDonald has argued, having offices on both sides of the Atlantic was important and something partners had to cope with, given the uncertainties of communication across the Atlantic. The confusion, he writes: "was [trying] to establish which side of the Atlantic was the centre and which was the periphery.[247] By transcending the wall between these two worlds, Lester avoided this confusion.

Another important aspect of Lester's relationship with family members was his insistence that they accompany him to London. During his trips to London Lester took both of his brothers,

[245] *Ibid.,* 141.
[246] *Trinity Minute Book.* Mention of Isaac's store: October 13, 1752, court cases: September 17, 1754, September 9, 1756, August 16, 1756.
[247] Terry McDonald, "The One in England, the other in Newfoundland," 211.

his daughter, and in February of 1769 his wife "agreed" to go to London with him.[248] Perhaps especially during the times he was accompanied by his wife and daughter, this legitimized him as part of elite society and demonstrated that he had the wherewithal to take trips to London. As Jerry Bannister has written, "Lester's visits to London distinguished him as just another member of the polite society which flocked to enjoy the pleasures of the city each winter.[249] His family accompanied him on these trips to enjoy the city, but they also helped establish himself as part of that polite society in an age where London was known as a location to demonstrate the wealth that merchants were accumulating.[250]

That Lester was regularly accompanied by his wife and children in Newfoundland was likely due to the comfort of having his family with him so far from home. The fact, however, that we can see parallels while Lester was in England in that he was regularly accompanied by his family on trips to other towns outside of Poole (not unlike the times that his family went with him to visit outports outside of Trinity) suggests that they served a mercantile purpose as well.[251] In Newfoundland, having his family travel with him legitimized his position as a Trinity planter through his wife's more permanent presence there; in England, it established him as part of polite society. His immediate family was intimately entangled in his business and status, but served different purposes based on where he was.

When it came to his brothers it was clear that Lester was taking up an important post in Newfoundland, while they took on tasks in England. Much like Lester having ties and socializing

[248] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* February 24, 1769.
[249] Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals*, 158; Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1990), 189.
[250] Hancock, *Citizens of the World,* 43; Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World,* 115.
[251] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January 13, 1763. Lester and his daughter travelled to Christchurch from Poole to see their "Newfoundland People."

with the Taverner family while he was in Newfoundland, he did so with his own family while he was in England -- they provided family support, accrued wealth, and a social network that enabled them to grow their empire. There is no doubt that Lester made independent business decisions and actions, especially during the time he was in Newfoundland when communication with his family members was uncertain. In other words, it is possible to analyze Lester individually, outside of the context of his family. Nevertheless, understanding that his family played crucial roles wherever he went and were largely responsible for the success of their mercantile empire is also important.

4.2: Friendships: "Spent the Evening"

The difference between who Lester saw as a friend or as a working relationship was often ambiguous from reading his diaries. This was because he often did not explicitly state the nature of his relationship with that person. Despite this ambiguity, Lester clearly had long standing friendships in Poole. When Lester arrived in Poole in January of 1763 one of first priorities was to go and see his friends. That night he went to Samuel Clark's where he was "elegantly entertained."[252] It would only have been natural that Lester had these friendships in Poole; it was where he had spent his childhood, and much of his life up to this point. Moreover, Poole was home to more people of his own class but who were involved in different industries other than the Newfoundland fishery, meaning he did not need to see them as rivals; this was an important difference between elite neighbors in Trinity. Their mansion on Thames street confirmed them as a part of the merchant elite and provided a place for socializing. Many merchant houses were designed specifically for entertainment, while its curation and elegance would have put their

[252] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January 11, 1763. His use of the word friends here is a rare occurrence

wealth on full display.[253] Spatially, Thames street lay near the water where they could oversee the work carried out on their ships and trade there.

There were instances in which it was clear that Lester spent time with friends by the activities in which they engaged. For example, on the 21st of January, Lester spent the evening playing Quadrille, a popular eighteenth-century card game, at John Pike's house. Lester walked away from the game two pence the richer.[254] Lester met with Captain Glover once during January of 1763. Glover regularly spent time with Lester in Trinity, and they drank tea together on the 18th.[255] It is notable that Captain Glover is mentioned only once during our sample period, whereas in Newfoundland he featured more prominently in the diaries. Whether this was an issue of the two not running in similar social circles, or whether Glover was otherwise engaged, is unclear.

Other activities that demonstrated friendship could be witnessed on Lester's two trips to London in 1769. During these trips Lester engaged in activities such as going to the market, and in one notable passage went to a play with one of his longstanding friends in Trinity and England, Mr. Prince.[256] Likewise, who Lester dined with at inns and taverns, either in Poole or London can demonstrate friendships. Lester spent one evening dining at the "Lyon & Lamb" with Mr. Strong, Faulkner, and Spurrier and later went to Lester's house and spent the evening.[257] His trips to London and dining at inns are one way to see who could be distinguished as friendships in England, especially since there was no comparison to these activities while he

[253] For more on merchant houses see: Hancock, *Citizens of the World,* 320-347. Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 182-183.
[254] *Ibid.,* January 21, 1763.
[255] *Ibid.,* January 18, 1763.
[256] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* February 11, 1769.
[257] Ibid., February 18, 1769.

was in Trinity. Lester spending time at various societies, coffee houses, or establishments fits into a larger pattern of the rise in these kinds of social activities in England. This rise correlated with the rise of the elite merchant class.[258] Though these kinds of activities, like societies and coffee houses, were cited as reasons that England was becoming more secular (as they offered different communal activities outside the church) Lester evidently balanced the two:

There was a trend in both Trinity and Poole that Lester often spent more time socializing on Sunday's than any other day of the week. The main difference being that in Poole Lester regularly attended church. On the 23rd of January, for example, Lester attended church and then spent the evening at Joseph Whites.[259] Again, on Sunday the 8th of February, Lester, his wife, and daughters attended church and then spent the evening at Miss Whites, with Miss Walker and John Bowles.[260] In the five times that Lester mentioned attending church during the sample, there was only one instance in which he did not write about socializing with others that day. Evidently, attending church was a catalyst for spending time with friends and cultivating relationships. Moreover, attending church was seen by elite society as a necessary obligation.[261] Despite any sense of obligation, though -- either to his faith, or to those who would have noticed his absence -- attending church and social functions after show that Lester was very much part of his social community in Poole.

Another attribute of friendship was in gift-giving. Giving gifts to friends remains an under-analyzed aspect of the mercantile elite in the historical literature. Though Naomi Tadmor notes that the receipt or exchange of gifts is often recorded in personal diaries, the meanings and

[258] Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* 226-7.
[259] *Ibid*., January 23, 1763.
[260] *Ibid.,* February 8, 1769.
[261] David Hancock: *Citizens of the World,* 307.

symbolism underlying gift-giving is seldomly explored.[262] Throughout his diaries Lester made several remarks on receiving and giving gifts, though it was often ambiguous whether these gifts were given and received by friends, or to cultivate working relationships. There was evidence that gifts were often given out of friendship. For example, Lester once gifted a dried fish to a Mrs. Ivany who dined with him at his mother's house, and who had stayed at his house the night before.[263] On the other hand, in 1769, Lester wrote that he sent Mr. Willis some fish and berries from Newfoundland. Given that this was written with no context, and there was no other mention of Mr. Willis, it was likely that this was a gift given to someone Lester was engaged in a business deal with.

Gift-giving was a telling example of how Lester was a 'citizen of the world,' as gifts that were given and received in England were typically goods from the other side of the Atlantic. Lester once gifted a seal pelt, for example, while Isaac Lester was once gifted some pineapples and melons from the Caribbean.[264] Essentially, gift-giving while in England was another attribute that bound Lester to the elite community while demonstrating his important ties on the other side of the Atlantic. The fact that he recorded giving and receiving gifts so diligently shows that they were meaningful. Either meaningful because they came from a friend, or meaningful because they were important in cultivating a work relationship. It has been suggested that Lester gave gifts primarily to win political support, though this analysis is offered for a later stage of Lester's life. Diary entries from the 1760s suggest that gift giving was always an important part of his

[262] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 141. One important exception is: Sherrylynne Haggerty, *Merely for Money?: Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750-1815*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).
[263] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January 20/21, 1763. Given that they dined at his mother's house suggests that it was likely a family friend.
[264] *Isaac Lester Diaries,* August 11, 1775.

social life.[265] A more encompassing analysis of Lester's gift giving suggests that it was an action that premeditated future helpfulness, whether through friendship, work, or in the political sphere. In writing about business culture Sherllynne Haggerty argues that, "gift giving was strategic, as opposed to purely emotive, because it helped to promote networks and create obligations in the long term."[266] There was a connection between loans and gifts, as well. Merchants in continental-America regularly offered low-interest loans to improve economic conditions. Loans given by merchants were a way to help overcome personal and community financial difficulty. In turn, this "increased the productive power of the local and regional economy," and ultimately put increased capital back in merchants' pockets.[267] An example of this is seen particularly well in 1769 with Captain John Lemon who had a longstanding working relationship and friendship with Isaac and Benjamin. When Lemon dined at Isaac's with both brothers. Isaac wrote, "I gave him two guineas the poor wretch is very miserable and poor."[268] Michael Borsk convincingly argues that sentimentality and debt went hand in hand for eighteenth century merchants. This sentimentality was often used as "proof of his sensibility, and of his capacity to react to the emotions of others.[269] This was certainly an example of this kind of sentimentality. Whether this was a gift or loan was unclear, but either way it had the same effect and helped secure future loyalty. Captain Lemon would go on to make appearances in the diary until 1776. In this way, Lester fits into what others have written about eighteenth century gift giving, one point of difference, however, is that this thesis has demonstrated the importance and usefulness of

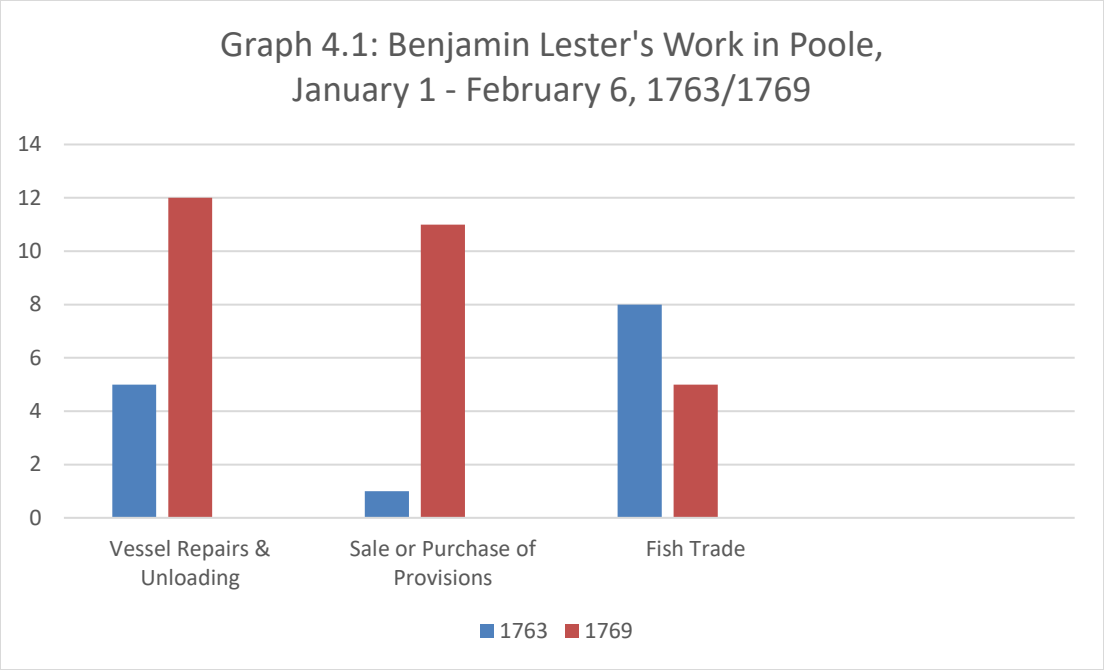
[265] Beamish, Hillier, Johnstone, *Mansions and Merchants,* 98-99.
[266] Haggerty, *Merely for Money?,* 139.
[267] Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World,* 125.
[268] Isaac Lester, *Isaac Lester Diaries,* March 7, 1769. "Colonial Secretary's Letterbook," John Byron, July 29, 1769, p. 170. Here John Lemon is recorded as being bankrupt.
[269] Michael Borsk, "Debt Amongst Friends: Sympathy in Exchange and the Narration of a Transatlantic Credit Network, 1792-1837," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 30, no. 2 (2019): 65.

friendships. While Lester certainly gave gifts to fellow traders and political allies, he also gave them to his friends which serves as evidence that he understood their role in his success. In Trinity, friends provided Lester with a social network and entertainment that allowed him to invest large amounts of time there; in England, his friends helped to establish him as a member of the English elite. Through gift-giving the way in which Lester transcended boundaries of Newfoundland and England are exemplified through the kind of the gifts that he gave. Moreover, it demonstrates how gift giving was an important social ritual of the elite merchant class that helped to secure future success.

With whom Lester had friendships can be identified in a few ways through the context in which they were written. Ultimately, his many friendships in Poole, and his placing priority on seeing his friends indicate that he was very much part of his community in Poole, and this provides contrast to his time in Trinity. This is yet another way that we can see Lester as a planter or an 'overseas representative' while he was there. This is not to suggest that some of these friendships and acquaintances were not due to a higher social order, or out of obligation, though. The consistent ambiguity of who was a friend and who was a working relationship brings us to the conclusion that these lines were often ambiguous in Lester's eyes as well.

4.3: Working in England

Although Lester spent a greater amount of time with friends and interacting with members of the community in England, it was hardly a vacation. As in Trinity, Lester worked constantly while he was in Poole, although the kind of work he did were often different.



Source: Benjamin Lester Diaries

Figure 4.1 demonstrates the main types of work Lester done while he was in Poole during January 1763 and January 1769. A point value is given to each time Lester referenced that type of work. For example, when he sent or received a letter regarding the sale of salt fish, or when he sent carpenters to repair ships.[270] This graph can help show the way that Lester expanded his business. While the shipping of fish remained the most crucial aspect of his career, the growth of his business was only possible through a growing fleet of vessels, which continually needed repairs. As the number of ships increased, so did the repairs. Some of the references in 1769 are for work for a yet unnamed vessel, which Lester had just purchased. This growth is also seen through the trade and sale of other goods besides fish. In 1769, Lester spent much more time organizing the sale of berries, cordage, wine, furs, lumber, and other "sundry" goods. The higher number of references to the provision trade is not to suggest that this trade was more important

[270] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* January - February 1763/1769.

than the fish trade; decreased references to fish was the result of this data coming from January when many vessels had already finished selling cargoes of salt fish.[271] Rather, the graph illustrates that Lester was increasingly putting more importance on his provision trade over time, a trend which would continue to increase into the 1780s, later evidenced by such things as trying to ban the Americans from trading at Newfoundland. Understanding this trend helps to differentiate between different stages of Lester's career. From the early 1760s until the American Revolution Lester remained most concerned with the fish trade, but as time went on he added increasing importance on other sources of revenue. After the American Revolution, even greater emphasis was put on his provision trade.

Besides his work in Poole, Lester's trips to London provide the best point of contrast between his working in Trinity and England in terms of his social life, and these two trips will be used as a sample in which to see the kind of work he did there. Primarily, his trips to London gave him the opportunity to meet with acquaintances, insurance companies, and politicians involved in the Newfoundland trade.

During the sample months Lester traveled to London four times. The movement of polite society around England increased in the mid-eighteenth century and the reason has been attributed to improved transport. Indeed, the ability to move, and socialize in different parts of the country, established merchants as part of that elite class.[272] These trips allowed Lester to delve into a kind of work that was not previously seen in the diaries. In 1763 he travelled to London with his brother John; during the two trips Lester takes in 1769 he is accompanied by his

[271] The reason for the greater time spent working in the fish trade in 1763 was the result of Lester sending and receiving letters from masters in Plymouth who were overseeing the sale of some cargoes of salt fish there.
[272] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 190.

brother Isaac and his daughter Rachel, and on the second trip, his wife. Lester appears eager to take his family to London and reported in 1769 that his wife "agreed to set out with me Saturday for London."[273] These trips were filled with socializing and enjoying the city, but they were also filled with work.

On the first trip, in 1763, Lester's first order of business was to meet with his underwriters at "Strange and Mr. Smith's" office about insuring a schooner.[274] As Lester sent an increasing number of ships further each summer to fish on the grand banks, and to Labrador for the sealing in the winter, his economic risk increased. Heightened economic risk because of the extension into new waters and new territory was a trend throughout the North Atlantic, but in order to lower this risk, insuring vessels also became increasingly important.[275] Clearly understanding where the merchant class socialized, underwriters would: "frequent several coffee houses around the Royal Exchange and near the Thames, where they exchanged news and gossip, and transacted marine business including ship auctions and marine insurance."[276] The following day Lester attended the selling of a store at a New England coffee house and bought some items. The diary entries stop here until March 5th, when Lester is back in London for which there is only a single entry: after a day of socializing with some relatives he meets with his attorney, Mr. Winn, after which they travelled back to Poole together.[277] This same pattern is established during his trips in 1769. He again met with a lawyer, Mr. Palmer, and paid a bill of £185. He also went to the underwriters who "allowed the loss on the *Two Brothers*." This was a

[273] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* February 24, 1769.
[274] *Ibid.,* February 14, 1763.
[275] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 36.
[276] Christopher Kingston, "Maritime Insurance in Britain and America, 1720-1844: A Comparative Institutional Analysis," *Journal of Economic History*67, no. 2, (May 2007): 383.
[277] *Ibid.,* February 15, 1763.

follow-up on some lost cargo aboard the vessel *Two Brothers* earlier that year.[278] During this trip Lester also spent time at the London stock exchange and met with acquaintances there and bought anchors at an auction. In London he also met with a client about seal furs. Though it was typically Lester's employees who handled the selling of his goods in London and the Mediterranean, we see here an example of Lester personally selling seal furs. He met with the potential buyer at a coffee house but wrote: "I was mistaken in ye Man, he quibl'd of from his Agreement, & without we had 15 Seal, he Could not or would not take it on the terms agreed, words Arose & we parted."[279] When his lawyer informed Lester the following day that he had grounds to take legal action against the buyer, Lester met again with the buyer who purchased the seal pelts, no doubt in an effort to avoid a lawsuit.[280] Besides showing how Lester could be directly involved in the purchasing and selling of goods, this demonstrates the effectiveness of using law, or threat of legal action, in Lester's business. In Trinity, Lester used the courts to his advantage for rivals and reneging servants, while in England he could use the threat of legal action to help sell goods.

The cycle of trade and types of work Lester engaged in represented a broader shift to a capitalist economy. Over the eighteenth century "hallmarks" of capitalism like "labor markets, capital markets, and commodity markets were established..."[281] Lester sold salt fish in Spain and Portugal to make a direct profit or trade for commodities. He then made a profit when he sold these commodity goods, which were often sold back to fishers he employed; thus, the cycle continued. This cycle allowed for the kind of run-away success and accumulation Lester saw

[278] *Ibid.,* February 11, 1769.
[279] *Ibid.,* March 2, 1769.
[280] Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 157.
[281] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 28.

during this period. In other words, he profited at each turn. This was evidenced by the rapid increase of ships he needed and purchased to carry these goods. The financial institutions that Lester utilized were also indicative of this shift to a capitalist economy.[282] Using financial institutions such as the stock exchange, putting insurance on vessels, and even utilizing the legal system were all ways that merchants and manufacturers increased their revenue while lowering their risk. The availability of these financial resources to the wealthy helped further increase their wealth. All things considered, this created an even greater divide between merchants and the working classes. This shift in Massachusetts has been demonstrated by Christine Heryman who determined that in 1690 "the richest ten per cent of these communities controlled an average of thirty-eight per cent... of the wealth. In 1770 they controlled fifty seven percent.[283] Meanwhile, Daniel Vickers has demonstrated that there was a 38% decline in the number of fishermen ship owners from 1676 to the eve of the American Revolution.[284] Lester can be understood as a player in this transition that served to undercut the ability of the working classes to accumulate wealth, while giving the possibility of run-away success for merchants. For Lester and other Newfoundland merchants, the fear of bankruptcy because of market conditions in the Mediterranean forced them to diversify the number of goods they traded. Diversifying their investments and using financial institutions then served to protect their accumulated capitol. His diary over this decade reflects and exemplifies the way in which merchants shifted to favoring capitalist ideals during the eighteenth century.

[282] Naomi R. Lamoreaux, "Rethinking the Transition to Capitalism in the Early American Northeast," in the *Journal of American History* 90, no.2, (2003): 438.
[283] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 29; Christine Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture,* 415, Table 1.
[284] Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause,* 29.

In Poole, the type of work Lester done showed the trend of how he expanded his business in new directions over time. Likewise, this growth necessitated important and multifaceted trips to London, where his social life played an important role in maintaining this growing business. The social aspects of these trips established Lester as a member of the English gentry, but also afforded him the opportunity to buy goods, meet with clients, and take care of clerical business. In many ways, we can see the transition to a capitalist economy through the Lester diary, witnessed primarily through the activities he engaged in during his trips to London. As other historians have noted, the fish trade was a convenient trade to partake in to expand one's career in new directions, in Lester's case the most evident direction was that of a political nature.

4.4: Change over time: Politics

Lester's trips to London in 1763 and 1769 offer a suitable sample that demonstrate changes in Lester's activities, and who he socialized with. Overall, these changes demonstrate Lester's rising influence and allude to his future motivations. One notable limitation to this evaluation is that Lester's entries for 1763 stopped during his time in London and resumes for only one entry when he was back in London. Though there was limited information in 1763 the pattern of his social activities is still revealing when compared to 1769.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the winter of 1763 and 1769 was how much time Lester spent talking about politics and interacting with politicians. As we seen with Lester's time in Trinity, Lester was able to utilize his social interactions with the naval government to his advantage and therefore took a keen interest in spending time with them. This was largely the same during the time Lester spent in England, however, there was very little talk of politics during the winter of 1763, and far more in 1769. In 1763 the only comment Lester makes in his

diary in regards to politics was that a Mr. Merry had visited from London and had failed to have a memorial signed at the town hall; he had dined with Lester and Isaac that night.[285]

During the winter of 1769 Lester appeared far more interested in political matters, but specifically when he travels to London. Before travelling to London Lester had been in contact with a friend of his, Mr. Mauger who had promised to get him into the House of Commons for a debate "on the validity of a parliamentary election for the borough of Poole; when a new vote was called, Lester's political ally won the seat by acclamation."[286] During his time in London Lester also recorded going to the Robin Hood Society, which was part of a larger network of debating societies.[287] On the way back to Poole, Lester commented on observing a group of political protestors.[288]

During his two trips to London in 1769, Lester connected himself to the world of parliamentary politics, but the politics that concerned Newfoundland did not leave his mind. On the second day of the first trip, Lester met with Lieutenant John Cartwright; this was the same John Cartwright who held courts in Newfoundland and regularly visited with Lester while he was in Trinity. Lester also met with the former governor of Newfoundland, Captain Hugh Palliser, at his London house where they breakfasted and talked for two hours.[289] On his second trip, Lester visited Palliser again for breakfast. Keen to get a jump start on a productive relationship, the following day Lester met with the new governor of Newfoundland, Commodore John Byron, who would take his post in Newfoundland that spring. Lester wrote that Byron

[285] *Ibid.,* January 19, 1763.
[286] Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 157.
[287] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1990), 349.
[288] *Ibid.,* 157; For more on political protesters/Wilke's affair see: Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* (London, Penguin Books Ltd., 1990), 100.
[289] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* February 15, 1769; *Rule of the Admirals,* 157.

"received me very well."[290] Later that summer Lester's name appeared twice in the Colonial Secretary's Letterbook, each time about debts that were owed to Lester.[291] He was ordered to be recompensed each time.

As David Hancock has written about merchants in politics, "a pattern of self-interest ran throughout: [they] used politics primarily to safeguard their commercial, social, and personal interests."[292] As in the case of Lester's parliamentary address in later years which sought to ban the colonial-Americans from fishing in Newfoundland waters, his political allies were likely those who could help him achieve those 'commercial, social, and political interests.' Those relationships with merchants that we saw in chapter three also served a political role as Lester was elected spokesperson for them when parliament proposed putting a custom house in Newfoundland. Had it not been for cultivating those relationships early on, and for those merchants seeing Lester as a trustworthy and reputable person, he would not have been afforded that opportunity.[293] Perhaps it was these trips to London that showed Lester the degree to which he could continue to influence Newfoundland affairs from England.

Lester's trips to London formed a vitally important part of how he ran his business. In terms of his social life, he was able to complete work, establish himself as part of English gentry, while allowing him to emerge himself into the world of English politics, primarily with regard to his Newfoundland interests.

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[290] *Benjamin Lester Diaries,* February 28, 1769; Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 157.
[291] Colonial Secretary's Letterbook GN 2/1/A, Volume 4, (On microfilm, Grenfell Campus, Memorial University). Governor John Byron July 29, 1769; Olaf Janzen, "Finding aid to the Colonial Secretary's Letterbook," https://www2.grenfell.mun.ca/~olaf/
[292] Hancock, *Citizens of the World,* 43.
[293] D. F. Beamish, "LESTER, BENJAMIN," in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, (Toronto and Quebec City: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lester_benjamin_5E.html.

4.5: Conclusion

Although Lester had a busy social life while he was in England, his insistence on involving himself in Newfoundland politics, especially while he was in London, demonstrates that Newfoundland affairs rarely left his mind. As Bannister wrote about Lester, "He may have been a fish merchant who divided his time between Trinity and Poole, but he was also a propertied Englishman who participated fully in the social life of his age… he tirelessly pursued his Newfoundland interests throughout the calendar year."[294] The necessary work that Lester oversaw in Poole allowed him to run a smooth operation, but he also placed a great deal of importance on connections in Poole, and on those important trips to London. Lester indeed treated Newfoundland as a backcountry to England, but also recognized that both required different social connections to keep his business successful. It was his ability to socialize in Trinity, and among the elite society that enabled him to do so. That fact that Lester had the choice to run his operations in this way indicates that he should be indeed be studied within a "transnational" approach, as Stephen Hornsby argued.[295]

Many who have written about Lester discuss the image of a codfish which he had engraved into the mantel of his Poole mansion. It symbolized that he understood the foundation of his success. But even this tiny detail fits into a broader Atlantic trend. In Massachusetts, a merchant commissioned a carved image of a codfish on each stair riser in his mansion, for example. And in 1784, the Salem House of Representatives hung up the "representation of a Cod

[294] Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals,* 157.
[295] Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier,* 1.

Fish," ultimately showing that people throughout the Atlantic understood that a great amount of wealth was generated form the humble cod.[296] Just as eighteenth-century merchants lived in an interconnected Atlantic world, they can be historicized within these contexts.

[296] Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World,* 145-146.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed Benjamin Lester's social world to ascertain how he developed a successful mercantile empire. The social connections that Lester made and maintained in both Newfoundland and England were highly responsible for this success. The success of West Country merchants rested largely on the ability to act in accordance with a developing business culture. But success was not measured by wealth alone: merchants like Benjamin Lester were also responsible for embodying the social rituals that demonstrated he was a member of a growing elite society. By looking at the social interactions that Benjamin Lester wrote about in his diary, we can see that there is a narrative of growth and change in this period. Lester went from establishing his presence and wealth in Newfoundland to being an established member of elite society, with similar interests that other eighteenth-century merchants had, in England. We see this particularly well with Lester's emerging political career. Ultimately, it was how Lester was influenced by, and reacted to, his social world that allowed him to emerge as an independent merchant, grow his influence in Newfoundland, and return to England with the social connections necessary to continue expanding his career.

This thesis has divided Lester's social world between Newfoundland and England. When Lester's actions in Newfoundland are analyzed within the context of the British Atlantic, it becomes clear that merchants throughout this world existed on the same social continuum, evidenced by the similar ways they used their social lives to succeed. Semi-permanence, house building, and enhancing the social situation in British colonies and workstations, were all commonalities that these merchants shared. There were, however, important differences that

were the result of the local Newfoundland context, and the way that merchants like Benjamin Lester balanced social change with their own conservative values resulted in important differences between Newfoundland and other parts of the Atlantic.

In England, the work that Lester oversaw was different, which led to different social experiences. Lester interacted with more people of his own class during the time he spent in England. And while he was there, it was far more evident that Lester was trying to establish himself within an emerging gentry class. As the decade progressed, it was clear that Lester was becoming increasingly interested in running Newfoundland affairs from a broader standpoint in England. He changed from having a direct influence over the district courts in Trinity as a magistrate, to attempting to influence the very laws that governed Newfoundland. It was therefore logical to differentiate between Lester's social worlds in these two places.

Chapter Two saw Lester in Trinity and analyzed the productive relationships that he had there. Friendships, family, his working relationships, and his relationship with the naval government were all important to understanding his success. Lester's business was very much influenced by his relationship to the Taverner family. One of the best ways to understand how his business changed over these years is to recognize the way in which Lester operated his business differently and shifted away from the Taverner model. From the beginning of his diary, it was evident that Lester was focused on gaining influence as well as wealth. That he kept a detailed diary to keep track of his social obligations was proof of this. Lester also maintained important relationships with the naval government in Trinity. These relationships allowed him some measure of monetary success but especially expanded his influence. Overall, this chapter demonstrated that over the course of the 1760s Lester's interactions became increasingly work-related.

The increased writing about his work relationships coincided with the expansion that we see particularly well in Chapter Three with Lester's relationships with his rivals. Lester's territorial expansion increased his exposure to various rivals, on a unique settler borderland. Lester's expansion to the north of Trinity put him at odds with merchants and allowed him to see how the French were able to provide considerable competition. Likewise, the pull from his resources that the church posed was unwelcome. Lester balanced encouraging social support for the important resident population in Newfoundland, while trying to maintain the situation that had led to this period of expansion. Overall, indications that demonstrated Newfoundland was moving from a fishery to a colony were met with opposition by Lester. That Lester could have some influence over these matters, either through the naval government in Newfoundland, or in acting as a spokesperson for other merchants show how his influence grew over this period, and how he shifted away from the Taverner model. Finally, this chapter demonstrated that Lester was very concerned with his interests in overseas markets, where the French and colonial-Americans posed issues. Once again, we see that Lester balanced the needs of residents by not discouraging American trade to Newfoundland, but by showing his concern over the loss of revenue at market. This chapter rests on the argument that Lester conformed to the contemporary business culture and dealt with his rivals based on the way that he was expected to, and so as not to ruin his reputation.

Finally, chapter four analyzes Lester's relationships during the time he spent in England. In that chapter, we see that it was not only wealth that Lester ultimately returned to England, but also his social class, and the influence he had developed in Newfoundland. This chapter mirrors Chapter Two in that work and social relationships are compared over time. In Chapter Two the major difference was in working relationships, in Chapter Four, the difference was in the amount

of time Lester spent socializing with politicians. As Lester's career expanded, so did his desire to have relationships with politicians. This level of influence that Lester developed shows the degree to which Newfoundland and its merchants remained firmly a part of British society and can be contrasted with American merchants who at the same time grew to be more independent from Britain.

This last point symbolizes the foundation on which this thesis rests. To garner a better understanding of the way in which West Country merchants operated in Newfoundland, they should be placed within a comparative context in the Atlantic. They were connected fundamentally – socially as well as financially – with the rest of the British Atlantic world. What this thesis offers is twofold. Understanding Benjamin Lester's social connections is important to delineating how he transitioned and developed himself as a successful merchant. It was through Lester's social relationships that he developed increasing influence. Smart business decisions alone may have allowed Lester to be a wealthy merchant, but it was the relationships that he cultivated in Newfoundland and England that would ultimately allow for the growth of his influence. They provided the base on which his career could grow throughout the rest of his life. Secondly, these social connections enhance our understanding of the Atlantic world. Status, wealth, and influence were transferred between places as easily as trade goods, which fundamentally demonstrates how this world was part of one social continuum, though with notable and very different local contexts and histories.

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