

CHAPTER III
THE CAPE VERDEAN- AMERICAN
PACKET TRADE



Hora di bai. The hour of departure. The *Madalan* pulling away from the pier at Providence on her return trip to Cape Verde, 1957. Photo Joseph Latham. Courtesy R. I. Dept. of State Library Services.



East Side or Bethel St., New Bedford, 1903. These dockside lodging houses were home to many whaling crews and immigrant workers. *Photo O. D. H. S.*

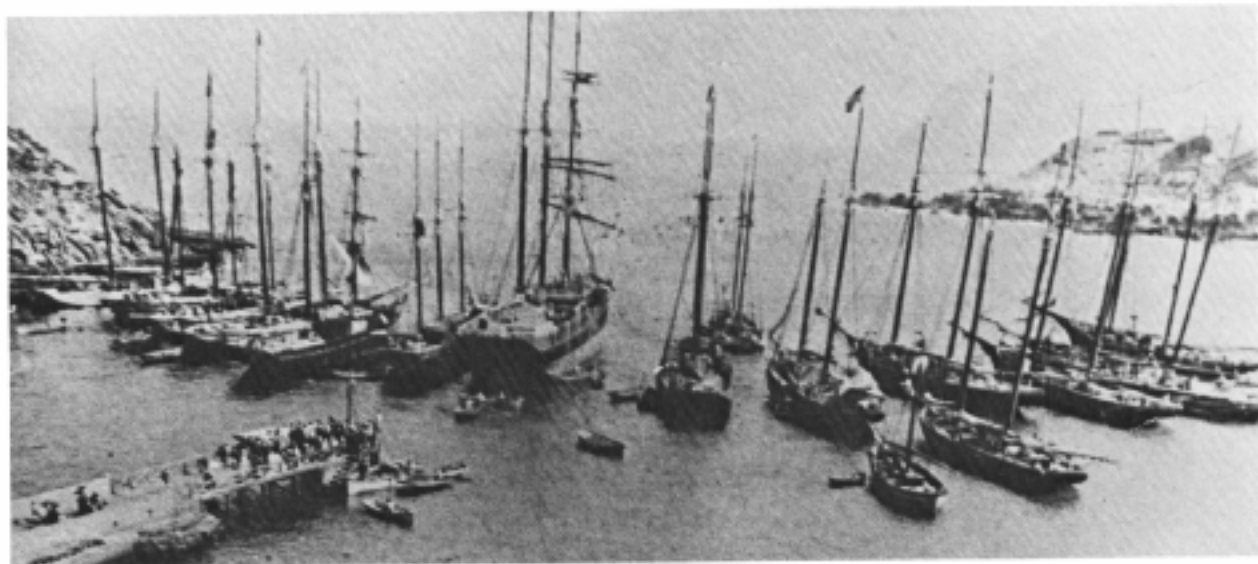
By the early 1800's Cape Verdean seamen were settling in New Bedford, which had come to replace Nantucket as New England's foremost whaling port.⁵⁵ Crew lists⁵⁶ of the mid-nineteenth century show that they were coming from all over the Cape Verde Islands, notably from São Nicolau, Santo Antão, Maio, and Brava. Photographs of the day show that they were of dark skin color. As Chapter III will explain, most were from the

desperately poor, landless class.

Between stints at sea, the Cape Verdeans stayed in flophouses near the docks. Many eventually took dockside jobs associated with shipping or shipbuilding. Cape Verdeans worked as riggers, dockworkers, and coopers,⁵⁷ among other things. In addition, they provided the bulk of the work force in the New Bedford rope works.⁵⁸



A Cape Verdean cooper (barrel maker) heading an oil cask on Merrill's Wharf, New Bedford c. 1905. *Photo O. D. H. S.*



The port of Furna, Brava at the height of the packet trade (1908). Most of the schooners and old whalers which regularly called at Furna were owned by Cape Verdean-Americans.

As steamships replaced sailing vessels, old schooners and whalers were plentiful and available for the asking. At the same time, cheap labor was required for the expanding textile mills and cranberry industry of southern New England. Cape Verdeans bought the windjammers in order to bring their countrymen to America to toil in the cranberry bogs of Cape Cod and the mills of New Bedford. During the height of the packet trade years, ten or more ships made the annual trip between southeastern New England and the Cape Verde Islands. ("Packet" refers to a regularly scheduled ship which carries cargo, mail, and passengers.) They usually arrived in the early summer before the cranberry season began and returned after the harvest in the fall, carrying clothing, household goods,

roof tiles, and other American made products back to the Islands. Since most of these ships, during this period, left from the island of Brava, the trade became known as the "Brava Packet Trade."

The importance of the packets was far more than commercial. It was these fragile vessels, above all else, that nurtured a "Cape Verdean-American connection," making it possible for new immigrants to resolve a dilemma that deeply concerned many of them: how to make a new life for oneself in America without abandoning those left behind in the homeland. For one thing the packets made visits home a possibility and this kept alive the dream many held dear of returning one day to live in the Islands as a prosperous *mercado* (American). For another, the packets



Capt. José Manuel Lopes and his first mate Francisco Rosario aboard the *Capitana* in Dakar after a long voyage from New England in 1942. (Photo courtesy Capt. Lopes).

allowed the immigrants to provide most of life's necessities—and some luxuries—to relatives in their home island. These “floating shipwrecks”⁵⁹ as one Yankee observer called them, were a lifeline between the immigrants and those who remained in Cape Verde. For the latter, they brought the material goods necessary for physical life, but, just as impor-

tantly, for the lonely “greenhorn” the packets enabled him to stay in contact with home and with the way of life that was part of his very identity. This chapter tells the story of the best-remembered ships and the Cape Verdean men, women, and children who risked their lives on them.



Wickenden Street in the Fox Point section of Providence. Cape Verdeans settled in this community in large numbers until World War II. Photo R.I. Dept. of State Library Services.

The Nellie May

Antonio Coelho was the first Cape Verdean-American to purchase a vessel to begin the Packet Trade. He bought the *Nellie May*, a 64-ton fishing schooner, from John Waters of Newport, hired an old whaleman as captain, and sailed in 1892 from Providence for Brava. Fifty people paid fifteen dollars each for the passage. Only a few days out at sea the captain died of a heat seizure. The mate knew nothing about navigation but tried to steer a course in the general direction of Cape Verde. After a month, they encountered a steamer and learned that they had passed the islands by some 500 miles south. Finally, after forty-five days at sea, they reached the harbor of Furna in Brava. Coelho hired a new captain and sailed back with the *Nellie May* to Providence in the spring of the next year. With 117 passengers and crew aboard, the schooner

arrived 28 days later. With the money gained from the trip, Coelho became an important person in the Fox Point, R.I. community.

In 1893 the *Nellie May* made another round trip, this time with Captain José Godinho in command. The passage to the Cape Verde Islands took ninety days—one of the most terrible on record for its length and for the suffering endured by passengers and crew. Food and water ran out. Two of the crew went mad and jumped overboard. The captain felt that he had not been properly compensated for his troubles and is said to have beached the ship so he could buy the *Nellie May* at auction as an abandoned ship. Coelho took his case to Presidents Cleveland and McKinley in an effort to secure the return of his ship. For two years the State Department attempted to clarify the situation.⁶⁰ Coelho died at age 92 in Providence without receiving any compensation.

Captain Henry Rose and the "Queen of the Cape Verde Packets"

One of the most colorful Cape Verdean captains was Henry Rose. Captain Rose made his first trip from Brava to America in 1911 at age thirteen as a messboy on the bark *Charles G. Rice*.⁶¹ He made two more trips on the *Rice*, and one on the *Diane* out of New Bedford. Captain Rose then sailed as mate under Captain José Silva on the *Emma* and *Helen*. At age 21, he was made master of the *Pythian* and took her to Cape Verde. In 1922, he was master of the schooner *Volante*. In the middle of the Atlantic, while a young crewman on his first voyage was at the wheel, the boat suddenly jibed and the swinging boom knocked Captain Rose overboard. No one on board knew what to do. For twenty minutes Rose hung onto the log-line and shouted instructions to the crew. Finally after he had spent two hours swimming in the cold Atlantic, they were able to turn the schooner and pick up their captain. Nonetheless, the *Volante* reached S. Vicente in 19 days—record time!

Henry Rose, however, had his best days aboard the *Valkyria*, a two-masted former whaler which he commanded from 1923 to 1936.⁶² He made fourteen crossings in her, and claimed he made one voyage in twelve days. She was solidly built as she proved in the 1923 crossing when for ten days she successfully battled a hurricane. (Rose's cabin was flooded.) Rose threw 50 tons of cargo overboard but arrived safely in Brava with his 32 passengers—after forty-five days at sea. On April 9, 1924, the *Valkyria* and her rival the *Yukon* sailed from Brava together and arrived the same day, May 13, in Providence. Capt. Benjamin Costa, former master of the *Valkyria*, was captain of the *Yukon*. For the return voyage, a wager of \$1,500 was arranged to prove who had the fastest vessel. The two vessels and the *William A. Graber*, under Capt. John Sousa, left Providence on October 19, 1924. The *Valkyria* carried seven passengers and seventeen seamen, while the *Yukon* had fifteen passengers and 26 crewmembers. The *Valkyria* won arriving on November 13, and remained the undisputed *Queen of the Cape Verde Packets* until 1926.

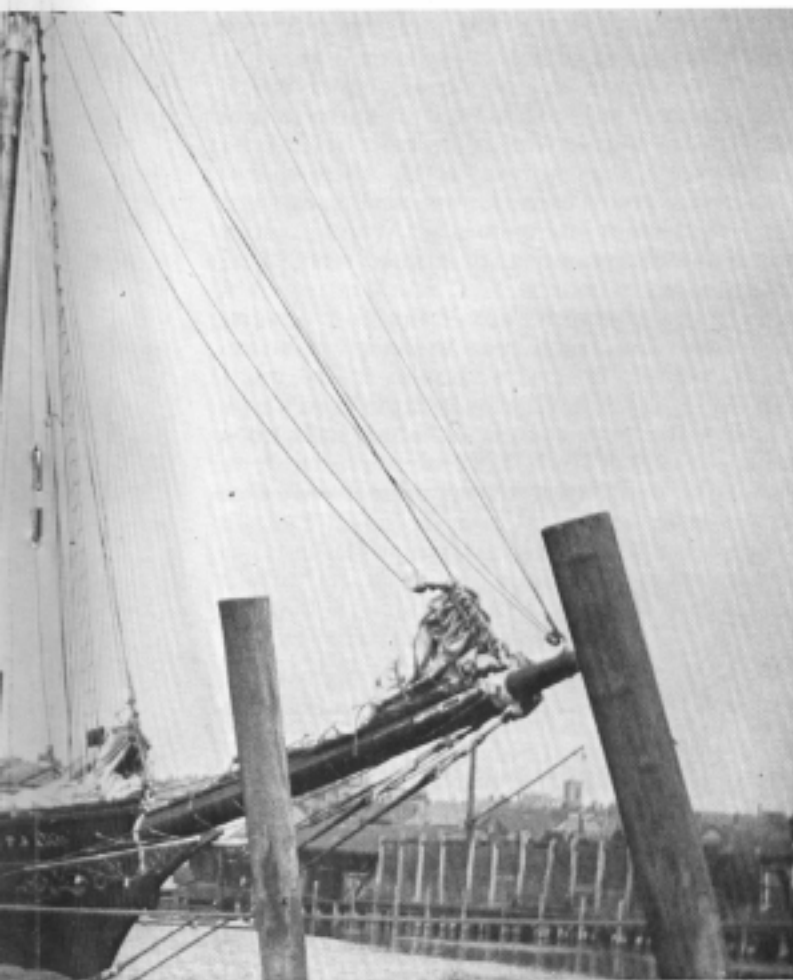
During the night of November, 1926, the *Valkyria* struck a derelict vessel. The collision brought down the foremast and, eventually, the main mast and opened the stem. Capt. Rose tried to hack away the rigging and masts which were pounding against the sides of the boat and tried to lighten the *Valkyria* in order to bring her three or four feet out of the water. Two seamen were swept overboard during the attempt. For two days, she drifted, a helpless wreck; but finally her crew of fifteen men along with two young girls were res-



The John R. Manta at Merrill's

cued by a passing British tanker. In 1926, Capt. Rose took over the *Manta*, the last active whaler out of New Bedford. He made five trips with her, the worst of which was in January, 1928 when she ran into such bad calms that it took 53 days to go from Providence to São Vicente. (For days they could see the mountain peaks of Santo Antao but could only sail 50 miles in 7 days). In 1932 it took Rose seventy harrowing days to get to Cape Verde on the four-master *Ellen S. Little*. Three days out of Brava, desperately short of food and water, his passengers had to raise \$700 cash before a passing steamer would tow them to port.⁶³

In 1929, 17 year old John J. Barros took the *Manta* back to Providence; but he ran her aground off the Nantucket Shoals. Four of the crew set out in a boat for help but, terrified of the breakers, turned back. Another party succeeded in summoning two trawlers to pull the *Manta* off and tow her to Vineyard Haven. The Coast Guard, suspecting illegal immigrants might be aboard, sent several agents to investigate and discovered eleven unfortunate aliens hiding below decks in the bilges. The *Manta* was fined and auctioned off.



Wharf in New Bedford. Photo O. D. H. S.

Frank Silva, the owner of the *Valkyria*, bought her for \$3,800 on August 6, 1929. She continued in the island packet trade for several years.



The *Adelaide T. Carlton* arriving at São Vicente, c. 1924.
Photo courtesy of Armando Perry.

The Loss of the Manta and the Winnepesaukee

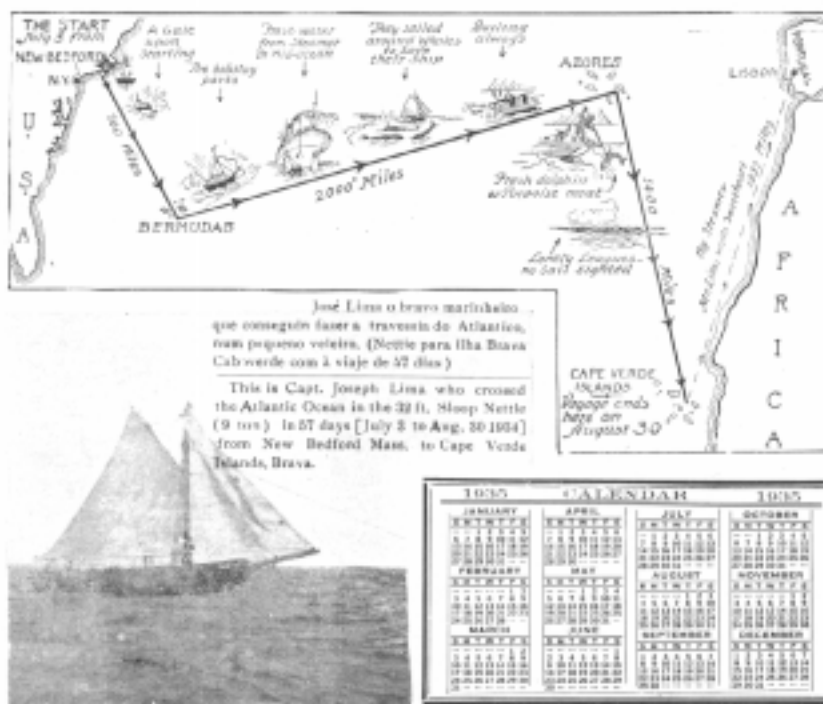
Capt. Albertino de Senna brought the *Manta* to Providence in 1934.⁶⁴ After a summer spent in refitting and re-rigging the old ship, the *Manta* sailed from Providence for Brava on November 8, 1934 with a crew of nineteen and thirteen passengers, including three women and six children, and a Guernsey heifer. A week before Christmas, the newspapers noted that the *Manta* was 39 days out of Providence and still unreported "but supposedly winging her way to Brava." By mid-January, the relatives and friends began to worry since no word was received from Cape Verde that she had arrived. Severe storms had been reported in the Atlantic. Two packets, the *Winnepesaukee* and the *Trenton*, had also sailed from New Bedford and had failed to reach Brava. The *Trenton*, an old New York pilot schooner eventually made port, but the *Winnepesaukee* was lost with all hands.⁶⁵ The last hope for the *Manta* and her passengers was abandoned on February 24, 1935 when the vessel had been missing for 107 days.⁶⁶

Another tragedy still remembered today in Cape Verde is the loss of the *Mathilde*.⁶⁷ In 1943 a group of men in Brava, some born in America, others emigrants returned for a visit, and still others going to the United States for the first time, bought a fifty-five foot sloop, *Mathilde*, to sail to New England. In so doing they hoped both to escape the famine raging in the Islands and send relief to those left behind as well as to volunteer for military service in the war. By this time World War II had brought a suspension to the packet trade, given the danger of encountering German submarines.

After only minimal repairs to the vessel, the men set sail from one of Brava's more secluded harbors on August 21, 1943. Their voyage was "unofficial," that is to say technically a clandestine one, because of wartime restrictions on maritime travel as well as the probably substandard condition of the *Mathilde*. To make matters worse, the voyage coincided with the beginning of the hurricane season in September.

Humberto Balla, then 12 years old, was aboard the *Mathilde*, accompanying his older brother. He could see that the boat was already leaking even before she was far out of port. Frightened, the boy jumped overboard and swam thirty minutes until he reached shore. There he wept as he watched the sloop disappear over the horizon, carrying his compatriots to what he knew was certain death. It is believed that the *Mathilde*, with her twenty brave crewmen, went down in rough weather near Bermuda.

COMPLIMENTS OF
Capt. JOSEPH LIMA



Captain José Lima crossed the Atlantic in the 32 foot sloop *Nettie*. In 1935 the nine ton vessel made the heroic voyage between New Bedford and Brava in 57 days.

Captain John

One of the famous captains of the Cape Verde Packet Trade was John Sousa of Brava. At age six he lost his father. His mother being poor, he went to live with his uncle Captain John Zurich of São Nicolau. Zurich taught him sailing and navigation, and by age twelve Sousa was running a small boat between the islands with his cousins. At eighteen he was made captain of one of Zurich's ships to America. For most of the next forty years, he made annual trips to New England and carried salt to the Gambia, wood and rice from Bissau to Cape Verde, and passengers to Dakar. In 1929 he took his whole family to the U.S. in the *William Grabner* and lived there for fourteen months before he was denounced by fellow Cape Verdeans for bringing in immigrants illegally. Sousa departed on the first ship available. Some time later, his family returned aboard the *William Grabner* on a long 46-day journey to Cape Verde.⁶⁸

The family was finally re-united in São Vicente, but Captain John must have caused them many a worry thereafter. Once he was considered lost after three months at sea between America and São Nicolau. Another time while sailing the *Atlanta* to the United States he lost two masts and the rudder in a storm and made his way back to Cape Verde with a jury-rigged⁶⁹ sail and steering device. Yet another time, between Cape Verde and Bermuda, he had to abandon ship in a cyclone but he was rescued by a

passing boat. Sousa lost still another ship on her maiden voyage between São Vicente and São Nicolau. At fifty-six he retired from the sea and established a small farm in Fogo, where he also maintained his shipping business.

People who knew Captain John describe him as courageous yet calm in adversity. Even on his deathbed in 1958, at seventy-five years of age, he fought the wind and sea, calling to his cousin to "pull in the sheets because the wind is picking up."



Captain John Sousa. Photo Teixeira da Sousa.

Roy Teixeira and the "Coriolanus"

Roy Teixeira, owner of the largest and finest Cape Verde packet ship, the *Coriolanus*, came to the United States at age sixteen.⁷⁰ He worked at low-paying jobs in the textile mills. After serving in the U.S. Army in France, Teixeira returned to America determined to save his money and make his mark. In 1920 he bought the schooner *Romance* for a mere pittance. The schooner made three trips to the Cape Verde Islands bringing fifty cranberry pickers each April, and returning them to the islands after the harvest. Teixeira's next ship was the *Thomas Lawrence*,⁷¹ soon after traded for the three masted schooner *Fairhaven*. In 1926 the *Fairhaven* came into New Bedford with twenty two Cape Verdeans without papers. The illegal aliens were ordered to remain aboard but during the night left the ship so Teixeira was fined \$22,000 for violating U.S. immigration laws. The government sold the ship at auction for \$500, and she was scrapped.⁷² In 1929 Teixeira joined with Albio and Antonio Macedo in acquiring the 300-foot *Coriolanus*.⁷³ She was a luxury ship by comparison with the other Cape Verde packets, carrying 200 passengers plus crew.⁷⁴ The ship had tiled bathrooms, electric light, a radio, and a paid orchestra aboard, as well as a newspaper listing the daily activities. There were constant celebrations, such as the "christening" of the crew's pet monkey. (The ill-fated monkey perished when he fell from a yardarm in a storm.)

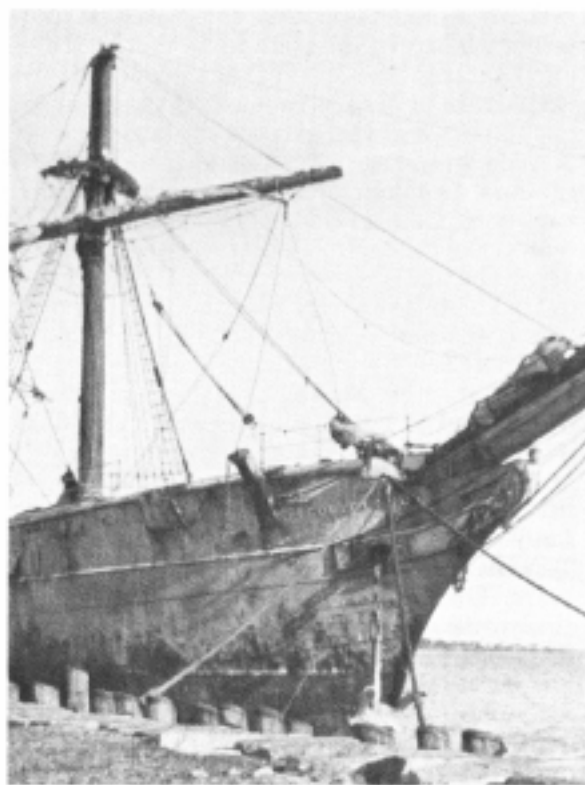
Teixeira decided to take his new bride to his homeland on the *Coriolanus*. What began as a pleasant voyage was not without a few challenges. Several days out they ran into a storm during the night. The cargo shifted and the ship would not right itself. Captain Sena was afraid to jettison the trucks and crates on deck on his own authority and so awoke Teixeira who immediately ordered the vehicles and the cargo on the leeward side thrown over. Slowly the ship began to right herself, and all were saved. Just a few days out of Sao Vicente an old man, who was going back to retire in the islands, died. A brief ceremony was held for him and he was buried at sea.⁷⁵

Teixeira had the *Coriolanus* for several more years. Towards the end, she made a record passage from New Bedford to Santo Antao in seventeen and one-half days, in spite of being becalmed for three days in the doldrums. On the return trip from Fogo with eight passengers and a crew of 38 men, she was struck by a squall which brought down some of her upper rigging, leaving it in a tangled heap on deck. Her crew fought to save her, cutting away the broken spars as raging seas swept across her rails. The ex-clipper

was still seaworthy, and she limped to New Bedford under shortened canvas. When she docked there on September 11th, 1930, her sailing days were over.⁷⁶

Teixeira owned one other large sailing vessel, the *Augusta Hilton*, which carried lumber from Florida to the Canaries and Cape Verde. She was a four-masted schooner but carried only a few passengers. In 1932 Teixeira took his family, including two young sons, to Cape Verde on the *August Hilton*. Before leaving Florida they ran aground, but a tug working nearby was able to pull them off. The crew lassoed sharks to pass the time. Once the vessel ran into a calm, Teixeira Sr. recalls that the dead sharks frightened Roy Junior. Carlos, the younger son, enjoyed the sea voyage and later became a seaman carrying on the maritime tradition of the family.

For over half a century, Roy Teixeira and his family have figured prominently in Cape Verdean-American life. Besides being a ship-owner, Teixeira was also legal counsel to Henrique Mendes, John Pontes, and most of the other Cape Verdean captains and owners. Known as "Lawyer Teixeira," he assisted them whenever they had difficulties with immigration officials and thereby became responsible for the entry of thousands of Cape Verdeans into the United States.



The *Coriolanus* moored at New Bedford immediately after losing her foremast en route from Cape Verde in September 1930. Photo courtesy M. Platzer.

John Costa

John Costa, like many other Cape Verdean mariners, followed in his father Benjamin's footsteps to work at sea.⁷⁷ Benjamin Costa owned and sailed many ships between the Cape Verde Islands and New England, including the *Platina*, the *Mystic*, the *Frank Brainard*, and the *Yukon*. When John was 14 years old, he joined his father on the *Yukon*. By 18 he already had his mates' license and took the *Yukon*, a fast ship and his favorite, to the West Coast of Africa.

In 1931, John Costa shipped out as first mate on the *John Manta* with Capt. Albertino Sena, but the *Manta* was a bad-luck ship. On the return voyage from Providence, they encountered a storm, and Costa ordered the sails down. The Captain, however, came on deck and ordered the sails back up. They raised the sails again only to see them shredded immediately, it took a week to repair them. Arriving in the islands, they were late casting off from Brava for São Vicente. The shore line was not released in time and it snapped, cutting off Costa's hand. For twenty hours the man agonized. When the *Manta* arrived in São Vicente, his arm had to be amputated. The same year the *Manta* was lost at sea with its thirteen passengers and a crew of nineteen.

Costa did not give up his sea career but instead joined the *Burkeland*⁷⁸ as first mate, under Capt. Julio Almada of São Nicolau, until taking over his father's shipping business. In 1939, he acquired the *Corona*, a beautiful steel sloop designed by the famous naval architect Herreshoff.⁷⁹ His return to the Islands was delayed by immigration authorities because America was now preparing for war and would not allow U.S. citizens to ship out. Eventually, Costa spent the war working on a WPA project in New Bedford until he was sent to the Cape Verde Islands to buy tunafish for the U.S. Government. After the war, moved by the plight of his countrymen, he decided to buy a schooner and reactivate the Cape Verdean packet trade in order to bring needed supplies, food, and clothing to the islands. To this end he purchased the *Lucy Evelyn* in partnership with Augusto Teixeira for \$10,000 and another \$5,000 in repairs. The *Lucy Evelyn* was the last commercially operated three-masted schooner in New England.⁸⁰

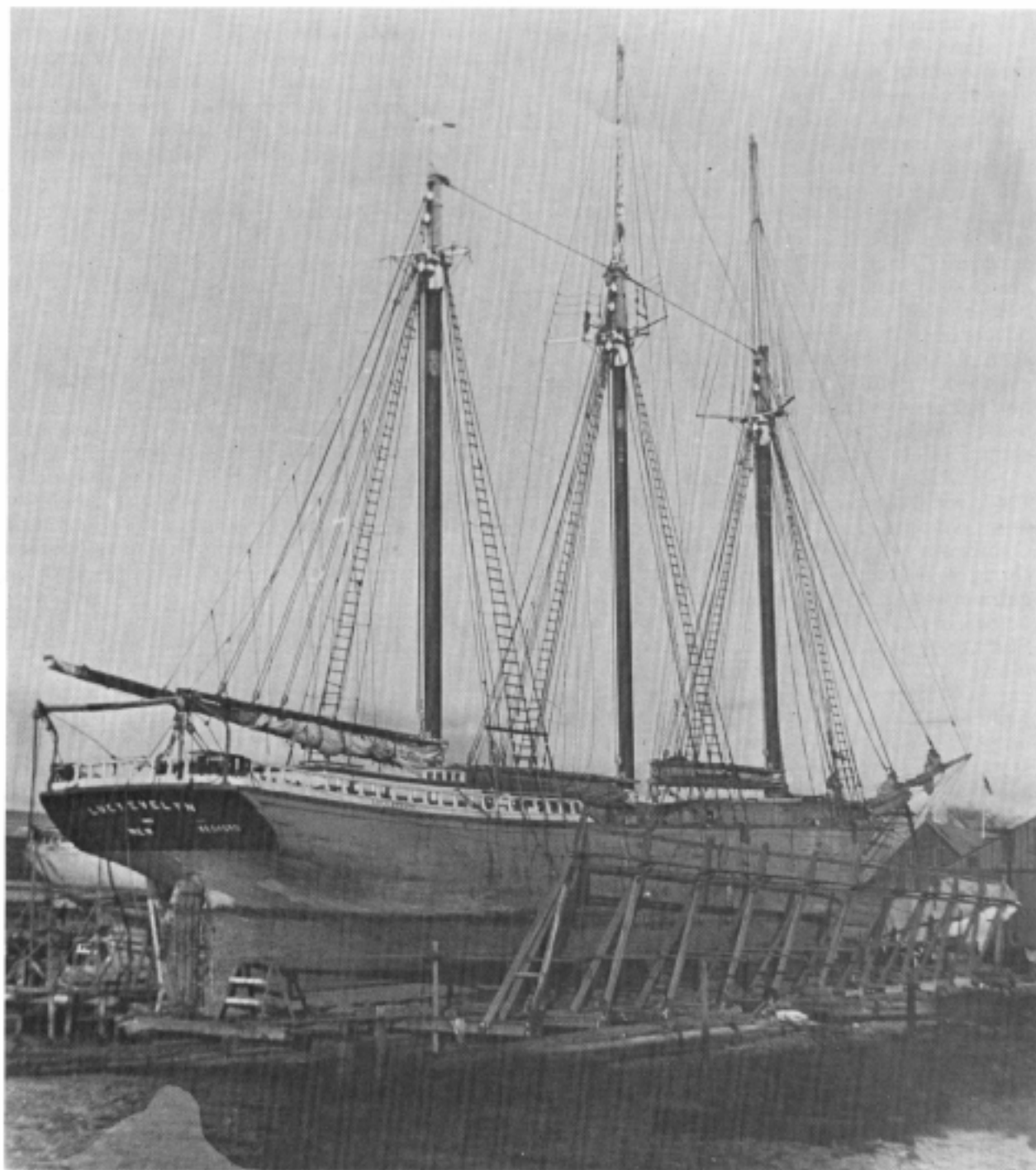
He now set out to get cargo. This proved difficult, for many Cape Verdeans who wanted to send goods were skeptical that anyone would really make an ocean voyage in a sailing ship. He literally had to set his sails as if preparing to leave and allow the Cape Verdeans to place their bundles aboard the ship themselves. Soon the ship was full with thirteen thousand feet of pine lumber and

twenty tons of cement for a new Nazarene church in Praia, a piano, household goods for the pastor, two hundred drums of kerosene, three automobiles, canned food, and bundles of clothing for relatives in Cape Verde.⁸¹ Two paying passengers signed on along with a crew of twelve. One of the passengers, Mrs. Teresa Neves, 60 years old, lost a sister on the *Manta* but decided to risk the voyage. None of the crew had ever served on a sailing vessel, so no one would go aloft to set the sails.⁸² On May 9, 1946 the *Evelyn* was towed out of New Bedford harbor, but nonetheless arrived safely in Cape Verde thirty-four days later.

The return to the United States was a real test of Costa's ability and endurance.⁸³ He left Dakar on September 20, with twenty-one passengers, including ten women and five children, a "crew" of twenty-eight, and two hundred and fifty tons of salt. When she was in the middle of the Atlantic, a heavy gale smashed the rudder and brought down the mizzenboom. Costa worked feverishly to improvise an apparatus of wires to repair the crippled rudder. The *Evelyn* was only 280 miles from Block Island, Rhode Island when a second storm struck on November 5, and drove her back to a point 250 miles east of Currituck, North Carolina. Unable to hold a course, the Coast Guard picked up the *Evelyn* and towed her into Norfolk, Virginia on November 22, 63 days after her departure from Dakar.

The *Evelyn* was repaired and on February 15, 1947 she set out for New Bedford. On February 21, after the Vineyard Sound Lightship had been sighted, a blinding blizzard hit. Visibility dropped to zero in minutes, and just as quickly the howling northeast wind shredded the mainsail and the jib. Captain Costa ran for deep water under the foresail alone, and before the winter gale was over the *Evelyn* found herself off the Georges Banks. On February 27, the Coast Guard cutter *Legare* picked her up and started towing her back, but rough seas caused the towline to break several times. On March 2, the *Legare* was relieved by the larger cutter *Algonquin*, but as they approached Gay Head another winter gale struck. In the early morning hours of March 3, four miles west of Cuttyhunk, the tow line broke again, and the *Algonquin* lost the *Evelyn* in the blizzard. On her own in raging seas before 60 mile an hour winds, the *Evelyn* was drifting into shoal waters. Captain Costa ordered the anchor dropped but the chain broke immediately. A second anchor held one half mile from the beach of Mattapoisett, and the next morning, the storm over, a tug towed her to New Bedford City Pier.

In late June the *Evelyn* set out for Cape Verde again with ten passengers and a gene-



The *Lucy Evelyn* in dry dock, Newport. Photo John Costa.

ral cargo. The elements were kind to Captain Costa on that voyage but the trip to the United States the next year was similar to the earlier ones. In March 1948 he left Praia for New Bedford via Dakar with seven paying passengers, but the winds prevented her eastward journey. Captain Costa discharged the passengers at Fogo and headed directly for America. Soon after leaving, a storm opened up a seam in her bow. With no gasoline

aboard for the pump, the crew had to pump the bilges by hand the entire way across the Atlantic. A month out of Cape Verde, they ran out of flour and by the time she reached New Bedford on April 12, 1948, most of the other food was also gone. Upon arrival, the crew sued for wages. After evaluating the long history of the *Evelyn's* misfortunes, Costa and Teixeira decided to sell the schooner for as much as they could get—\$1550.

The Madalan

John B. Pontes, a Boston Cape Verdean businessman, and his business associate Fortunato Gomes da Pina, despite seeing the problems of Costa and Texeira, decided carrying cargo to Cape Verde could still be profitable. In November 1946, they bought for \$35,000 the former luxury steel yacht *Illyria*, which had been used for Coast Guard service during World War II and was now considered surplus.⁷³ The Cape Verde Packet Trade had never seen such a fine vessel. She had been built of steel and teak wood in 1928 in Italy, boasting four double cabins, a library, and sitting room, besides the captain's and crew's quarters. Pontes renamed her *Madalan*, had her rerigged and the partitions ripped out below decks for cargo space, and hired Captain Sebastian Cruz.⁸⁴

The *Madalan* left Providence on June 8, 1947, with twenty passengers, among them one woman—Mrs. Minnie Correia of California who had come to the U.S. over thirty years before on a sailing ship. It was a calm crossing and seventy-four days passed before the *Madalan* arrived in Cape Verde. She had a new engine, but Pontes would not allow it to be used because it was too expensive to operate! The return voyage to Providence was a good deal faster, taking only thirty-nine days from Dakar. After staying in New England for Christmas and New Year, she attempted a winter crossing in January 1948. Five days out of port, the *Madalan* ran into the start of a week of gales that drove her 130 miles a day with no sails. Yet apart from the three kerosene drums and a barrel of beef that were washed overboard, the brigantine came through without damage.⁸⁵

The *Madalan* was back in Providence on July 27, 1948, with forty two passengers after making a forty-eight day crossing from Dakar despite seventeen days of calm. In order to have fresh meat during the voyage, a stock pen had been built under the forecabin to shelter hogs, cows, and sheep. The comfortable conditions aboard the *Madalan* had made her a popular ship, and so every year thereafter the *Madalan* returned in July and left in autumn after the cranberry harvest, when many Cape Verdean cranberry pickers would book passage home to visit family and friends.⁸⁶ Second Mate John Baptiste, Jr., boasted "She's the finest ship ever to sail in the trade."

She was also a lucky one. On a crossing to Cape Verde in January 1954 the mate John Brites was washed overboard by a wave; the next wave washed him back aboard, unhurt! Good fortune indeed smiled on the *Madalan* until she was sold to Antonio Bento of Maio who neglected her. In 1955 she broke loose in

the harbor of Praia and was driven against the rocks. The *Providence Journal* reported in 1957 that "Antonio Bento can't or won't spend money for necessary repairs on leaks in her steel hull and on her sprung topsail." Sometime later, unattended, she developed a leak and sank.

Henrique Mendes and the "Ernestina"

The rival of the *Madalan* was the *Ernestina*, a two masted schooner, owned and operated by Henrique Mendes.⁸⁷ At age 18, Mendes ran away from his home in Fogo and sailed for New Bedford on the schooner *Serpa Pinto*, arriving on May 2, 1898. In Providence he shoveled coal at twenty-six cents an hour for several months then decided to ship out on a whaler. He was made a harpooner on his first voyage and brought in a sixty barrel whale. Thirteen dollars for six months proved to be too little money for Mendes. He left whaling and alternately worked as a deckhand aboard coastal schooners, took odd jobs ashore, kept a store in Wareham, and picked cranberries. It is said that "he lived to save his money." After five years in the United States he made an agreement with a cranberry bog owner to bring forty contract workers from Cape Verde and was advanced the rest of the money needed to purchase his first vessel. Mendes went on to own thirty different vessels in succession, all of them old and dilapidated. Several were lost in the Atlantic. Undaunted Mendes went ashore following each calamity to work and to save money for another vessel. He once bought the old barkentine *Savoya* for \$8,000 in Baltimore and sold her a few years later for \$15,000. While he had her he said, "She carry plenty passengers, make plenty money."

The Second World War halted the Cape Verde Packet trade, but as soon as it was over, Henrique bought the famous artic exploration ship *Effie Morrissey*, which had sunk in Flushing, New York.⁸⁸ The old schooner was raised and sold to Henrique's daughter-in-law, Louisa Mendes, for \$7,000.⁸⁹ He repaired her in New Bedford and rechristened her *Ernestina*. For the next twenty years she sailed regularly between Providence and Cape Verde.⁹⁰ The seasonal arrival of the *Madalan* and *Ernestina*, timed to coincide with the harvest of the cranberries, was a joyous occasion for the Cape Verdeans of New England.⁹¹ Hundreds would come to the dock to greet the vessels, hear the news about friends living in the islands, celebrate aboard the ship drinking sugar cane "grog" and dancing to the "mornas" played by the crew. The *Ernestina* would receive goods all summer for shipment to relatives in the islands. In the fall the



Nho Antoninho "inspecting" the Madalan on sailing day in the early 1950's. Antonio Francisco Nascimento of Santo Antão worked as a whaler when he first came to America in 1917. In his youth he worked as a longshoreman on the docks of Providence, R. I. Like many of his transplanted countrymen he would spend long hours at the docks whenever a packet arrived from Cape Verde. Photo Joseph Latham courtesy R. I. Dept. of State Library Services).



The *Ernestina* leaving The Port of Providence c. 1957. Photo Providence Journal.

MORNA DE DESPEDIDA

Hora de bai,
 Hora de dor,
 Ja'n q'rê
 Pa el ca manchê
 De cada bez
 Que 'n ta lembrã,
 Ma'n q'rê
 Fica 'n morré

Hora de bai,
 Hora de dor
 Amor,
 Dixa 'n tchorã
 Corpo catibo,
 Bá bó que ê escrabo
 Ó alma bibo,
 Quem que al lebabo?

Se bem é doce,
 Bai é magoado;
 Más, se ca bado,
 Ca ta birado
 Se no morré
 Na despedida,
 Nhor Dês na volta
 Tã dano bida.

Dixam tchorã
 Destino de home:
 Es dor
 Que câ tem nome:
 Dor de crecheu,
 Dor de sodade
 De alguem
 Que'n q'rê, que q'rêm...

Dixam tchorã
 Destino de home,
 Oh Dor
 Que câ tem nome
 Sofri na vista
 Se tem certeza,
 Morré na ausência,
 Na bo tristeza.

—Eugenio Tavares



Eugenio Tavares, Cape Verdean poet.

“Morna of Farewell”

Hour of departure,
 Hour of grief,
 Would that it
 Might never dawn!
 Every time I remember it,
 I want to
 Lie down and die!

Hour of departure,
 Hour of grief!
 My love,
 Let me weep!
 Captive body,
 Go thou, slave!
 O living soul,
 Who dares carry you off?

If coming home is sweet
 Departing is bitter.
 Yet, if one doesn't leave
 One can never return.
 If we die
 Saying a farewell
 God, on our return
 Will give us our life.

Leave me to mourn
 The destiny of man;
 This grief
 Which has no name!

Lover's despair
 This painful longing
 For someone
 Whom I love and who loves me.

Leave me to mourn
 The destiny of man
 O Grief
 Which has no name!
 I would rather suffer
 Being close to you
 Than die far away alone and
 Engulfed in sorrow.

community would come to the docks to bid a tearful farewell to these two brave ships which for so long served as the living link between their homeland and their newly adopted country.⁹²

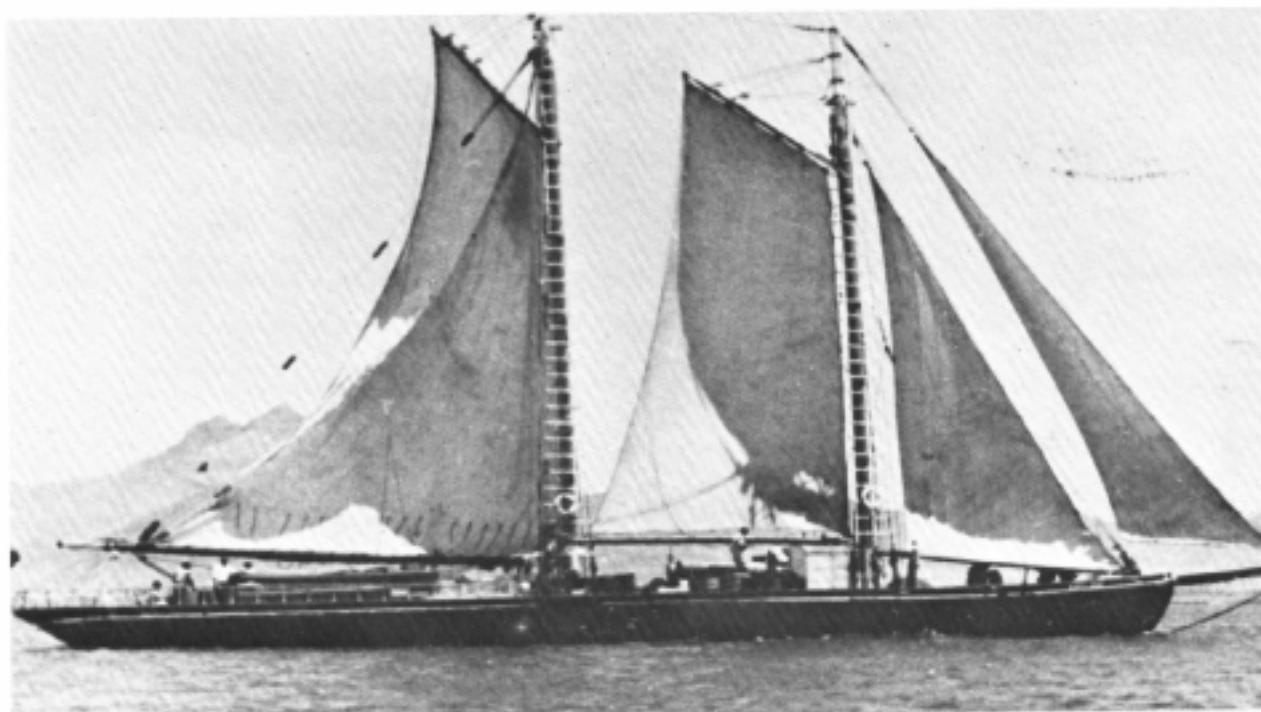
Henrique Mendes was almost killed by a falling spar on one voyage; another time the *Ernestina* ran into two hurricanes;⁹³ once she limped into Providence with a broken engine and almost no fresh water or supplies left. Still, she remained a faithful commuter packet until 1965, and Mendes kept coming every year, despite his claims of impending retirement. In all he made fifty-five crossings of the Atlantic before finally retiring to his farm in Fogo.⁹⁴ In 1968 he wrote to a group interested in buying the vessel for the South Street Seaport Museum in New York, "I can not go to sea no more. I am 89 years of age, I have to stay home." He died at age ninety having spent most of his life at sea.⁹⁵

The *Ernestina* returned in 1964 and 1965, in unsuccessful efforts to revive the schooner trade with the islands.⁹⁶ While a few of the "oldtimers" preferred the leisurely trip aboard a sailing ship, steamer competition proved too stiff. Although sailing schooners were still used in inter-island trade, the attempt to bring the former *Cape Eagle*, a Canadian schooner which had not been used for five years, to Cape Verde in 1970 was the last daring effort to sail across the Atlantic in a battered 100-foot sailing ship. She sank in rough seas 185 miles northwest of Bermuda; fortunately the crewmembers and a 78-year-old passenger were saved.⁹⁸

The "Maria Sony"

Several other former Canadian fishing schooners finished their careers in the Cape Verde packet trade. One of the most famous was the *Dorothy G. Snow*, which had won the Newfoundland-Halifax races in 1912 and 1914 with Captain Ansel Snow.⁹⁹ (At one time he had also owned the *Effie Morrissey*.) In 1939 she was bought by a Cape Verdean and was used for almost twenty years in inter-island trade and trade between Cape Verde and Dakar. In 1957 the vessel was bought by Cecilio Andrade who, after several mishaps with her, had her fitted out for a return voyage to the United States.¹⁰⁰ He renamed her the *Maria Sony* and on June 17, 1959 set out for Providence. She was still a racing schooner and reached Bermuda in twelve days. A hurricane struck and she had to ride out the storm under bare poles. She finally reached Newport on July 25 and was towed to Providence by a tug. Ninety minutes after debarking, one of the passengers had a baby which was named after the vessel.

After the usual festivities which greeted all the packet ships from Cape Verde, the *Maria Sony* was towed to New Bedford for an overhaul and installation of a new engine. Unfortunately, the engine broke down not a week after the departure on November 7th for Cape Verde. On November 20th rough seas broke the steering gear leaving the schooner to drift helplessly in a gale. After four days of this a huge wave crashed over the deck and broke nine beams. Now the crew feared for the structural integrity of the vessel and used



Maria Sony in Cape Verde. Photo Cecilio Andrade.

only a small triangular sail, throwing over barrels of fuel and other cargo to lighten the ship. For fifteen days she was buffeted about by the waves, her mechanical pump broken, she was slowly sinking as the crew prayed helplessly. Finally, on December 11, a freighter spotted her and started towing the old schooner to Bermuda. She was finally taken by the U.S. Coast Guard to St. George's.

Cecilio Andrade's troubles had only begun. Penniless, with a derelict schooner and a crew which refused to continue, Andrade stayed for ten months living on the generosity of local groups. Money was collected from Cape Verdean groups in the United States; and, through donated services and material in Bermuda, Andrade was able to put his boat back together again and sail for Cape Verde. On November 10, 1960 the *Maria Sony* arrived in Cape Verde one year after her departure from New Bedford. Andrade never attempted another voyage to the United States.

Pedro Evora

The captain who skippered the *Maria Sony* on her last voyage and who brought the *Ernestina* for the last time to Providence was Pedro Evora. He had piloted other ships including the schooners *Marion*, *Conrad* and *Madalan*.¹⁰¹ He had made the trips in the *Madalan* in 1949, 1950, 1956, and 1957. He was the captain of the *Ernestina* in 1951 when, in his words, her masts "were cut down as if with a saw" off Fogo, and he jury-rigged two poles with sails and made his way to

Brava safely. He also had command of the *Madalan* and *Ernestina* toward the end of their careers when, as he puts it, they "had lost their spirit" for they were not being properly cared for and no longer carried full cargoes.

Seafaring in the Cape Verdes

Although it is widely believed that a tradition of seafaring led Cape Verdeans to emigrate on the whalers and the packets, this is not the case. Actually most of the emigrants had never been off their own home island. (So, when a "greenhorn" spoke of "my land" [*nha terra*] he was referring to his particular island.) For most people, travel even between the islands was too expensive. Moreover, there were many periods in which there were very few vessels making such trips, making each island a little world unto itself.

For the most people the sea was not an avenue but a barrier. Fishing was the occupation of but a few, even these dared not to go too far in their tiny boats (Cape Verdean fishing boats were and still are small rowboats designed for a crew of only three.) Very few people knew how to swim, especially in more mountainous islands devoted to agriculture from which most of the immigrants to the United States came. In fact, many young men learned to swim with the express purpose of sneaking on to the whalers by night. (This was sometimes necessary because they were avoiding being drafted into the Portuguese army and would



The schooner *Vila de Ribeira Brava* with its owner/Captain Joãozinho Lopes da Silva on deck in the port of Preguiça, São Nicolau (1938). These smaller vessels provided Cape Verde with its only inter-island communication system.

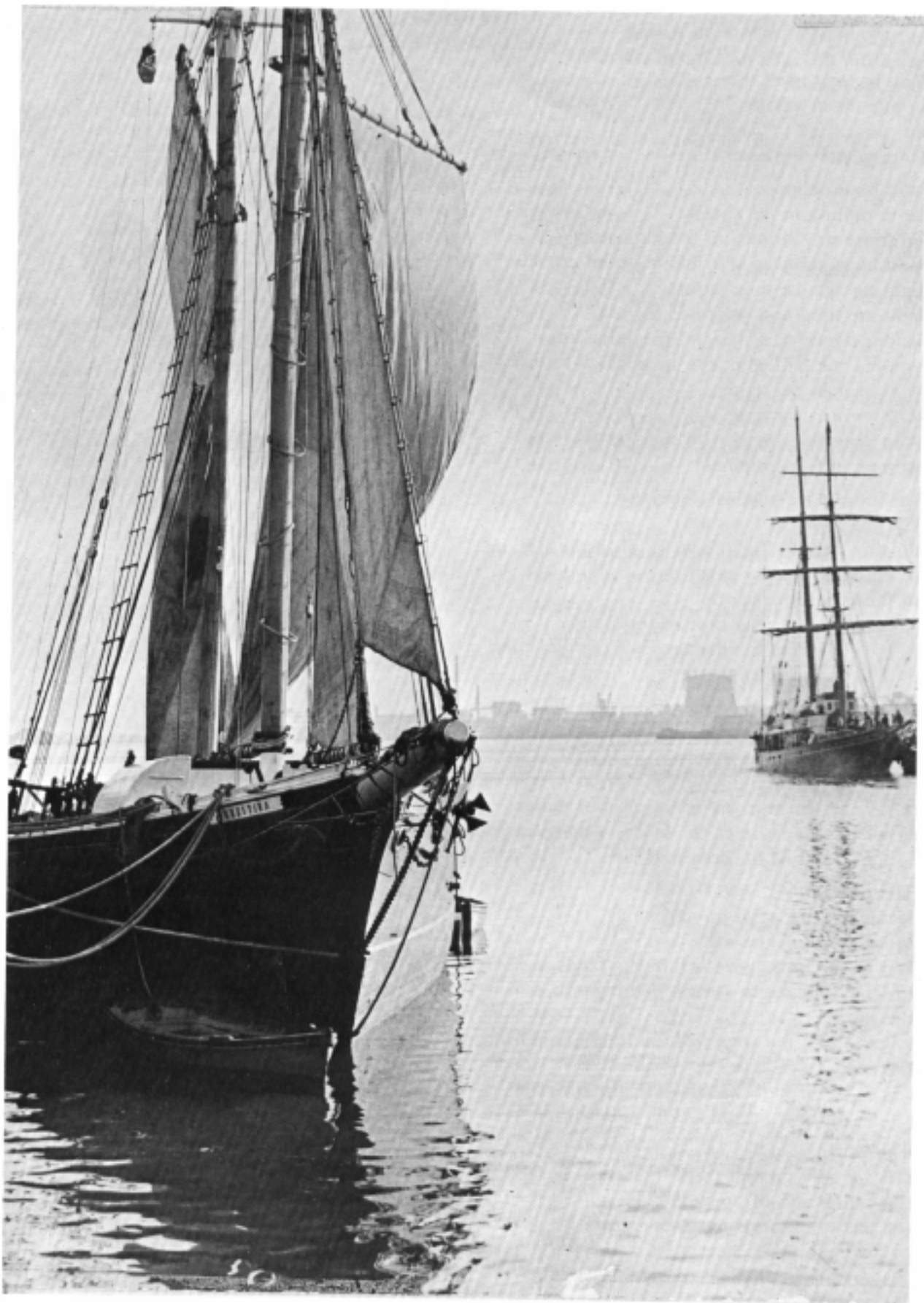
not have been allowed to leave, if they had done so openly.) All this should not lessen our admiration for this "pioneering" generation of Cape Verdean immigrants. If anything, they are all the more to be admired for their courage in an unknown world, that of the open sea.

Many of the men who sailed these vessels to America are still alive. Hopefully their

daring and skill and the bravery of the men and women who sailed with them will be remembered by the younger generation of Cape Verdean-Americans who owe their existence in the United States directly or indirectly to the successful voyage of someone in their family aboard one of the "Brava Packets."



Seaman Ben Rose and Capt. Raimundo Brito aboard a schooner leaving Providence November 1, 1957. *Providence Journal* photo.



The *Ernestina* and the *Madalan* in the port of Providence. Joseph Latham photo. Courtesy R. I. Dept. State Library Services.

BROTHER*

A Poem by Jorge Barbosa

You have crossed the seas
in pursuit of whales
on those trips to America
from where ships sometimes never return

You have calloused hands
from pulling in the sheets
on those tiny sloops on the high seas;
You have survived horrible hours of anxiety
fighting against the storms;
You are tired and weary of the sea
Under the infernal heat of the furnaces
you fed the boilers of the steamships with coal,
in peacetime
in wartime

And you have loved with the sensual impulse of our people
women in foreign lands!

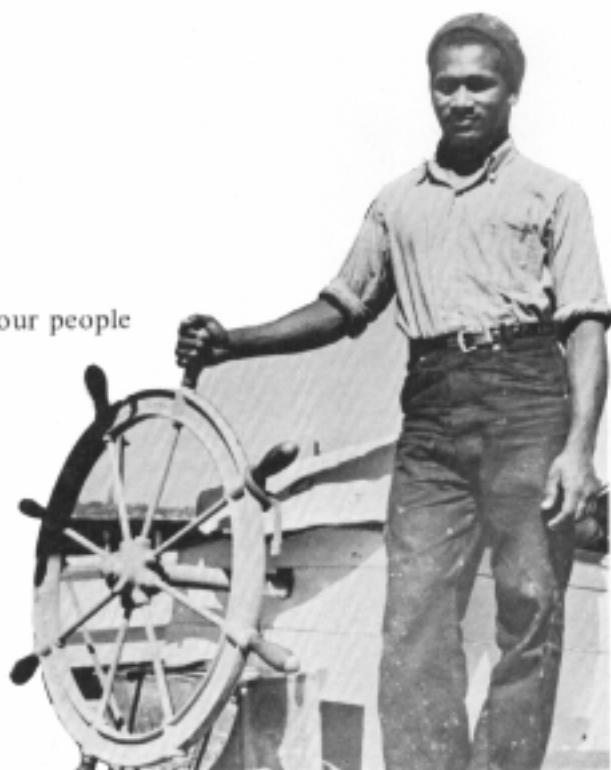
On those poor islands of ours
you the toiler of the soil
digging furrows for the water of fertile streams;
scraping at the dry earth
in those barren regions
where the rain seldom falls,
where the drought is a terrible curse
and a tragic scene of famine!

You bring to your dances
your melancholy
deep inside of your gaiety
when you play the mornas
with the sad tones of your guitar
or when you embrace the loving women in your arms
to the sound of the creole music...

The morna...
seems like the echo in your soul
of the voice of the sea
and of the nostalgia for faraway lands
to which the sea is always inviting you,
the echo
of the sound of the long desired rain
the echo
of the voice deep within all of us
of the voice of our silent tragedy!

The Morna...
takes from you and from the things around us
the expression of our humbleness
the passive expression of our drama,
of our revolt,
of our silent melancholic revolt!

America...
America is finished for you



João Gomes of Santo Antão and Brooklyn, N.Y. at the wheel of the Ernestina on one of the ship's last regular voyages of America c. 1957. Photo Providence Journal

she closed her doors to your expansion!
These adventures across the oceans
no longer exist...
they only live
in the tales you recount of your past,
with a pipe hanging in your mouth
and with joyful laughter
that will never hide
your
melancholy...

*This poem was written after the U.S. enacted the restrictive immigration laws of the 1920's. Translated by the author's son, Jorge Pedro Barbosa and Dr. Michael K. H. Platzer.

IRMÃO

Cruzaste Mares
na aventura da pesca da baleia,
nessas viagens para a América
de onde às vezes os navios não voltam mais.

Tens as mãos calosas de puxar
as enxárcias dos barquinhos nor mar alto;
viveste horas de expectativas cruéis
na luta com as tempestades;
aborreceu-te êsse tédio marítimo
das longas calmarias intermináveis.
Sob o calor infernal das fornalhas
alimentaste de carvão as caldeiras dos vapores,
em tempo de paz
em tempo de guerra.

E amaste como ímpeto sensual da nossa gente
as mulheres nos países estrangeiros!

Em terra
nestas pobres Ilhas nossas
és o homem da enxada
abrindo levadas à água das ribeiras férteis,
cavando a terra sêca
nas regiões ingratas
onde às vezes a chuva mal chega
onde às vezes a estiagem é uma aflição
e um cenário trágico de fome!

Levas aos teus bailes
a tua
melancolia
no fundo da tua alegria,
quando acompanhas as Mornas com as posturas

graves do violão
ou apertas ao som da música crioula
as mulheres amoráveis contra o peito...

A Morna...
parece que é o eco em tua alma
da voz do Mar
e da nostalgia das terras mais ao longe
que o Mar te convida,
o eco
da voz da chuva desejada,
o eco
da voz interior de nós todos,
da voz da nossa tragédia sem eco!

A Morna...
tem de ti e das coisas que nos rodeiam
a expressão da nossa humildade,
a expressão passiva do nosso drama,
da nossa revolta,
da nossa silenciosa revolta melancólica!

A América...
a América acabou-se para ti...
Fechou as portas a tua expansão!
Essas Aventuras pelos Oceanos
já não existem...
Existem apenas
nas histórias que contas do passado,
com o canhoto atravessado na boca
e risos alegres
que não chegam a esconder
a tua
melancolia...

O teu destino...
O teu destino
sei lá!

Viver sempre vergado sobre a terra,
a nossa terra,
pobre
ingrata
querida!

Ser levado talvez um dia
na onda alta de alguma estiagem!
como um desses barquinhos nossos
que andam pelas Ilhas
e o Oceano acaba também por levar um dia!
Ou outro fim qualquer
humilde
anónimo...

Ó Caboverdeano humilde
anónimo
—meu irmão!