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# OCEANS OF WINE

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*Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste*

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David Hancock

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## THE TRIUMPH OF BACCHUS

The Madeira that visitors found in 1815 was a tiny island that might have been an insignificant part of the Portuguese empire, except that, because of its location along major Atlantic wind and water currents, it became one of the principal provisioning nodes in a vast transoceanic trading web that had been spun during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even in 1640, Madeira was already a point of rest and refilling. Travelers stopped there to quell their appetite for food and drink, and captains to pick up shipping supplies. Over time, it became an increasingly desirable entrepôt for redistributing goods to all parts of the world, whether the other side of the island, mainland Europe, Africa, the Americas, or India and Asia. Chief among those goods was the place's principal product, wine.

The island also became a markedly cosmopolitan place in these 175 years, a point of encounter and articulation of peoples and cultures, an arena in which "the strangeness of everything was interesting" and challenging. In a place marked by a "combination of objects curiously, ay wonderfully novel to an English eye and certainly not [to] be met with at a similar distance in any other direction from Hyde Park Corner," nationalities met, traded, and clashed. Madeira emerged as a retreat for the peoples living around the Atlantic at the zenith of its wine's golden age: aesthetes desiring inspiration and consumptives seeking relief found in its scenery and climate escape from the grind of everyday life. Visiting in 1813, the novelist Theodore Hook sensed its appeal: "No place in the world . . . could have been [better] selected" for a "retreat, in which old associations and habits could so soon have been got rid of," and new ones adopted.<sup>1</sup>

More than anything else, Madeirans inhabited a richly textured crossroads community and mentality. Both were porphyritic and amalgamative in nature,

whereby elements combined but did not lose their own traits. This was a place that was unabashedly provincial yet highly cosmopolitan, unquestionably Portuguese yet remarkably British, commercial yet religious, a market important for world trade yet dominated by local agriculture, a node central to the elaboration of global commercial and social networks yet possessed of only one real export and a small population. The island, the inhabitants, and their institutions constitute a small yet powerful alembic in which to distill traits and changes that shaped the wider Atlantic marketplace.

### THE PLACE

The island of Madeira was situated at a crossroads in the Age of Sail: 32 degrees, 51 minutes north latitude, at its southern extremity, and 17 degrees, 16 minutes west longitude, at its western extremity. It is 1,457 miles south-southwest of London, 559 miles southwest of Lisbon, 408 miles southeast of São Miguel in the Azores, 340 miles west of Safi in Morocco, 216 miles north of Tenerife in the Canaries, 2,619 miles northeast of Barbados, and 2,761 miles southeast of New York.<sup>2</sup>

Geographers, traders, and mariners alike thought Madeira and its appendages (Porto Santo and the three uninhabited Desertas), like the other Wine Islands of the Azores and Canaries, belonged more to Africa than to Europe.<sup>3</sup> It lies near the confluence of the North-East Trade Winds and the Rennell and Canary Currents. Since the prevailing Atlantic winds move clockwise in the Northern Hemisphere, and the currents move south-southwesterly, most vessels westbound from Europe passed nearby, whether or not they stopped.<sup>4</sup> From London, for instance, America-bound ships headed west out of the English Channel. At the Lizard (the southernmost point of Britain), they steered WSW and, around 10 or 12 degrees W, set their course for Madeira's vicinity, accommodating the northwesterly winds that predominated off Portugal's coast. Near Madeira, relatively steady winds and the Canary Current carried them southward, west of the Canaries, and then into the North-East Trade Winds, which blew from April through September toward Bermuda. Given its comparatively temperate weather, constant wind, and freedom from fog and ice, this southern shipping route was the preferred outbound route to America from the countries of northern and western Europe. Thus, the island was perfectly situated for trade.<sup>5</sup>

Madeira is small — 34 miles long and 14 miles wide, 90 miles in circumference, 286 square miles in area. It is smaller than Man, Guernsey, São Miguel, Tenerife, Santiago in the Cape Verdes, Barbados, or Long Island. But it is—and was—impressive. From the initial reports of its discovery by João Gonçalves Zarco and

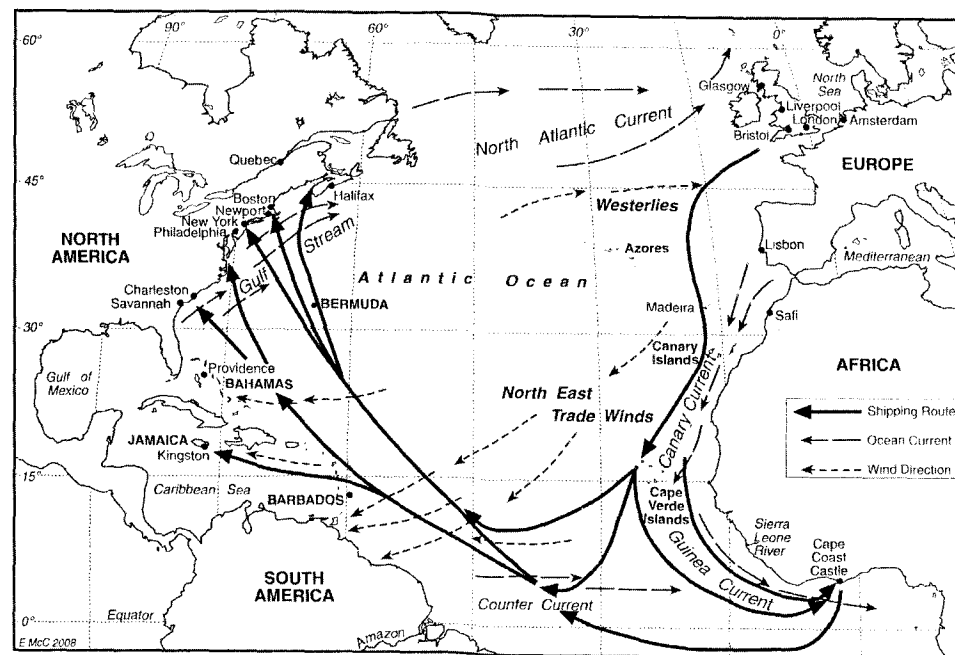


Figure 1.1. Madeira's placement in the prevailing Atlantic winds and currents.

Source: Drawn by Eliza McClemmen, Cartographer.

Tristão Vaz Teixeira in the fifteenth century through the subsequent assessments of its resources by mariners and scientists to the impassioned romantic accounts penned by residents and visitors in the nineteenth century, it captured the imagination.<sup>6</sup> Centuries before, the ancients had written about an island that could only have been Madeira, believing this “Queen of Islands” to be the Elysian Fields—“an earthly Paradise”; their idea of a place dedicated to happiness reverberated throughout subsequent descriptions of the island. It was “the pleasantest Place” at the beginning of the seventeenth century, “fort agréable” at midcentury, and “the delightfulest Place in the World” at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Adam Gordon, on his way to North America, felt “pleasure” on the approach when he “could distinguish the uncommonly beautiful Landscapes with accuracy.” George Washington’s friend Robert Stewart found it “as charming as the imagination can well perceive,” and the explorer George Forster thought it much like “a fairy garden.” After the American Revolution, “the sublimity of the scenery” overwhelmed spectators: it was, the purser of the China-bound *United States* thought in 1784, “one of the most beautiful islands at present”; “nothing,” one English nobleman admitted in 1792, “could be more picturesque and invit-

ing”; and even the most dour Scotsmen were moved with “pleasurable” sensations on approaching it, the “Nature of the Country” being “peculiarly favorable to such impression, . . . picturesque to the greatest degree.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet what was “picturesque and enchanting” to many was full of menace and imperfection to others: “huge perpendicular rocks, lofty precipices, prominent ridges, deep excavations and chasms, innumerable cascades, liberally supplied with rivulets, beautiful vallies, deep gullies and ravines, containing immense torrents of water” painted “a highly varied, sublime, and [a] no less alarming picture of nature.” Drama and danger coincided. “The Queen” was not only beautiful and fertile but also powerful, capable of destruction, and “inaccessible.” “Thick Fog” shrouded her, hiding small islands nearby, extremely rocky shoals, sometimes even the island itself.<sup>8</sup>

The artist John Greenwood captured what first struck the eye when the fog parted: Madeira’s height (plate 1). It is as if some of the Alps had been set down in the tropics. Steep, rugged, and uneven, the island was formed some 20 million years ago during the Miocene Period, when lava spewed up from the ocean floor and built up a high east-west mountainous spine. Some peaks are “very high,” higher by a thousand feet than any mountains in Portugal or Britain. Cabo Girão, west of Câmara de Lobos, is the second highest cliff in the world. The height evoked strangeness and unease. At a “distance of three leagues,” the island bore “a very hideous appearance, occasioned by several vast mountains, the lower parts of which seemed of a red gravelly colour and quite barren, and the summits” bore the “dark dirty green” captured by Greenwood. This vista was “odd almost beyond a possibility of description,” though voyagers repeatedly made the attempt. It was “one ridge of mountains, of an amazing height, running east and west, rising quite from the water’s edge to the summit”—a profile sketched by Thomas Prince in his 1710 ship log (figure 1.2). It was not “the least flat near the water” but rose “instantly from a rocky shore, to an horizon broke by the beautiful irregularity of the summit of the hills.” Nor was the range one continuous slope, for its sides were “interspersed with an infinite number of smaller hills, and little hollows between them.” The island was “one entire piece of irregularity.” The only exception was an uninhabited “foggy plateau” to the west of the island’s center, three and a half miles long by four miles wide, “not at all rocky, but [with] the soil of a stiff red clay,” and encircled by a ring of hills from seventy to eighty feet high. Elsewhere, there was hardly a twenty-foot square of level ground anywhere. Even what was planted with vines was rocky land “rising up.”<sup>9</sup>

The mountains were blanketed in woods and riven by streams. According to local tradition, the island was heavily forested in 1425, so densely that Zarco gave it the Portuguese name for wood—*madeira*—and then ordered it to be burned,

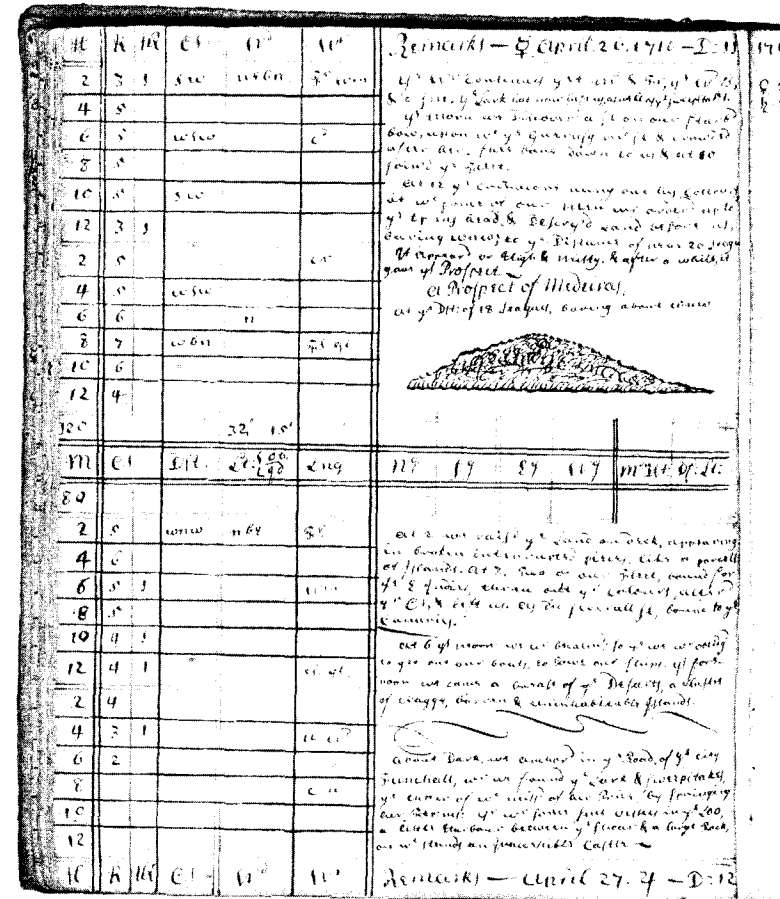


Figure 1.2. “A prospect of Madeira” in Thomas Prince’s ship log, 1710. Source: Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

and burn it supposedly did for seven years. The fires, if real, did little to tame the place and, by the 1600s, heavy growth had returned. Father Antoine Jean de Laval, who passed through on his way to Louisiana in 1720, described the mountains as carpeted with trees up to their summits. Joseph Banks provided a more detailed picture nearly fifty years later: the lower reaches were covered in vines, above them stood “woods of chestnut and pine of immense extent,” and higher up “wild timber of kinds not known in Europe.”<sup>10</sup>

More to the point of its productivity, the “fertility and goodness” of the land were “very rich” and “uncommon,” so fecund that it encouraged “everything almost spontaneously”; it was especially “proper for the vine.” The most common

soils were degraded pumice and a dark red earth, both of which were “mixed with a portion of sand and marl”; smaller hills possessed a dark red clay and “a black or gray sand”; other places enjoyed a very black mold.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Madeira was blessed with abundant water, another necessity for grape growing. Eight rivers, numerous streams, and a plethora of springs carried water from the center of the island. “There fell from the Mountains,” one visiting American sea captain noted, “many fine Rills of Water,” which the inhabitants channeled into aqueducts (*levadas*) and used to water their vines.<sup>12</sup>

Soon after Zarco’s arrival in 1425, colonists established a large town and several smaller villages on the more hospitable southern side, before harbors of varying safety and utility: Funchal, which became by 1640 the principal city and capital, dominated a bay between the Loo Rock to the west and the Brazen Head to the east; Marasylo, or Marsilia, lay to the west of Funchal, and Santa Cruz to its east; and Machico stood near the eastern tip. In time, new settlements arose. By 1791, when the merchant William Johnston’s map was printed, there were also the towns of Madalena, Calheta, Ponta do Sol, Ribeira Brava, and Câmara de Lobos in the south and the hamlets of Faial, Santana, and São Jorge in the north. Except for the latter small settlements, the north remained relatively unsettled through the first half of the nineteenth century.

Climate not only assisted Madeira production but made it one of the Atlantic’s more salubrious commercial hubs. “Healthy Air” was something visitors particularly remarked upon again and again, with “healthy” connoting temperate.<sup>13</sup> It was, they thought, “more moderate” than Europe, North America, or even the Canaries.<sup>14</sup> The “very Temperate” air was “refreshed for Nine Months of the Year by a Sea-breeze in the Day, from Eight in the Morning till Four in the Afternoon, and a Land-breeze in the Night, from Eight at Night to Four the next Morning.”<sup>15</sup> Too, the sun was filtered. Between nine and ten in the morning, “a strong vapour” rose “like a cloud,” screening the islanders for “the remainder of the day from the rays of the sun, without in the least obstructing the view, or rendering it less clear.” Thus “freed from an inconvenient glare of sun-shine,” one could work or relax “with greater ease and pleasure.”<sup>16</sup>

Islanders enjoyed “a most delightfull Climate.” The “extremes of heat and cold” were “never felt.” Spring and summer were “the only seasons.” Methodical observers all agreed. Dr. William Gourlay, a physician to the resident British, recorded that in 1793–1802 the temperature fluctuated between 74 degrees in the hottest months (August and September) and 62 degrees in the coldest months (December and January). Dr. Nicolau Caetano de Bettencourt Pita, a native, noted in 1812 that the thermometer averaged 72 degrees Fahrenheit in summer and 61 degrees in winter.<sup>17</sup>

There was “scarcely a single object of luxury” “growing either in Europe or the Indies that might not” happily flourish in such a climate. The environment was especially well suited to vines and grapes. Ushering in the planting season, the rains usually began in November and continued through late January or early February. The winds blew from the south and west, and the weather was quite stormy; fierce gales and heavy rains were frequent. “The winter was the only season of the year” when the sky was not “serene.” Rainfall averaged about twenty-three inches each year, and most of it fell in the rainy season. Rain generally brought the worst of devastation. “Except on the top of the Mountains,” snow and hail were unusual. Drier weather prevailed during late February, March, and April, when pruning was done before sap rose. The ensuing budding and flowering of the vines and the maturation of the grapes occurred at a time of year when the “sky was almost always covered by clouds.” Not until July did high temperatures, cloudless skies, and the dry, irritating *leste* winds set in, in advance of a two-month harvest and pressing. Fog was not common on the island’s lower reaches in these months, nor was dust, except when raised by the *leste*.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, situation, soil, and climate converged to make Madeira “the garden of the world,” a place of contrast and continuity noticed by nearly all who touched there. The island was blanketed with trees. When the island was discovered, it was filled with cedar. By the 1740s, cedar was “seldom to be found,” nor were oaks, elms, and limes: they had been replaced by poplars, pines, chestnuts, fruit and nut trees, and “several varieties of brush wood.” Exotic specimens included the dragon’s blood tree (whose sap was used as “a sovereign remedy for bruises”), the *lignum klodium* (which vied “with mahogany for domestic uses”), and the opuntia (a pear that turned urine red). When Captain Cook’s party “botanized” in 1768, it found twenty-five plants previously unknown to science.<sup>19</sup>

As ships came for wine, foreign flora slowly began to complement native growth. Resident merchants aggressively imported and transplanted the stock of plants from both the Old and New Worlds. Grape vines and sugarcane were only the two most prominent. Sweet oranges came from China, while maize, sweet potato, and peanut came from the Americas. Hans Sloane, whose account of his 1687 visit is little more than a catalog of plants and trees, found apples, apricots, peaches, and pears originally native to Europe and Asia, walnuts originally belonging to many places in the Northern Hemisphere except Madeira, and oranges, lemons, citrons, bananas, guavas, figs, quinces, bays, limes, white and black mulberries, dates, yams, and plantains originally “common to . . . hotter parts of the world.” In 1748, the pineapple, hardly “a native production,” began to appear in “particular gardens,” as did cinnamon and guava, which were brought from India via Brazil. More prosaic “vegetables produced by culture”—cabbage,

corn, lettuce, and potato—had also been introduced from Europe and America and by 1800 become staples. The island, in short, was ever “fit for producing the Fruits of both Hot and Cold Countries.” No “fruit, flower, grain, herb, nor root that grows either in Europe or Africa and great part of America” could not be successfully transplanted there.<sup>20</sup>

## THE PEOPLE

### GROWTH

“The Queen of Islands” grew from a small settlement with 2,310 inhabitants in 1455 to a substantial agricultural province with a bustling, cosmopolitan trading port and over 110,000 people in 1851.<sup>21</sup> Its population rose rapidly in the first fifty years for which data have survived, 1455–1505, at 3.8 percent per year, on average, and thereafter settled into a slower but fairly steady increase—between 0.5 percent and 0.9 percent per year for the next three and a half centuries, excepting during the period 1675–1760, when growth apparently temporarily stopped.<sup>22</sup>

Migration was quite heavy in the first two centuries of settlement. Europeans and Africans went or were brought to Madeira to take advantage of the island’s central location and to exploit its rich resources. Most early settlers came from Portugal, and most subsequent arrivals came from Portugal and its dominions. The best modern estimates suggest that, from 1425 to 1700, 56 percent of all arrivals came from Portugal and its dependencies, another 12 percent came from Spain, and the remainder came from Italy, England, France, and Flanders.<sup>23</sup> Natural increase was great, as well, and it persisted longer than migration. Before 1740, early and widespread marriage, high rates of fertility, and a comparatively long life expectancy contributed to high internal population growth. That increase slowed somewhat in the second half of the eighteenth century. During the 1740s and 1750s, the incidence of marriage declined and the size of family decreased; in addition, child mortality rose, reaching an alarming 59 percent in the period 1759–66, a time in which population rose by only 1.4 percent. Such conditions persisted through 1815.<sup>24</sup>

Growth from immigration and natural increase was held in check by the persistence of these delimiting conditions through 1815 and episodic emigration after the 1660s. Only a third of the island was cultivable, and that was almost fully employed by 1640. Too, most cultivated land was owned by noble families and religious orders. This state of affairs impinged upon the opportunities and aspirations of the lower and middling sort, who earned their livelihood from working the land. Emigration from the island, minimal and sporadic before the 1660s, reached disturbingly unprecedented levels by the 1680s. The collapse of

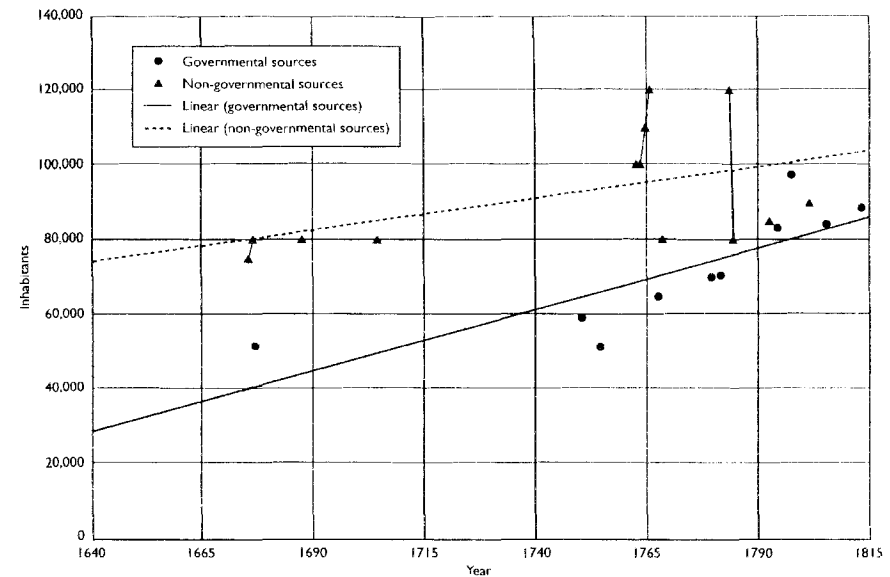


Figure 1.3. Madeira population, 1640–1815.

Sources: Phérotée de Lacroix, *Relation Universelle de l'Afrique, Ancienne et Moderne*, (Lyon, 1688), 3:711; Shattocke, “Description,” 1675, Eg. 2395, fol. 649, British Library, London; Christopher Jeaffreson, *A Young Squire of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1878), 1:170–72; Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands Madeira, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers, and Jamaica*, (London, 1707), 1:9, 12; Thomas Howe, *The Annexed Sketch* (London, 1762); James Gordon to Alexander Gordon, 1763, 1764, Gordon of Letterfourie Papers, private collection, Preshome, Scotland; Thomas Cheap to Secretary of State, 1766, SP 89, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England; Robert Stewart to George Washington, March 10, 1768, in W. W. Abbot and Dorothy Twohig, eds., *The Papers of George Washington*, Colonial Series, vol. 8 (Charlottesville, 1993), 75; J. C. Beaglehole, ed., *The “Endeavour” Journal of Joseph Banks, 1768–1771* (Sydney, 1962), 1:162–65; Inventário, 1:144, 2:481, Arquivo histórico ultramarino, Lisbon; *Flucidário madeirense*, 2nd ed. (Funchal, 1946), 3:103–4; José Manuel Azevedo e Silva, *A Madeira e a construção do mundo atlântico* (Funchal, 1995), 669.

Madeira sugar production—discussed at greater length below—left many families impoverished and landless, as consolidation of cane lands into vineyards and transfer from insolvent tenants to solvent ones proceeded apace.<sup>25</sup>

Emigration became an even greater problem in the eighteenth century, when first gold and later diamonds were discovered in Brazil. Metropolitan and local

reaction to the exodus of workers to Brazil had to confront the countervailing need for labor there. At first, the Crown feared that emigration would strip Madeira and Portugal of laborers. To prevent this calamity, João V issued *alvarás* (charters or patents) in 1709, 1711, and 1720 to curtail significant exit. Yet emigration brought benefits to the kingdom as well, for it “relieved the pressure of an expanding population on resources and prevented declining yields, deepening poverty, and subsistence crises,” and these benefits were increasingly recognized. So it was that in the late 1740s João’s government offered free land and assistance to Madeirans who wished to immigrate to southern Brazil, and it authorized certain Lisbon merchants to carry at least five families from Madeira to Brazil on each of their ships. Some 1,277 inhabitants—2 percent of the population—left by such means in 1747–51 alone; most who did so were free men drawn largely by the prospect of economic gain, although religious freedom and social advance were also motivating factors.<sup>26</sup> After Brazilian gold exports peaked in 1755 and governmental incentives disappeared, private incentives persisted and individual departures continued. Exit was still substantial enough in 1779 for the governor of Madeira to consider measures to “prevent the emigration to foreign countries and to punish those who tried,” to develop agriculture “to improve the miserable conditions of the population,” to guard the coast better, and to institute a more rigorous auditing system. Those policies that were introduced were mostly ineffective, however, and the outflow continued. Many Portuguese boarded English vessels without passports, and such clandestine departures were only the tip of the iceberg. Plus an even larger group of Madeirans went to North America on account of Catholic persecution of Masons in the 1790s.<sup>27</sup>

## MIX

The overwhelming majority of islanders—or “natives,” in the parlance of the day—was tied to the land. Nearly all the land was owned either by “old & noble” Portuguese families, some of which had “princely Estates” outside Funchal and lived in their city mansions (*palacetes*), if they did not reside on the mainland, or by religious communities, like the Jesuits or Santa Clara nuns. The Jesuits, holding “precedence in Fortune” and place among the religious, had “secured the *Monopoly* of *Malmsey*,” and so enjoyed substantial annual rents, even if the acreage they held was low, for Malmsey always fetched the highest prices. Natives were, thus, the owners (*senhorios* or *proprietarios*) of vineyards. The “owners” commonly rented their vine land on an annual basis to peasant “cultivators” (*colonos*) and in the eighteenth century also to semiprofessional “farmers” (*feitores*), who served as intermediaries between the landlords and tenants, renting from the former and to the latter. Tenants divided between *meyros* (who did not live

on the land) and *caseiros* (who did). Under Portuguese law, tenants owned all but the land. After 1640, the bulk of the population was tied to the land in these three ways. True, a fraction lived in Funchal and traded the fruits of the island’s agriculture or worked in servicing that trade. But that was always a small share overall. In the eyes of the natives, power, success, and upward mobility rose out of the land; trade would be entered into with an eye toward earning the means to acquire vine land and then exit commerce, which by 1815 had still not completely divested itself of its nonnoble taint.<sup>28</sup>

A small enslaved community of Africans worked for the natives. Black slaves were not heavily involved in wine production per se, but they played an important role in building Madeira’s wine economy. Paradoxically, their numbers thinned in these years, when slave labor was on the rise in most other parts of the subtropical and tropical Atlantic plantation world. The importation of black slaves began around 1443, but became numerically significant only in the following century. In 1552, there were approximately 3,000 slaves, forming 15 percent of the island’s total population. As cane cultivation declined during the late sixteenth century and gave way to grape growing, the need for labor (especially relatively expensive African labor) fell and the number of Africans decreased, cultivators either selling their slaves to Canary Islanders or setting them free. By 1598, there were roughly 1,150 slaves, forming 6 percent of the population, and their numbers continued to drop in the two centuries that followed. Indirectly, of course, blacks played an important role in the shaping of Madeira’s market. The trade in slaves was central to the development of the trade in Madeira, for the former brought ships to Funchal demanding wine, fruit, and other goods to satisfy slave traders’ personal, barter, and provision needs on the African coast. It was a one-way exchange, for few vessels returned with slaves directly from Africa; but the wine so exported was used as currency in slave-trading castles and depots by whites in their barter negotiations with African kings, in the medical treatment of whites and slaves, and as a sustenance and medicine for whites and sometimes slaves on the Middle Passage. Perhaps not so coincidentally, the rise of the Madeira wine trade roughly parallels the rise of the British and French slave trade.<sup>29</sup>

Notwithstanding the declining need, white Madeirans did not stop buying and selling slaves. In 1663, for instance, the English East India Company requested an islander to buy it two blacks “good, sober,” and “well skilled in planting.” Little is known about the slaves, but the request and others like it suggest there was still a vibrant market in black labor that survived the switch from sugar to wine, which had by the 1660s fully been accomplished. Registers of ships entering Funchal harbor between 1727 and 1768 record the importation of 1,337 slaves—an average of 33 per year. One-third of these slaves was brought from

Africa, one-quarter from Brazil, and one-quarter from the West Indies and North America. Whether most stayed or quickly moved on to other destinations is unclear, although church records indicate some remained for a time: Funchal's two central parishes baptized at least 556 slaves, constituting 3 percent of baptisms there, between 1750 and 1799.<sup>30</sup>

Blacks, whether slave or free, seldom worked the vine land. Grape growing being less labor intensive than sugar cultivation, there was less "reason" for them, or so it was felt at the time. The great amount of slack time in cultivation and manufacture and the comparatively minimal amount of exertion required even in heavy working times counseled against the year-round expense of providing food, clothing, and housing. So it was that Africans went from being primarily outdoor laborers to indoor or town laborers. By the middle of the eighteenth century, most slaves were domestics.

This state of affairs would likely have persisted, for there is little evidence that the abolitionist sentiment sweeping mainland Portugal inspired local support. It was the Crown that intervened. A royal *alvará* of 1761 banned the transport of black slaves from Portugal's dependencies to the kingdom and declared that those so transported would be freed. Unlike many royal decrees, this one stuck. Ships subsequently arriving at Madeira with slaves were refused entry. But the decree was confusing. Slaves already living in Portugal were not emancipated, nor were those arriving from non-Portuguese lands. The 1761 law was designed to prevent slaves being taken out of Brazil, where they were needed to work plantations and mines. When asked in 1768 whether the ban applied to slaves arriving from non-Portuguese lands, the Crown interpreted its edict broadly to include all lands. Five years later, it abolished slavery entirely, summarily freeing all blacks.<sup>31</sup> Even then, however, emancipation was only a principle, for slavery endured in places. Some Madeira exporters continued to use slaves in their Funchal operations, in their houses, offices, shops, warehouses, and on the harbor front through 1815.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of their share and their lock on goods traded between 1640 and 1815, the Portuguese controlled all of Madeira's professions and occupations but one—the export trade. "Strangers"—as natives referred to foreigners—dominated that branch of the economy. That they came to do so is remarkable given the restraints upon them. Strangers were essentially noncitizens whose allegiance and obedience were owed to the sovereigns of other states, and Madeirans' understanding of alienage was largely in sync with the canonical *ius gentium* of accepted private international law as articulated by Grotius and Vattel. In their view, foreigners possessed few property rights: they could not own property absolutely, they could not wage suits about property, and they could not inherit property. Moreover, they possessed no political rights: they could not vote, and

they could not hold office. Madeirans' application of alienage, however, was less clear-cut. The category was used flexibly, strategically, opportunistically—there was in effect no fixed status for foreigners, only a shared sense of legal possibilities, and the parties drew on them as they saw fit.<sup>33</sup> Outcomes depended as much on the courts, judges, litigants, and issues as they did on law. About the only thing foreigners could do in Madeira was trade, and trading rights were spelled out in various commercial treaties signed by London and Lisbon between 1576 and 1654 and in the enabling legislation recognizing English consulships and factories and judicial advocates (*juizes conservadores*) designed to aid foreigners in legal matters. Complaints flowed to the English consul and the Portuguese advocate, but whether they would or could do anything about them and how the law would be applied were always unclear.<sup>34</sup>

Foreigners had long dominated the island's economy. Strangers were present soon after Madeira's settlement in the 1420s. Some, like William Annan of England and John Drummond of Scotland, arrived before 1500 and stayed. A handful of Englishmen and a like number of Europeans are known to have become permanent residents between 1547 and 1640 in the final century of sugar production and exercised significant governmental and social power. Scores of others traded no more than a decade or two and then left. Foreigners formed an influential group, but a small one, never comprising more than a fraction of the total population.<sup>35</sup>

Their small share of the population is deceiving. Foreigners concentrated themselves in Funchal, became active in its overseas export businesses, and drove the entire economy. Funchal's ruling body, the municipal Council, required merchants to register their imports into and exports from the island on a ship-by-ship basis, and the resulting lists are revealing of who the overseas traders were. Before the rise of wine in the 1640s, foreigners outnumbered natives directly involved in transoceanic distribution of sugar: between 1470 and 1500, some 24 foreigners worked in the city alongside 19 Portuguese; between 1500 and 1600, at least 246 foreigners exported sugar, wine, or other goods from Madeira alongside 121 Portuguese. After the eclipse of island sugar that occurred in the years 1575–1650, the shares were switched: more Portuguese than foreigners exported wine (17 out of 30 in 1682 and 118 out of 202 in 1815).<sup>36</sup>

But these numbers are also deceiving. With wine, foreigners together shipped out greater volumes than natives. In 1682, the foreigners managed nearly four-fifths of the export. It seemed to many as if they were the only traders, despite the fact that natives still comprised an overwhelming majority. While a wonderful example of inaccurate Protestant self-deception, there is some truth in the 1771 surmise: there were "a great number of English and French Roman Catholics



settled there.” some English and French Protestants, and a smattering of Europeans—Russians, Swedes, Danes, Germans, Dutch, Swiss, Spaniards, and Italians—and North Americans. They dominated the economy’s leading sector: in 1775, they managed over four-fifths of wine exported, and in 1815, just under four-fifths. Their mix and importance gave a cosmopolitan flavor to the place that few islands in the Atlantic—and, indeed, few cities on the Portuguese mainland but Lisbon—could boast of.<sup>37</sup>

Madeira’s foreign export merchants came “from almost every part of Europe.” English-speaking traders formed the largest subcohort. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the fifty or so English people (merchants, plus their employees, families, and servants) probably constituted roughly 1 percent of Funchal’s population. In addition, they were served by an assemblage of fellow countrymen of roughly equal number who provided them with ancillary medical, food, lodging, and other services; that group grew as the merchant body grew. The records of the British Factory for 1774, for instance, reveal the presence of a doctor, a minister, a lawyer, his wife, an Englishman with no known occupation, an array of bankrupt or senile pensioners, an Englishman and his wife who took care of shipwrecked sailors, and a tavern keeper and his wife who ran an inn wistfully named “The British.” By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British probably numbered five hundred, or roughly 3 percent of Funchal’s population. They were the richest, most powerful of the foreigners, but they were not alone; a dozen other foreign groups were at work as well. Combined, their presence imparted a strong international flavor to the city—and, when they chose to band together politically, they constituted a powerful mercantile lobby.<sup>38</sup>

Into this porphyritic world of largely cosmopolitan, largely Protestant foreign traders was introduced around the beginning of the nineteenth century a small, noncommercial group of foreign whites: invalids. Madeira had attracted the infirm since at least the close of the Seven Years’ War, and probably before. In 1767, for instance, one Murray set down there specifically “for the recovery of his health.” The Scot did not find himself much improved by the experience, and he returned to London. But the return of men like Murray did little to dissuade others from following in their footsteps. William Hickey’s wife’s maid was just one among many who “benefited materially” from a stay in 1782. As the infirm reported back to families and friends, a reputation for Madeira’s healthiness spread throughout Britain and Europe. Some, like the sister of the Countess of Glencairn, visited while traveling to other places and stayed awhile, but others decided to remain, to return and settle permanently, or to return again and again.<sup>39</sup> Those seeking a cure on the island were initially embraced by Madeira’s wine exporters, who offered “good wine, good victuals, and a good room with

tolerable society,” seeing these visitors as potential customers and recommendations. Taking their cue from doctors, they suggested that, since their Tinta (a local red wine) was of “great service” healthwise to some of the natives, it would be invaluable to invalids.<sup>40</sup> The cure was further burnished by fashion and war. Prominent men and women found the island worth a visit, novelists sent their protagonists to it for their health, and news of their trips encouraged emulation, especially among the British: colonial governors and officials—even the future George IV—set out for Madeira.<sup>41</sup> After the British occupied the island in 1801, it acquired an even stronger appeal to English-speaking consumptives desiring not only “clear and salubrious” air but also a safe haven in time of war.<sup>42</sup> Not all physicians counseled a visit, even in peacetime, pointing out the unlikelihood of gaining advantage, and not all “foreigners” welcomed visitors from their homeland, resenting the disruption to business that converted “the island into a general infirmary and individual houses into sick wards.” Yet it became a significant “*demier resort*.” Wine exporters could do little but profit from the growing fame of Madeira—both the island and the wine.<sup>43</sup>

#### RELATIONS

The Portuguese were famous for their sobriety and, natives forming the bulk of the population, this trait shaped their relations with the foreigners. On a material level, it manifested itself in bland food, temperate drinking, drab clothing, little color or decoration, and a paucity of public entertainments. There were no universities, and no academic, literary, or artistic societies or events, such as those found in Lisbon, Bahia, Charleston, or London. Few nonreligious schools existed before the early decades of the nineteenth century, when a school of art was founded to encourage local painting and design. There were neither lecture series nor reading groups before 1820, when a program of scientific talks was established. There was neither public library nor museum. There was no public press before 1821. Opera, ballet, and orchestra were not available. The offerings of the theater—first opened in the 1770s—were outmoded, and its schedule erratic. Public pleasures were rare: there is no record of boat races, horse races, cockfights, raffles, or lotteries. The only exceptions to the rule of sobriety were festivals and spectacles given by the governor. But even these were few.<sup>44</sup>

To say that the island’s public life was sober is not to suggest socializing never occurred. Roman Catholics daily encountered their friends at Mass, even if attendance was driven primarily by devotion. Friendly calls among relatives and associates took place. Reading must have been an important form of personal amusement to the literate (admittedly a small group), given the books that merchant householders recorded in their inventories. Private parties were held. For

men, as well, there were opportunities to overcome the restraint through membership in confraternities or brotherhoods—religious, charitable, or professional groups of pious men dedicated to good works whose meetings often ended with drunken revelries and militia musters.<sup>45</sup>

Portuguese restraint found its analogue in an adherence to purity of blood laws that had been in existence since the fifteenth century. Pure Portuguese, under such restrictive laws, should not mix with Portuguese Moors and Jews. Detailed inquiries were to be made “into the family and descent” of a suitor or matrimonial prospect before a marriage was entered into, in order to prevent any “affinity” with undesirable persons. After the *marquês de Pombal* abolished such laws and the distinction between “old” and “new” Christians in 1761, upper castes on Madeira began to relax their guard, allowing money and connection to ease remaining qualms. Still, for the island’s middling and lower classes, customary separations remained intact.<sup>46</sup>

Denied public entertainments and any participation in native domestic socializing, foreigners grudgingly adapted, accepting some aspects of Madeira’s native/stranger divide and working around others. They never admitted the place to be anything more than dull, and they dealt with the dullness by manically plying their trade. Business reigned, and the hours of the day marched according to its beat. Merchants tended to rise early, work all day—taking an hour or two for lunch—and go to bed early. “There were no recreations, diversions, or companions.” The natives, one young Scots apprentice found, were “a very sullen, proud, deceitful people”; all but the priests and collegians lacked wit or conversational skill. The English were “much worse,” for they were wildly competitive. There knew only “jealousy of one another’s correspondents.” Everyone tried to get “another’s” trade. If they spoke to one another, it was “criticizing or telling stories” about third parties. It was “a bad time for new beginners,” he groaned. “No place in the world” was “more convenient for business, or quicker in dispatch than this, especially for Englishmen who have nothing to divert them from it.”<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless, distractions came in off the ships, with the visits of friends, correspondents, and people who had been recommended to their hospitality by friends or correspondents: the height of the shipping season saw a continual stream of boarders and lodgers, all needing food, drink, chaperoning around the island, and explanation of its customs and manners. Yet, the hospitality was work for the merchants, and the camaraderie short-lived. Much more relaxing encounters took place among the foreigners themselves, both within national groupings and across national lines, who fostered a culture of sociability more or less unattached to business. An ambience of camaraderie, calls on each side, semiofficial receptions, and private parties glued foreigners together. Amateur

theatricals, impromptu dinners, picnics, excursions, balls, and dances lightened their routine business schedules, making Funchal seem slightly more like the provincial capitals of Edinburgh, Dublin, Bordeaux, or Philadelphia. They tried “every amusement that a retired mountainous place will admit of.” Some swam; others went horseback riding; still others favored shooting. Competitive games were common forms of amusement at home: whist, backgammon, checkers, and bowls.<sup>48</sup>

Chief among their outlets was “Bachelors Hall.” Foreigners could not join confraternities, and clubs would not meet in the town’s taverns, on account of their substandard appointment and fare. So the British combined the two in the Hall, which they founded by 1758. For ten years at least, they rented a villa, the *Quinta do Val*, which sat just beyond the city’s walls, about a mile north of the harbor. It was here that James Cook, Joseph Banks, and Daniel Solander planted a tulip tree as a token of thanks for the Hall’s hospitality. When a merchant bought the Val in the late 1760s, the bachelors moved to the *Quinta dos Pinheiros*, higher up with an even more spectacular view. Hall accounts suggest it was mainly a drinking and dining club for single men. One typical excursion required “cloths for country entertainments, 36 common knives & forks, 2 carving knives, 72 pairs candle snuffers, 72 small oval tin plates for tent table, and a japanned knife tray.” The comfortable, genteel life led there was such a mark of the community that mere mention of the Hall among transatlantic travelers conjured up island hospitality and the quintessence of international camaraderie.<sup>49</sup>

Records of invitations to the Hall suggest that the English-speaking community was, socially, no respecter of nationality and religion among foreigners: many of the guests did not speak English. Social relations among foreigners were generally harmonious, if competitive. They invited one another to dinners and dances. They married one another. Typically, when American merchants had people staying with them and needed something to accommodate visitors, they borrowed it from Dutch or French friends.<sup>50</sup> Similar efforts served to bind individuals into a community where none had existed before: securing debts, witnessing deeds, providing guardianship, making beneficiary of estates, appraising estates. Across nationalities and among divisions of any nationality, ethnicity was not a very strong force; rather, it was malleable, and the gaps apparently easily bridged. The uprootedness and mobility experienced by most foreigners, atop the alienation of living in a strange, sometimes hostile place, broke down what might otherwise have been an obstruction to exchange.<sup>51</sup>

Interactions between strangers and natives, in contrast, were more restrained. Both believed that the groups should “not mix much together.” They were segregated by religion, for the most part; by class, since few foreigners were of the

lower sort and many were middling and upper; and by national allegiance. The Portuguese had "a strong aversion" to the British in particular, especially British Protestants, and the British held a similar view in reverse.<sup>52</sup>

"Much social intercourse between them" never arose. Recorded instances when the Portuguese interacted socially with foreigners neither correspondents nor partners are rare, as are times when the two groups allied themselves with one another for personal reasons. If a Protestant English merchant married a Catholic Portuguese woman, it was assumed he would "first renounce his religion." Of the roughly four hundred foreigners known to have worked in the wine trade between 1700 and 1815, some six married Portuguese women. Equally indicative of the avoidance of intermarriage: of the 3,350 marriages performed in the parishes of the Sé and São Pedro between 1750 and 1799, only 50 involved bonds between non-Madeiran Portuguese and foreigners; 8 of these 50 involved an English-speaking partner, and 2 of these 8 involved an English speaker and a non-English-speaking foreigner. Even fewer English women married Portuguese men.<sup>53</sup> In business, as well, natives and foreigners did not mix very much. The English allied themselves infrequently with the Portuguese as partners, and seldom turned to Portuguese for assistance. They did so with reason: entanglements with locals might end up before local judges who favored natives, whatever the strength of particular claims.<sup>54</sup>

The passage of time and the ascendancy of the British broke down some of the time-honored unwillingness of natives to assist and interact with foreigners, and vice versa. The two groups needed each other. That they could communicate was critical. Most resident English-speaking merchants (and this was nearly all of the foreigners) read, spoke, and wrote at least rudimentary Portuguese; all merchants whose records have survived kept some books in Portuguese, usually those having to do with growers and suppliers of wine. Although their records are scarcer, the major Portuguese merchants were able to speak and write English, although they were unwilling to exhibit their proficiency. Too, government officials, when called upon to converse with foreigners in their respective tongue, usually did so; when given a choice, they opted for French.<sup>55</sup>

As the British and Americans exporters became more involved in importing goods to be consumed on the island and in managing shops for their retail (both functions of a deepening engagement with wine), they tied themselves into the supply and credit networks of the Portuguese and into the natives' ability to repay. Conversely, as the Portuguese produced more wine for export, they became reliant upon consumer networks in the growing English-speaking world. Over the course of the "long eighteenth century," relationships developed that undermined the attitudes of the most genealogically proud Portuguese and most self-

identified culturally superior Britons. This was unavoidable given the fact that space and business were not segregated.<sup>56</sup>

Mixing and assisting were not restricted to business. Apprenticeships, partnerships, and ventures of all sorts; marriages; kindnesses and loans; memberships in Masonic lodges; the provision of medical services; the relaxing of dietary rules to accommodate guests; a measure of religious toleration of non-Catholic or non-Protestant institutions and customs; the intervention of governors in legal process: all served in small ways to bind the native and stranger communities more tightly together by 1815.<sup>57</sup>

#### THE INSTITUTIONS OF A CROSSROADS COMMUNITY

The island so strategically situated tradewise at the head of the Canary Current and North-East Trade Winds and blessed with exploitable natural and human resources underwent a profound shift in economic orientation in the seventeenth century, moving from the Atlantic's premier producer of sugar to that community's premier producer of wine. The ensuing "Triumph of Bacchus" was assisted by the reworking of older civic institutions and the introduction of newer ones, institutions directly affecting wine and indirectly influencing the ways that native owners, cultivators, farmers, and laborers and foreign and native merchants interacted.

No part of the Madeira wine complex remained untouched by this reorientation. Not only did grape vines replace sugarcanes but the comparatively greater riches that accrued from vine cultivation to producers and exporters also freed islanders from using up more marginally arable ground or pursuing less lucrative alternatives. Increasingly, more money was made in an exclusive focus on wine; crops grown on the island for centuries, like wheat and corn, were procured more cheaply and easily from the Azores, England, and North America. Wine monoculture brought a relaxation in labor demands and a decrease in capital demands on owners and cultivators, wine being cheaper to produce than sugar. At the same time, though, an increase in output encouraged a widening in global distribution and, so, an increase in capital demands on exporters.

Development of what became Madeira's export-driven wine economy went through several broad phases. Initial experimentation coincided with initial settlement. Zarco, it was commonly believed, planted the first vines, in the 1420s, and vineyards and wines were taxed in the 1470s, but the production of wine remained primarily a subsistence undertaking. Sugar dominated this period.<sup>58</sup>

A boom in wine production and export began about 1600 and ushered in a second phase that endured for the next seven or eight decades and saw wine sur-

pass sugar as the island's principal crop and export. This surge coincided with several developments. On the one hand, sources for Atlantic sugar grew. New World competition arose in the sixteenth century; by 1600, Brazilian sugar had bested that from Madeira, in terms of both quantity and quality. So, by the 1630s, there was simply more and better sugar coming out of Brazil, at a time when Madeira's canes were being ravaged by a plague of rats and insects. Thereafter other suppliers joined Brazil to crowd out any remaining share Madeira sugar might have enjoyed in European markets. Colonists first planted canes in Barbados in the 1640s, and in other islands in the Lesser Antilles in subsequent decades. Their export became significant enough within a matter of years to capture English- and French-speaking consumer markets, nailing the coffin on Madeiran sugar and confining the market for Brazilian sugar to Iberia. By the 1680s, then, there were "so many Sugar Plantations in Brazil and the West Indies" that it was not worth Madeirans' while to cultivate the crop, Hans Sloane reported, even if (as many believed) their type of sugar was superior to New World varieties. On the other hand, new demands for shippers emerged, independent of any supply change. The island's newest export could satisfy emerging Atlantic shipping and consumption needs: it filled empty holds in oceangoing vessels at a time when European vessels were increasingly involved in provisioning new settlements in America, and their holds were on average expanding; and it sustained many drinkers in North and Caribbean America and Brazil with a beverage that was neither successfully nor continuously produced in those markets. On top of this, moreover, the surge was built with infrastructure already laid down: Portuguese salt, fruit, and sugar traders cut numerous channels before 1640 through which wine could subsequently flow. Northwestern European traders, for instance, had long come to Portugal with grain and bought salt, fruit, and sugar, and to this mix could easily add both mainland and island wine. Early on, the ties and nodes of the sugar trade in particular formed the basis of the emerging wine trade.<sup>59</sup>

A long period, stretching from the 1670s to the 1810s, formed one last developmental period—in which slow and steady growth gave final shape to the production and distribution sectors. It constituted the age of the wine complex's great consolidation. Owners and exporters flourished as never before, even if the greatest part of the population, the growers, remained depressed. As chapter 5 discusses in detail, the number of ships departing Funchal each year (almost all of which carried some wine) increased tenfold between 1640 and 1815, and the quantity of wine they carried rose sixfold. Exports peaked at 20,400 pipes in 1805 (the pipe being the principal container of Portuguese wine, holding between 110 and 132 gallons, depending on the place of first export—in Madeira's case, 110).

Exporters reached the heights of their activity between 1800 and 1815—such levels were never regained.<sup>60</sup>

During this age of growth and consolidation, Madeira's exporters shifted away from reliance upon markets in Portugal and its dependencies toward cultivation of consumers in the English-speaking world. As they did so, their work became even more complex. From almost exclusively focusing on supplying ship provisions on demand to visiting captains in the mid-seventeenth century, exporters turned to supplying wine to repeat customers (American and Asian for the most part), to extending to those customers a more full-bodied commercial service, and to importing dry goods and grain stuffs from them for retail to islanders or reexport to Iberians. Participants thought this a "revolution in trade." It gained particular momentum between the 1740s and 1760s: while the possibility for exporters engaging in island retailing had long existed in the bringing to market of dry goods, fish, and grain, they only entered into it with any vigor in these decades. The value of such business was clear. Exporters wanted dry goods, fish, and wheat "in order to serve [their] customers," that is, the growers. The nature of this business was also risky. Doing well, however, required buying well, for better cloth, say, attracted better wine. Moreover, specialization to the point of relying on imported food, despite the disruptions of frequent wars, was an impressive instance of risk taking, but only for those most in danger of starving—the growers who formed the bulk of the population, who depended on the food and manufactures, and who had no control over the process run by the risk takers, who were never really much at risk. Given islanders' nearly absolute dependence on these imports in the post-sugar era, sales to the cultivators, farmers, and owners, especially credit sales, generally gave the exporters a stranglehold over them, which in the end allowed them to gain competitive preferences in the purchase of wine. Sales to local shopkeepers gave them similar powers.<sup>61</sup>

As the population of the island grew, the people transitioned from sugar to wine, and relations between natives and strangers became more intertwined and contested, so, too, did the capital city grow and its institutions evolve to meet the demands of the leading wine sector.<sup>62</sup> Supposedly named for the fennel (*funcha*) that flourished in its environs, Funchal had spread out over a square mile by 1600. A wall sixteen feet high and four feet wide protected it from the sea, its surf, and intruders. Three relatively wide streams formed the eastern and western bounds of the town. Eight east/west streets intersected at varying angles eight north/south streets coming down the mountain. Five clusters of buildings served as foci for the townsfolk: the Customs House along the harbor; the residences and offices of the governor and his troops further west; the cathedral; a square

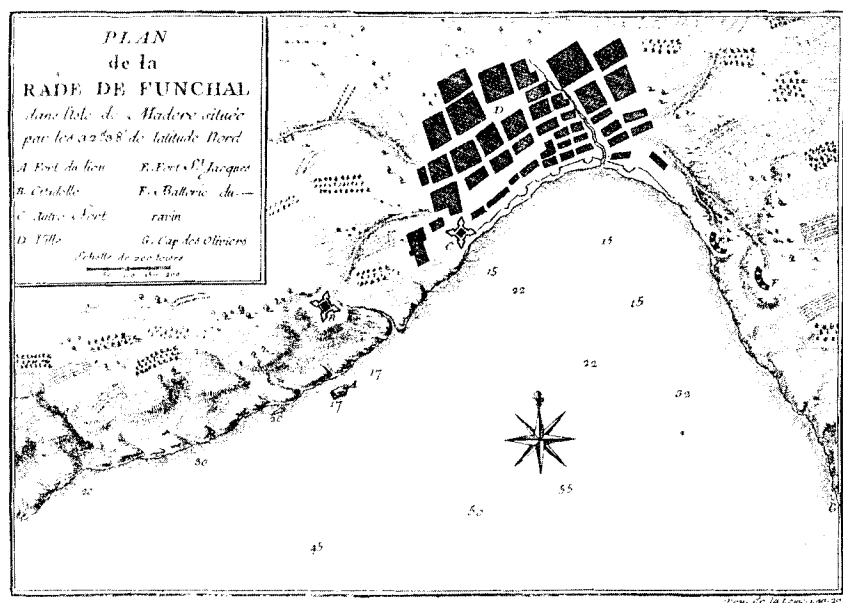


Figure 1.4. Plan of the road of Funchal, 1728.

Source: Antoine Jean de Laval, *Voyage de la Louisiane* (Paris, 1728). Courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Sci 2707.28\*, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

northeast of the cathedral bounded by the Bishop's Palace, Jesuit College and Church, and Town Hall; and the principal marketplace and pillory to the east.<sup>63</sup>

Although the city's area and layout remained more or less fixed from 1600 to 1815, the number of forts, offices, and residences and the range of services grew, as the population rose and its trade burgeoned.<sup>64</sup> Population statistics for the city are sparse and rather unreliable, but what survive suggest growth. In 1598, Funchal had 2,279 hearths; in 1675, about 3,000. Its population remained stable or fell slightly from 1675 to 1700. Later data for hearths have not survived, but complementary information on inhabitants suggests that this halt or decline gave way to growth. In 1687, some 9,836 people (one-eighth of the island's total population) lived in the city; in 1797, 18,892 did (one-fifth).<sup>65</sup>

Within the eight-square-block city, a series of communities grew up after 1640—overlapping, intertwined, cooperative, and competing. Official, religious, and residential-commercial spaces rose up alongside one another. Imbued as they were with a notion of property in which land was a foundation for power and culture, visitors from Protestant Europe and Anglo-America paid close at-

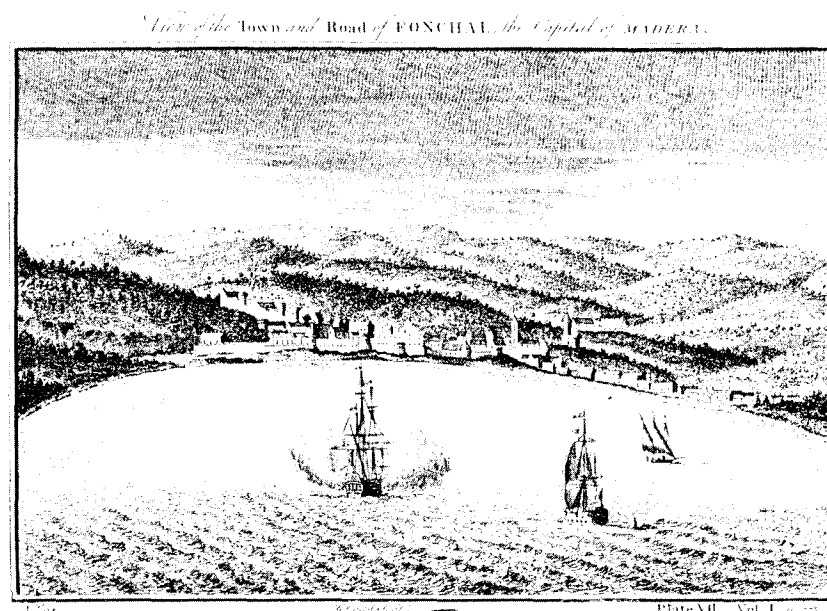


Figure 1.5. View of the road and town of Funchal, engraved by J. Kyp and G. Child, 1745.

Source: "Supplement," in Thomas Astley, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vol. 1 (London, 1745), facing p. 20; this image is identical to the earlier *Prospect of the Town of Funchal*, engraved by Johannes Kyp before 1722. Courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Geog 4157.45, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

tention to these spaces, to what was owned and by whom: the sites, buildings, uses, occupants, and contents all came under scrutiny.

#### STATE

For someone arriving by water, the most common landing place at Funchal lay near the center of the beach that stretched before the city. After passing through a thick, high wall that ran the length of the beach, the visitor first encountered the Customs House (*Alfândega*) and a string of governmental buildings that left no questions as to the centrality and power of the state and the state's reliance on trade. The massive Customs House, shown in most contemporary paintings and engravings, dominated this waterfront, with its three stories, "a large paved court where the merchants walk as upon an Exchange," and a battery of cannon for protecting trade-based revenues.<sup>66</sup> Adjacent lay the Royal Treasury (*Erário*

Régio). Moving west inside the wall, one passed the small Health House (Casa da Saúde), the office of the chief health officer (*capitão da saúde*), and by 1703 the Product House containing the offices of the product master (*patrão-mor*) and quarters for his guards (*guarda-mores*)—all of whom had responsibility for examining incoming ships' state of health and granting passengers and goods entry warrants.<sup>67</sup> Further west stood the largest structures: the official residence of the governor and the castellated Fortaleza São Lourenço (plate 3), the island's principal defensive fort, housing troops under his command.<sup>68</sup> Along the north-eastern bounds of the city lay the Town Hall (Casa da Câmara), which housed most of the executive and judicial offices of municipal government. A large market square (*praça*) was situated near the eastern edge of the bay in a triangle of land formed by the confluence of the Ribeira de Santa Luzeira and the Ribeira de Santa Maria. Lastly, scattered around the city stood several forts possessing varying degrees of defensibility, and these increased in number as the population expanded and perception of the need for its protection grew. Given the island's potentially vulnerable position in the Atlantic sea-lanes, defense was never far from the minds of Madeirans.<sup>69</sup>

What residents knew and what visitors discovered about these buildings and their occupants was that they constituted a labyrinth of overlapping and competitive royal and municipal institutions at work within the town. Government being grounded “upon the Plan of that of Portugal,” an absolutist monarchical regime, all governance and property were in principle subject to the will of the monarch and his representative the governor and captain general (*governador* and *capitão geral*), who stood at the head of the island's military and civil departments. But to characterize Portuguese rule in Madeira as wholly absolute would be inaccurate. Actual control and administration always involved a contest among several powers, only one of which was royal. Considerable voice was exercised by city officials, landowners, and merchants whose main concerns were the promotion of personal authority, economic growth in the island's wine trade, and material well-being.

The governor's chief responsibility was to defend the island, and in this capacity he ruled supreme. Like the official who took charge after Portugal regained control of its dominions in 1640, each governor after him concerned himself primarily with the island's troops, forts, and militias as well as with visits by foreigners and their ships. That there were forts, walls, and cannon suggest the importance of security; that Madeira was never attacked attests to his success in maintaining it.<sup>70</sup>

The governor was less absolute and his authority more questioned in matters of finance. At the head of the Royal Treasury (Fazenda Real)—the most signifi-

cant office in government—stood a comptroller (*provedor*) who answered not to the governor but to a Lisbon-based overseer (*vedor*) who had appointed him. From 1640, the comptroller sat as the president of a council (Tribunal do Alfândega), which after 1700 functioned independently of the governor and often thwarted his initiatives. Later on in 1761 was added a Royal Treasury (Erário Régio), over which the comptroller presided. Not until a council (the Junta da Real Fazenda) that the governor headed was inserted between the overseer and comptroller in 1775 did the governor regain some of his former influence in financial affairs.

The financial power of the governor was always limited, even after 1775. The comptroller managed revenues garnered from agriculture for much of the period, especially the tithe due to the king of all produce grown on the island (*dízimo*). In addition, he directed fiscal matters relating to shipping, like the authorization, levying, collection, and recalculation of duties, particularly the 10 percent import duties and the 11 percent export duties. Nearly all revenue flowing to the island government (as opposed to the Lisbon government) came from taxes and duties on or relating to wine that the comptroller's council (Tribunal) set, collected, and reset: the *dízimo*, the oldest tax, an imposition on agricultural exports levied to assist the Church; the *imposição do vinho*, a tax on retail sales; the *direitos de saída e entrada*, taxes on export and import; the *donativo*, another imposition on agricultural products; the *finto*, a wartime tax to subsidize government; the *subsídio literario*, a tax on wine, *aguardente*, and vinegar to aid schools and teachers; and the *imposição das estufas*, a tax on stoves used to heat wine during production. The comptroller used what revenues he could to pay for military and civil salaries, military supplies, and the upkeep of public buildings. Nor was his power limited to handling agricultural and commercial revenues. He set guidelines for wine measures used by growers and merchants, banned as it suited him the import of foreign products or the barter of goods in exchange of wine, and required merchants to submit dispatches that precisely listed the contents and destination of all cargoes. All in all, the comptroller and his officers wielded seemingly unlimited power, often in contravention of gubernatorial policy and royal law.<sup>71</sup>

Collecting revenue fell to the Customs. At its head sat a chief judge (*juiz da Alfândega*), an appointee of the comptroller and usually the administration's oldest judge. Among the more important of his staff was the “receiver of the king's duties” (*almoxarife*) and beneath him ranged an army of employees. Charged with collecting royal revenue, the Customs constituted the largest official cohort, working out of the large building that dominated the harbor.<sup>72</sup> Yet, while legally authorized to collect revenue, the Customs managed to do so only by bal-

ancing interests. On the one hand, it reconfigured many duties it had not initiated. Most taxes were established by other branches of government, like the 1772 impositions on wine, brandy, and vinegar, which were enacted by the Crown for the creation and maintenance of primary schools. But the Customs found that it had to recalculate and raise them, sometimes in accord with the dictates of the king and governor, but just as often in opposition to them.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the Customs did not manage all revenues. Collection of the impost on Brazilian tobacco and snuff, for instance, was assigned to a contractor, usually resident in Lisbon, who purchased the rights to sell such goods on the island, take payment in wine, and reexport the wine to Brazil and India. About this, the Alfândega could do little.<sup>74</sup>

Equally independent of the governor was the bureaucracy of judges and courts that meted out justice to islanders. Law was the bailiwick of the chief judge (*desembargador*), who resided in Lisbon, visited the island occasionally, and acted as the judge of last appeal, and his deputy the inspector general (*corregedor*), who resided in Madeira and ran the island's judicial department. These officers received their appointment from the monarch and held their places at royal pleasure. In principle, they heard all causes on appeal from inferior courts and judges; appeals from their decisions went to the king's court of appeal in Lisbon.<sup>75</sup> Yet, in practice, justice in Madeira was as contested and problematic as in most places. Law was not certain, property, as we have seen, being particularly insecure for foreigners. Every six or seven years, the king dispatched a judge to unravel "all causes that had not been well decided." In the intervening period, those concerned with wine production and distribution waded through legal and judicial process as if through a labyrinth, native and stranger alike. Jurisdictions and regulations were complementary, overlapping, and competing; obtaining redress and fair treatment was intricate and complicated; and the rules and judges were generally inflexible and rigid. Each of the three major geo-military divisions of Madeira and Porto Santo, for instance, had its own law department officially supervised by the chief judge and inspector general yet actually managed by a judge elected by local senators in the captaincy's representative forum. Further complicating royal jurisdiction, each municipality had its own courts and judges, and military tribunals operated relatively independently of all courts.<sup>76</sup>

The law was less lenient and respectful to Britons and other foreigners than to Portuguese. There was no need that it be, of course. As noncitizens, foreigners were not extended the rights of property, in much the same way that a foreigner had no rights under the Roman *ius civile*, or if they were allowed certain exceptions or privileges, such were extended so erratically and at such a high cost that no right attached themselves and no precedents were established.<sup>77</sup> Foreign mer-

chants seldom felt they could "obtain justice in the courts at Madera" or from the Portuguese jurisprudential system in general; and, while the sentiment was what one would expect to be expressed by foreigners anywhere in this period, there is independent confirmation of their insecurity, and there was no attempt to ameliorate their disabilities as there was elsewhere.<sup>78</sup>

Legal problems for foreigners fell into one of three categories. First, the laws were complicated and vague, and the jurisdictions unclear. The laws relating to import duties were complex, and they became more so over time. Shippers and traders often experienced great difficulty in understanding, solving, or explaining them; the intricate interlacing of parts made it often impossible to grasp them separately.<sup>79</sup> Second, the laws were not equally applied to natives and strangers. Criminal laws were unequally administered. Commercial laws were peculiarly subject to the discrimination of those in power.<sup>80</sup> The comptroller could block the flow of goods and dispatch of ships to the Americas, and little help could be found in the courts. Or the product master who examined the quality of the fish imported from America could throw it into the sea if he thought it bad or could sell it to local fishmongers at a price much below that of the market, with no legal justification grounded in law ever being proffered. Or the Town Council could forbid foreign merchants to sell certain goods above certain prices and require grain importers to tender unnecessarily detailed bills of lading.<sup>81</sup> Finally, the resolution of local problems was elusive. In 1719, one merchant in Madeira fruitlessly complained of "appeals lying from thence to the courts at Lisbon," where the British ambassadors or envoys responsible for arguing them did "not concern themselves in those matters," thinking it "below their characters to apply to the judges of any of the said courts but only to the King and his ministers of state in the last resort." Fifty years later not much had changed. Lawsuits were still "very troublesome" for foreigners, as a determination in Funchal decided only "that the same thing, however clear & obnoxious, must be tryed" later on the continent and, in doing so, fall into a well of oblivion from which no final legal judgment was likely to emerge.<sup>82</sup>

With responsibilities intricately articulated, jurisdictions not clearly defined, officials nearly absolute in power vis-à-vis foreigners, and justice biased, certainty was elusive and property was highly insecure for those foreigners involved in the wine industry. Given the realities of the system, how could distributors obtain justice? They could avoid law altogether. They could use law at their peril. Or they could adopt intermediate approaches. It was the latter that the exporters generally favored. On an official level, they could cultivate the favor of the governor, since his attitude was critical to the conduct of or interference with trade. Drawing from the "contributions" English-speaking merchants imposed on

themselves, the British annually made a 600\$000 “donation” to the governor on the Portuguese king’s birthday, in order to keep him “always amenable” to their business. Given the large size of this gift, the small annual income earned by the governor, and the precarious resources of his office, this donation usually succeeded in smoothing relations.<sup>83</sup> Exporters could also hire an advocate for their community on a semiofficial basis. Foreign merchants technically stood beyond the reach of royal, municipal, and military jurisdictions. Accordingly, from at least 1705, English-speaking residents hired a Portuguese trained in the law to act as their advocate—the *conservador dos Inglêses*—and handle disputes among themselves, disputes with Portuguese citizens, questions over the interpretation of treaty rights, disputes over specific duties, and debt cases. Yet his assistance went only so far, given the vague interpretation of law and the erratic dissemination of justice.<sup>84</sup> Finally, foreigners could resort to manipulation and bribery. There was, all knew, “no doing business . . . without being well with all the people in power,” and that could only be “managed” with “a sum that is not worth consideration compared to the object attained.”<sup>85</sup>

Alongside royal officials worked municipal officers. Each city and town had its own municipal council (*câmara*). Funchal’s Council, the island’s most important, met at the Table of the Propertied Men (*Mesa da Vereações*), northeast of the cathedral. The Council’s main body—the Senate (*Senado*)—was made up of propertied managers (*vereadores*) elected by voters to pass legislation and spend revenue.<sup>86</sup> Another influential elected council (*Conselho*) approved all loans and taxes and set expenses; made up of voters who paid the highest municipal taxes, it served as a check upon the Senate.<sup>87</sup> The Senate approved municipal legislation and oversaw its implementation, managing Funchal’s courts, police, and markets. It appointed officers, like municipal judges (*juizes ordinarios e pedãneos*), city and village magistrates (*alcaldes*), bailiffs (*meirinhos*), inferior judges (*almo-tacês*), and city and mountain ridge guards (*guardas-mores*). It gathered municipal taxes, especially the tax on retailed wine (*imposição do vinho*). Most critical to the wine industry, the Senate set the floors and ceilings of prices to be paid to farmers and cultivators, decreed cultivation techniques and harvest times, and regulated imports and exports. Moreover, it guided the Health House and its Chief Guard, both of which worked with the Customs’ health and police officers.<sup>88</sup> Yet, as in the examination of ships, so in most matters: municipal and Crown officers often worked at cross-purposes, and it was never clear whether the Funchal Council was independent of or subordinate to the governor. In principle, Portuguese municipal town councils had limited powers; the lines of authority were kept deliberately blurred and overlapping. In practice, however, Funchal’s Council exercised a surprising degree of power, depending on its

makeup, the personality of the governor, and the degree to which the Crown was worried about what was going on in Madeira—which was not often.

#### CHURCH

Religious institutions in Madeira raised similar challenges for natives and foreigners producing and exporting the island’s wine. Entering the city from the harbor, one walked north along the side of the Customs House and into the heart of the city—the square before the cathedral that was the seat of the bishop—and into a community that was remorselessly Catholic.<sup>89</sup> In addition to the bishop and his establishment, the city at midcentury boasted the cathedral’s own chapter, five friaries, three nunneries, two seminaries, and twenty-three parish churches and chapels.<sup>90</sup> After 1675, these numbers increased with the addition of three Franciscan communities, two Cordelier and one Carmelite. Madeira earned a reputation for Catholicity that has persisted to this day.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, over the course of the eighteenth century, the island became more secularized and its religious communities declined. That decline set in before 1720, when the Jesuit College (plate 4) housed fewer ecclesiastics than it ever had in the past. It was certainly clear after 1759, when the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portugal and its dependencies that year removed one of the richest and most powerful orders from the scene. Massive exodus does not seem to have happened in Madeira; some Jesuits stayed on as secular priests. Still, officials blocked new Jesuits from settling and sold off long-held Jesuit properties. The decline of Madeira’s religious institutions was not shaped solely by the fall of the Jesuits, however, for most orders were waning. By 1772, their total had dwindled to four friaries and four nunneries, half what it had been a century before. The clergy found it increasingly difficult to recruit new members, for fervor had greatly “slackened among the laity.”<sup>92</sup>

The presence, dominance, and even decline of Catholics exerted a heavy influence on relations among participants in the Madeira wine complex. Religious communities were landlords, owning vineyards and countinghouses and setting rental and sale agreements; the Jesuits owned all the Malvasia land, for instance.<sup>93</sup> Catholic beliefs impinged on the religious practices of foreign Protestants, since they frustrated easy burial. The Church, allowing “no Charitable Thoughts to the Souls of Hereticks,” refused them “decent interment” before the 1760s; their corpses were “cast into the Sea.” Only in 1761, after the intervention of the British consul in Lisbon, did Protestants gain land for burial. With financial support from the resident British merchants, a few acres in the northwest quadrant of the city were rented from the nuns of the Convent of Santa Clara.<sup>94</sup> True freedom of worship took even longer to arrive. The English-speaking “Na-



tion” had to make do with itinerant ministers. Not until 1822 did Protestants gain their own church building and a full-time preacher.<sup>95</sup>

Outright persecution of Protestant believers, at least foreign Protestants, was minimal. In large measure, the eighteenth-century Inquisition in Portugal took cognizance only of Catholic behavior. Moreover, international treaties explicitly safeguarded religious freedom, or at least freedom from harassment, to foreign merchants. Yet the oppressions perpetrated by the Portuguese from time to time on Protestant merchants were no less real, despite the legal safeguards. The Catholic Church’s persecution of Freemasonry in the second half of the eighteenth century unsettled many merchants of all religions. Even if persecution and harassment became less frequent, its incidence and the Madeirans’ unremitting Catholic zeal were powerful forces keeping foreigners and natives apart, should either group choose to emphasize their differences.<sup>96</sup>

#### SOCIETY

Public buildings so dominant on first landing were outnumbered by far more pedestrian, far less imposing structures—the houses, offices, stores, and warehouses of inhabitants, most of whom were involved in some way with the wine complex. The built environment they comprised was, en masse, a confusing amalgamation of metropolitan and provincial, cosmopolitan and pedestrian. Visitors seldom knew what to make of it.

The stock of residential and commercial buildings was permanent, and in style quite different from that inhabited by northern Europeans. It added to the strangeness of the place. The walls of the merchants’ houses were made of “very thick” freestone or brick. The unglazed windows were “latticed, and the window frames . . . composed of a reddish stone.” Flat and uniform roofs were covered with hard, smooth pantiles, and upon these were frequently set “large pebble stones to keep them from falling or being blown down.” On either side of the narrow cramped streets, the houses, offices, lodges, and stores of the city’s growing overseas merchant group and those who served it were visible.<sup>97</sup> Of the latter, there were thirty artisans who worked with wood, metal, and leather, shopkeepers who satisfied apparel and appearance needs, and manual laborers who provided construction and transportation services in 1700, plus an array of service providers like tavern-keepers, workers, and soldiers. A hundred years later, when another census was taken, the list had not changed much, except for an increase in the reach of the service group to include weavers, jewelers, and engineers and the expansion of the wine-support group to embrace seedsmen, vintners, coopers, carters, and tasters. Exhibited in the rise of shops was an Anglicization of everyday consumption. There were shops by 1700 that offered a wide range of

international goods, like silks, jewels, chinaware, food, and drink. Yet few stocked British and American goods. By 1800, “most of the shops” had become “filled with articles of English growth and manufacture.” Not surprisingly, many of the shops were established and run by exporters. By the time of the English occupation of the island in 1807, the city possessed a nearly fully developed economy capable of meeting the global demand for Madeira. Shops formed just one small but critical link in that transformation.<sup>98</sup>

One of the city’s most striking features was that there were no obvious patterns to its layout. Merchants were scattered throughout the central town, symptomatic of the unavoidable interaction and interdependence of the island’s dominant traders. There was no foreign merchant ghetto, as there was in many Atlantic port cities: native and stranger lived side by side, as did owner, farmer, merchant, and cooper.

The vernacular of Madeira’s merchant homes was simple yet substantial. “The houses of the bettermost people” were large, “but those of the poorer sort very small.” A typical house was 90 feet wide along the street and 180 feet deep. The doors to the street were “large, and the entries spacious,” but neither were elegant, the former crudely constructed and the latter a space where men urinated in public. Most houses had three or four stories. No merchant lived on the ground floor, for this contained servant rooms, offices, stores, and warehouses. The “best apartments” were situated up “one pair of stairs,” where the dining parlor and kitchen were placed. Inside, the rooms above were “large and lofty,” and the ceilings wooden, coved, and “neatly wrought.” Catholics nailed a wooden cross above the door of each chamber. Nearly every house had a garden and a lookout (*miranda*) on top—“a kind of Balcony” “to which in warm weather” the family retired to take in the “views of the surrounding country and of the sea.”<sup>99</sup>

Funchal’s vernacular merchant housing was a composite of differing styles, much as the commerce was made up of different nations, and this, too, changed, as foreign dominance grew.<sup>100</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century, the simple Portuguese style of urban building began to incorporate decorative motifs first introduced and popularized in England, the Netherlands, France, and America. With the introduction of good stucco at midcentury, rooms were enriched with plastered, paneled walls, and decorated and plastered ceilings. “Plain decoration” in the Portuguese style fell out of favor in the 1760s, while northern European windows with sashes and glass panes, for instance, became de rigueur; such was “the increasing wealth and taste for luxury” that few houses were found without them.<sup>101</sup>

The combination of styles and the porphyritic nature of Madeira’s community are apparent in the early nineteenth-century house and office occupied by the

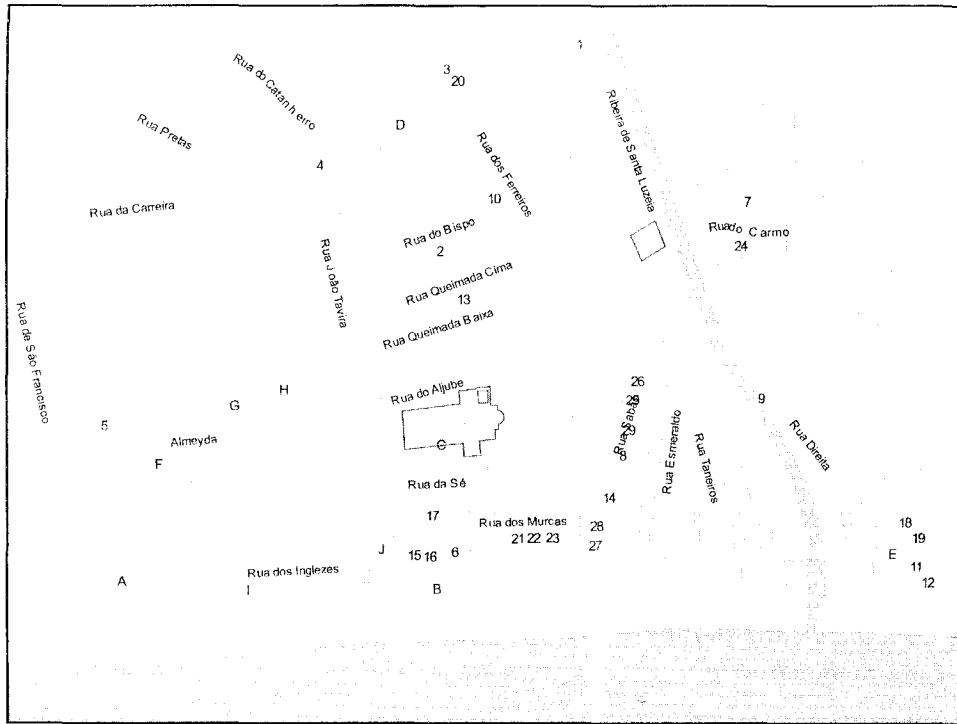


Figure 1.6. Map of public buildings and exporters' residences in Funchal, 1750-1815.  
 Legend: A—Fort; B—Customs House; C—Cathedral; D—Jesuit College; E—Pillory and Plaza; F—Theater; G—Hospital; H—Orphanage; I—Health House; J—Câmara; 1—Henry Veitch; 2—Leacock & Sons; 3—Newton & Gordon; 4—Searle Brothers; 5—Hayward & March; 6—Blackburn & Co.; 7—Phelps & Page; 8—Gordon Brothers and Gordon Duff & Co.; 9—Charles Alder; 10—William and Thomas Haddock; 11—Duff Brothers; 12—Thomas and Arthur Ahmuty; 13—Robert Scott Jr. & Co.; 14—Scott, Pringle & Cheap; 15—Shirley & Co.; 16 and 17—Thomas and Arthur Ahmuty; 18—James Ayres; 19—Thomas Edward Watts; 20—Pedro Jorge Monteiro; 21—John Forster; 22—James Ayres; 23—Thomas Gordon; 24—John Searle; 25—Lamar, Hill, Bisset & Co.; 26—John Searle; 27—Alexander Gordon; 28—James Ayres; 29—Pedro Jorge Monteiro.

Source: Drawn by Karl Longstreth. Maps created using software in the Map Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

American exporter John Howard March, who set up a firm in 1815. Situated along the tree-lined central mall that was the city's most prestigious address, next to the Misericórdia Hospital and opposite the Governor's Castle, it was large—90 feet by 260 feet (figure 1.7). One entered an arched gate piercing a high wall that fronted the mall, passing through a small room into a long hallway “paved with small stones” that was flanked on the right by a large, long interior garden and on the left by a smaller garden walk and garden in which were growing grapes, bananas, peaches, lemons, oranges, figs, cane, coffee, and yams. The house itself had four floors: the ground contained offices and stables; the first, the principal living quarters; the second, bedrooms; and the third, a lookout sporting cages of canaries, a table, and “a good telescope.” Finally, behind this structure stood a poultry yard, a cooperage guarded by “two watch dogs chained in the daytime near their kennels” and, most important, “very extensive” wine stores.<sup>102</sup>

In the first-floor living quarters one engaged a space both foreign and native. Having climbed the steep stone stairs, one found on the left a sitting room that boasted “a balcony commanding a view of the ocean” and a smaller library off of it, straight ahead an entry hall, and to the right “a noble room” lit by “three windows, two with balconies, look[ing] upon the ocean.” Opposite three windows were three doors that led to a parlor and a dining room. The parlor was “beautifully carpeted and furnished” and had two windows looking out upon a small interior flower and shrub garden. The ceilings and walls of these chambers were plastered, and the walls and chair rails were painted. From the dining room, one could descend to the garden via stone steps and admire a tank full of “small fish, some of a very deep red color.” Service rooms lay beyond the entry hall: several keeping rooms and a kitchen with a chimney. The bedrooms above were large, with walls “nicely plastered and painted a lemon color” and nine-foot ceilings “of paneled wood, painted of a light blue color.”<sup>103</sup>

The more enterprising foreigners appropriated native elements of decoration and furnishing, amalgamating or at least juxtaposing them with foreign detail. The tensions between integrating and separating were chronic, the former winning out more in town and the latter in the countryside. Indeed, in the villas (*quintas*) occupied by foreigners, one sees them using cosmopolitanism to reinforce separateness, even as they settled in on the side of the fanlike bowl forming the harbor and grew used to its ways. Given the poor road quality, the crude inland transport, and the incessant demand of their trade, it was only logical that merchants desiring to combine business and comfort would situate here. The villas usually lay within sight of the harbor (with a telescope, one could see the ships entering and identify nationalities by their flags) and within easy traveling distance to the city (one could cover the distance on horseback in three or

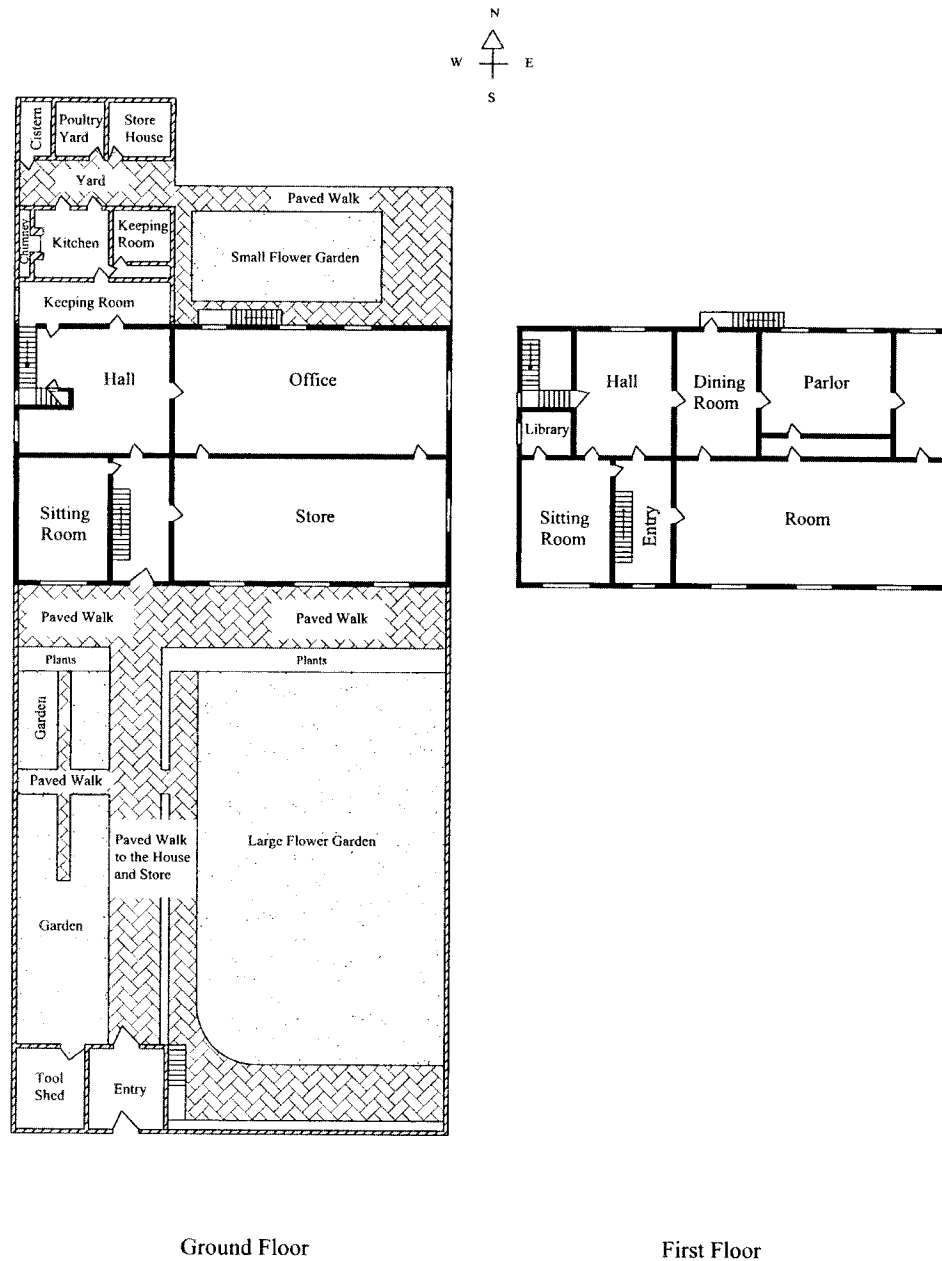


Figure 1.7. Ground and first-floor plans of the John Howard March House, c. 1815. Source: Based on Edward Wells, "A Trip to Madeira, 1836–1837," in *Madeira Fragments*, ed. Graham Blandy (Funchal, 1971). Drawn by Donald Buaku.

four hours) (figure 1.8). The neighborhoods were breezier, cooler (especially in the warmer months), cleaner, and less congested, far closer to the Acadian ideal being lauded by the leading European literary and philosophical tomes that lined the merchants' libraries than the dirty, dilapidated squalor of their in-town neighborhoods. Moreover, the relative absence of houses and abundance of land on the mountainside allowed free rein to the foreigners' construction fantasies, far freer than was possible in town. As they pushed into the hills, untouched terrain let them build as they saw fit, to articulate their own identities and erect "floral temples" that were a microcosm of the world as they both saw and wanted it.<sup>104</sup>

Rural retreats arose in the last decade of the seventeenth century, according to visitors interested in architecture: there were no houses worth noting in 1687, but there were plenty by 1702, when "all along" the ascent from the town, "from the bottom to the middle," the land was "covered with quintas." As the 1750s watercolors of Richard Hill's Achada suggest, spacious quarters were surrounded by "beautiful gardens" graced with "pleasant fountains and running streams," "cool shaded alcoves of marble and various coloured stones," and orchards with "delicious fruits."<sup>105</sup>

The number of villas increased with each passing decade, although they did not reach critical mass until the 1750s, by which time several native families had begun to coalesce as a local gentry class, to appropriate northern European style, and to acquire a near-virtual monopoly of political, social, and commercial power. At that critical juncture, these families desired apposite expressions both visible and fixed of their newfound power. Such desires, too, aligned with those of the foreign elite: some foreign merchants, like Charles Murray (figure 1.11), had amassed enough wealth and prominence to announce their achievement—to themselves, fellow islanders, and passersby—and set themselves apart; other foreign exporters, like James Gordon (figure 1.10), had founded or joined firms spanning generations and settled in Madeira with the intention to stay and raise a family. A villa satisfied all.

All was not so Elysian, though. While the villas, townhouses, offices, and storehouses of the city's overseas merchant elite were comfortable and well appointed by the standards of the day, there were other aspects of social life that frustrated the persistence and push of the trading group and thereby the development of the international wine trade. The period 1640–1815 was an age of only limited civic improvement in Madeira, as many of the foregoing accounts have suggested, and most of that came only toward the end of the age. A want of structures and amenities retarded production and distribution and the pursuit of enterprise, and it reinforced the separateness of the foreign and native communities.

One glimpses this clearly in the port's commercial infrastructure. Funchal in 1640 was ill provided to meet the challenge of an expanding, exploding Atlantic,

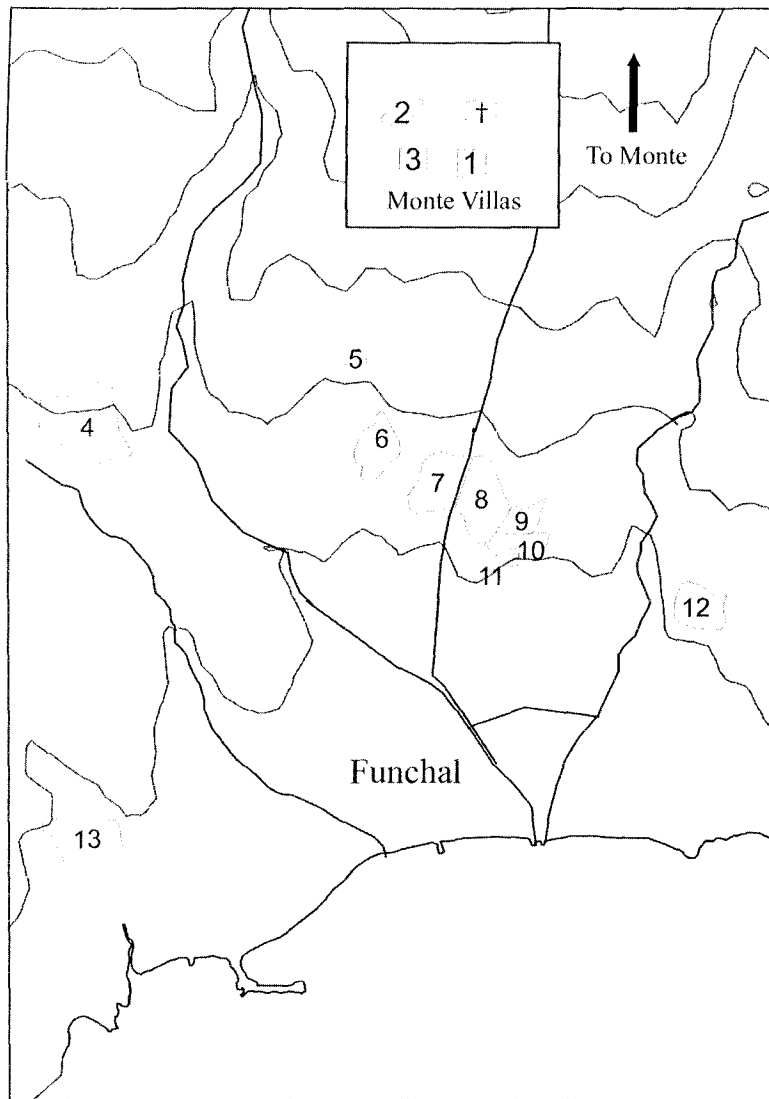


Figure 1.8. Map of exporters' *quintas* near Funchal, 1750–1815. Legend: 1—Quinta do Belo Monte (Charles Murray); 2—Quinta do Monte (James David Webster Gordon); 3—Quinta Cova (Andrew Wardrop); 4—Quinta da Achada (Richard Hill; William Penfold); 5—Quinta da Palmeira (Henry Blackburn); 6—Quinta do Til (Alexander and James Gordon); 7—Quinta dos Pinheiros (Bachelors Hall); 8—Quinta da Santa Luzcia (John Blandy); 9—Quinta da Levada (Andrew Wardrop); 10—Quinta San André (William Casey); 11—Quinta do Val (Bachelors Hall, and later James Murdoch); 12—Quinta da Moedas Homens (Leitão); 13—Quinta Magnolia (Dr. Pita; John Howard March)

Source: Drawn by Karl Longstreth. Maps created using software in the Map Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

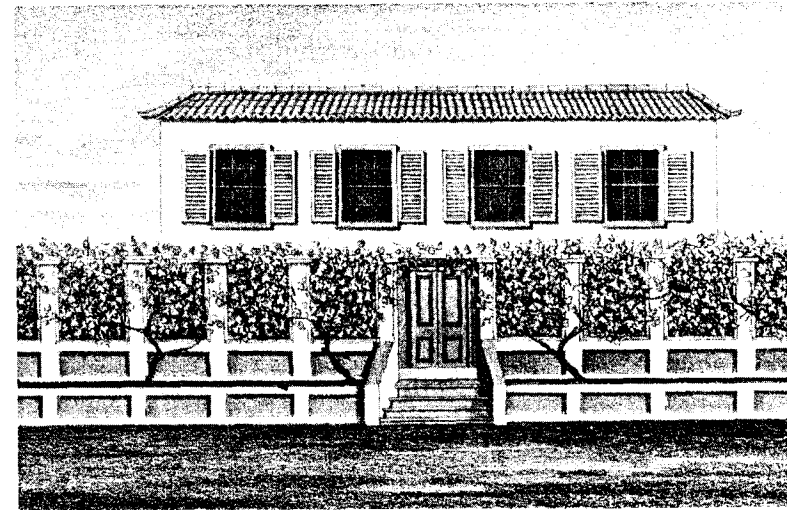


Figure 1.9. Richard Hill's Quinta da Achada, built 1750s–1770s. Source: John J. Smith, ed., *Letters of Doctor Richard Hill and His Children* (Philadelphia, 1854). Courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.



Figure 1.10. James Gordon's Quinta do Til, built 1740s–1750s. Source: Courtesy of Photographia-Museu "Vicentes," Funchal, Madeira.



Figure 1.11. Charles Murray's Quinta do Belo Monte, built 1780s.  
Source: Courtesy of Photographia-Museu "Vicentes," Funchal, Madeira.

much less global trade in wine. Its exposed marine situation was troublesome, and there was little that the islanders could do about it. True, the fact that Funchal lay "open to the Atlantic" was something of a boon. The sea around it was deep: within one-half mile of the land, it was 300 feet and, within three-quarters mile, 600 feet; there, fishermen found plentiful stocks of albacore, dolphin, and bonito. But that depth created problems. There was no safe anchorage but at the western edge of the town, in 240 feet of water and at least a mile from the shore; even there a ship was always at the mercy of treacherous winds. In foul weather, when a gale blew from the south, southwest, or west and a great swell ensued, ships would have to slip their cables, raise their anchors, and put out to sea, "returning at a more favourable season for their lading." Other ships might "venture to ride out bad weather" by lying between the Loo Rock and the island, yet they did so at their peril, for frequently cables snapped and vessels crashed upon the "ragged steep rocky shore." In addition, the surf raised obstacles to easy shipping, as Greenwood captured in his 1783 oil painting (plate 5). Because of the depths and the winds, the bay had "so great a Surf" that those who rode or anchored offshore were in constant danger of capsizing. Broken hulls littered the bay and

shore. In addition, rough surf made it difficult to get ashore or aboard without getting the passengers or goods soaked.<sup>106</sup>

Only gradually did islanders achieve some mastery over their "rode." About the fogs and clouds, they could do nothing. The changeable and fast winds could be partially managed with information. Elaborate sailing techniques were devised to accommodate wind changes, especially having to do with timing and direction. Local seamen imparted such wisdom to merchants, and merchants to visiting captains. Vessels arriving from the east "with the wind northeasterly" were told to go "through the passage between the Desertas and Madeira, keeping thence along to Madeira's shoar," since the northeasterly would "carry them as far as the Brazen Head" on the outskirts of Funchal. During the day, these ships were to "keep farther distant from the land, to avoid being becalmed under it, and to stretch into the stream of the sea breeze."<sup>107</sup> Similarly, to cope with the surf, mariners and merchants learned to turn "the stern towards it, and wait the rising of the surf," and then "endeavour to force in"; or, if that failed, they were to swim the pipes to the beach. Other steps, like innovations in boat design, were introduced to compensate for changeable weather, rough surf, and the relatively poor situation of the harbor.<sup>108</sup>

More physical, visible improvements were introduced only at the end of the eighteenth century. A true "quay or landing place" was needed to battle sea and sky and expedite shipping. During the 1750s, plans were formulated to enclose the harbor with a battlemented wall connecting the mainland to harbor islets. The king approved one design by a French engineer in 1757, but the project took years to finish and almost as soon as it was completed in 1775 a storm destroyed it. Alternate private schemes were floated in the 1760s "to join the Loo Rock at the Westernmost end of the beach" to the harbor's rocky point, but nothing was done with them. Construction of a true breakwater was not begun until 1885.<sup>109</sup> Second, a true lighthouse was needed to warn mariners of rock formations or weather conditions. But until the end of the nineteenth century seamen had to make do with a flag hoisted up a pole at the Loo Fort during the day and a lantern at night.<sup>110</sup> Third, unloading machinery was needed. The first real improvement came when an American wine exporter erected a column and a winch atop it near the Customs House in 1798.<sup>111</sup> None of these changes were revolutionary, of course, and only the column survived. Yet, through small, incremental, often unseen and certainly disconnected steps, they contributed to traders gaining greater control over the elements and ultimately over their trade.

Looking at Madeira's capital, one sees overlapping spaces in the built environment and in the activities unfolding within. Viewed together, one ascertains the

multiplicity of functions required for the buildup of a new wine market that occurred in these 175 years, and the degree to which one rather insignificant place linked to and integrated with Portuguese and non-Portuguese networks and empires. One glimpses the extent to which the wine complex was decentralized, organized by individual opportunists concerned primarily with the immediate push and pull of the workday, concerned and frustrated more by local rivalries and underdevelopment than central control and royal fiat, which they were willing to adhere to—but only when it served their purposes. One sees, as well, the successful installation of a wine complex where none had existed before, largely the work of a minority group of foreign traders who figured out how to work with the native establishment. From much of the foregoing account, one could conclude the natives had neither the commercial nor the organizational capacity to develop an oceanic and eventually global trade in wine. A rural economy; an uneducated populace; a work ethic that did not value education, record keeping, and thrift, much less trade; nearly nonexistent capital: all these things stymied the natives. Whatever their shortcomings—and they were legion—foreigners had the capacity, although they had neither land nor laborers.

Yet facts belie such a conclusion. The two groups worked together to build their market, and the improvements to their port are a case in point. Using the time a ship spent in the harbor as a measure of the port's efficiency, one discovers that that time fell from a high of twenty-three days in 1730 to eight days in 1775, and to six days by 1815.<sup>112</sup> Thus, the greatest gains were made before the foreigners began to lobby for change and introduce improvements on their own. A much more efficient trade-based bureaucracy arose in the 1750s, in part a response to the promptings of Pombal but more a function of the hawk-eyed oversight of several governors intent on maximizing the revenues flowing to themselves and their demesne. At the same time, a much more tolerant approach to foreigners set in, not only among officials like the governor but also among the natives. Finally, again at the same time, a much more compliant group of marginal men wholly obsessed with work arrived, intent less on asserting their Englishness and rights (witnessed by a noticeable decline in complaints issued by the Factory and consul) and more on gaining real profits and Atlanticizing the trade. That the new wine complex emerged at all was the consequence of unrelenting human endeavor among and between the natives and strangers.

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# OCEANS OF WINE

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*Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste*

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David Hancock

*Yale University Press*  
New Haven & London

sia as well.<sup>66</sup> Although the quantities involved were small, the Baltic trade was significant because Madeira's wine exporters needed Baltic wood and iron for pipes, Baltic isinglass for finings, and North Sea fish for laborers; in turn, the Baltic states wanted a liquor less strong than vodka.<sup>67</sup> While the long-hoped-for "great consumption" never arrived before the fall of Napoleon, the region was important to their business.

Madeira was known as "America's wine" in the eighteenth century, and the characterization is apt. Stopping at Madeira was convenient for provisioning ships on the westward leg of the Atlantic trades. Transporting Madeira wine to Anglophone America filled the ships' holds profitably. It provided a potable drink to European settlers in the New World who were frustrated in developing viticulture in America. British mercantile policy encouraged it, and Portuguese mercantile policy discouraged the alternative of taking the wine to Brazil, where Port was privileged. From this perspective there is something almost inevitable about the development of an extensive Madeira wine trade to America.

Yet the participants called it "a revolution in this trade," and the revolution was more than simply the sum of increases in the scale and scope of distribution. Exploiting the opportunity to sell Madeira wine in America required changing the ways market participants did business—increasing the density and complexity of arrangements for buying, marketing, selling, and transporting goods around the Atlantic basin and beyond. As the volume of wine, the frequency and regularity of shipping, and the extent of the wine's dispersal increased, the organization of the enterprises became more extensive and complex; this was true of both the Madeirans' production and export enterprises and the importing, wholesaling, and retailing enterprises on the receiving side of the Atlantic. The revolution in organization transformed not only the conduct of the Madeira trade but also the workings of the entire Atlantic marketplace, moving it from a congeries of metropolitan and frontier economies with sparse links, many of which were characterized by European exploitation of their peripheries, to a more or less interdependent system in which "the gains from trade were not always distributed to the European power with sovereignty over its colonies." In the new regime, returns "flowed to providers of goods and services that were determined not by the flag of the imperial power but by economic relations on a broader scale."<sup>68</sup> What islanders and their customers did to increase the trade and complicate its organization lies at the center of the evolution of wine's world.

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## A "COMMERCE OF MINDS": MADEIRA DISTRIBUTORS AND THEIR CUSTOMERS

The link between grape growers and wine drinkers was the collection of distributors, typically the forgotten or ignored characters in any commodity's history. On Madeira, the distributors began as exporters, performing the functions of merchant, agent, consignee, agent-consignee, and representative.<sup>1</sup> As the eighteenth century progressed, they integrated backward, becoming manufacturers concerned with production processes and techniques, and forward, becoming sophisticated marketers. As the population of consumer societies in America exploded in ways that intrigued Europeans, Madeirans, like other European exporters, made forays into the Atlantic wine market and, in networked conversation, seized the chance to make money from their drink.

### THE MADEIRA MERCHANT EXPORTERS

In the earliest days of the Madeira wine trade, the number of island merchants active in overseas commerce was small. During the seventeenth century, the group of commercial strangers hovered between one and two dozen. Native merchants, who had been overshadowed by foreigners during the heyday of sugar, continued to be outflanked after wine replaced it. Although they always outnumbered foreigners, natives lost in terms of share of exports with each passing decade (table 5.1). In 1620, there were approximately 40 exporters: 28 Portuguese and 12 foreigners (including 6 Flemish and 3 English). In 1650, there were 66 exporters: 48 Portuguese, 10 English, and 8 other foreigners. By 1687, there were 80 exporters: 56 Portuguese and 24 foreigners (of which at least 13 were English). In 1699, the total had grown to 95, including 80 Portuguese, 8 English, 4 French, and 3 Danish or Dutch.



In the golden age of distribution that ensued, the number of exporters increased substantially. Between 1703 and 1807, at least 925 men and 4 women assumed responsibility for buying wine from growers, packing it, finding overseas buyers and placing it aboard ships. In the six years between 1721 and 1727, the size of the wine export community exploded from 63 to 160. By 1768, the group had grown to 216. After the American Revolution, it dropped, falling to 202 by 1807 and 177 in 1815.<sup>2</sup>

Foreign traders grew apace: from 15 in 1699 and 10 in 1721, they increased to 76 by 1807. Because the movement of the seat of government from Lisbon to Rio in 1807 and the opening of Brazil's ports to British traders in 1810 rendered Madeira a less useful transshipment point for goods going to either Portugal and Spain or Brazil, their number fell to 48 in 1815, from just over one-third (36 percent) of the island's merchant community to just under one-quarter (24 percent). Even if one included the five English-speaking Americans in the 1815 British count, English speakers' share constituted only just over one-quarter (27 percent). While the majority of exporters were always Portuguese, in 1815 as before, the Funchal commercial community included "merchants from almost every part of Europe." Of those working in the island's export sector between 1703 and 1807, 542 (58 percent) were Portuguese, 295 (32 percent) were British, and 38 (4 percent) were American, along with a few Danes, Dutchmen, Frenchmen, Italians, and Spaniards. English-speaking enterprisers increasingly dominated the foreigners. Of the 25 British merchants in Madeira in 1727, 19 were English, four Irish, and two British Americans. Forty years on, in 1768, quite a few Scots had entered the market, constituting more than one-third of the 34 Britons; the Americans had risen to 6. Other foreigners comprised only 4 percent of the exporters. Soon after 1800, the proportion of Britons and Americans among the foreign merchant community rose: 72 of the 76 foreigners were English speakers in 1807, and all but one of the 48 (a Frenchman) in 1815.<sup>3</sup>

The number and share of foreigners cannot convey with accuracy their strength. While Spain ruled Portugal and wine vied with sugar, the ten largest wine exporters of 1620 comprised 56 percent of the island's wine exporters and paid 92 percent of export taxes (probably shipping most of the wine). Portuguese were among the top ten exporters, paying 18 percent of the export customs duties between them. They worked alongside three Flemings, two Englishmen, two Frenchmen, and one German. The largest, English merchant William Ray, and his nearest competitor, the Fleming Guilherme Dinis, together paid 38 percent of all island wine export duties.<sup>4</sup>

As wine eclipsed sugar, the number of participants increased, and non-Portuguese merchants increasingly dominated the trade (table 5.2). By 1650, the

Table 5.1. Madeira merchants known to be exporting wine, 1620–1815

Year	Portuguese	British	Other foreign	Total foreign	Total
1620 <sup>a</sup>	28	3	9	12	40
1650 <sup>b</sup>	48	10	8	18	66
1687 <sup>c</sup>	56	13	11	24	80
1699	80	8	7	15	95
1721	53	9	1	10	63
1727	125	25	10	35	160
1768	173	34	9	43	216
1807 <sup>d</sup>	126	72	4	76	202
1815 <sup>e</sup>	129	42	6	48	177

Sources: T. Bentley Duncan, *Atlantic Islands: Madeira, the Azores and the Cape Verdes in Seventeenth-Century Commerce and Navigation* (Chicago, 1972), 54–57, based on old codex no. 1503 (1620), Alfândega do Funchal, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon; Livros dos direitos por entrada (e saída), Colbrancas, nos. 306, 308–9 (1650, 1687, 1699), Alfândega do Funchal, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo; Livros dos direitos por saída, nos. 272–326 (1721–23, 1727–29, 1768–1815), Provedoria e junta da Real fazenda do Funchal—Alfândega do Funchal, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo. Cf. Blandy, *Bolton Letters*, vol. 2, for 1702–10 and 1711–13; Petition, December 15, 1706, fol. 140, Blenheim Papers, vol. 410, British Library, London; Livros dos direitos por entrada, nos. 7–8, 21–22, 146–55, 177–91, 220–21, 469 (1717–18, 1727–1815), Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo. Note: These numbers probably overestimate slightly the share of foreigners. The Livros dos entradas e saídas, like the books of export taxes, in particular, do not usually record Portuguese merchants using Portuguese ships to export sugar and wine as such enterprisers were not taxed. Their numbers were small, however, as most Portuguese utilized foreign shipping as well, and so appear in the tally. Duncan tries to correct for undercounting, but his estimations are no more convincing than actual tallies.

a. All British are English; foreigners are 6 Flemish, 2 French, and 1 German.

b. All British are English; foreigners are 6 Flemish, 1 French, and 1 Italian.

c. All British are English. 1699: All British are English.

d. The 72 British include 8 Americans as English speakers.

e. The 42 British include 5 Americans as English speakers.

ten largest exporters—comprising 15 percent of the entire merchant community—paid 79 percent of all wine export duties. Some fifty years later, by 1699, the ten largest exporters—comprising one-tenth of the entire export group—paid 82 percent of all wine export duties. Two of these men, when their work is combined, shipped 55 percent of all wine. In 1727, the ten largest exporters—6 percent of the community—managed 6,420 pipes—70 percent—of it. Thereafter, the share exported by the top ten trended slightly downward through the early nineteenth century but remained high; in 1768 the ten largest exporters exported 68 percent of all wine, and in 1807 63 percent of a much larger volume.

Table 5.2. Ten largest exporters of Madeira wine in five different years, 1650–1807

Year	Merchant	Number of pipes	Share of exports (%)
1650	Matthew Da Gama	107	21
	Richard Pickford	55	11
	Manoel Thomas	53	10
	Duarte Zormans	43	8
	Captain Diogo Gueirreiro	39	8
	Antonio Lopes Maciel	37	7
	Antonio Camacho	33	6
	Manoel Fernandes Mondim	18	4
	Antonio Gonçalves d'Araújo	15	3
	Antonio Peronel	10	2
1699	Richard Richbell	1,823	28
	William Bolton	1,766	27
	Samuel Barquim	425	7
	Pedro de Faria	320	5
	Sebastiao Pinto Lobato	185	3
	Eusebio Da Silva Barreto	153	2
	Alexandre Sauvaire	143	2
	Joseph Caire	141	2
	Benjamin Homem	132	2
	João Phillippe	124	2
1727	Charles Chambers Sr.	3,085	34
	Marcos Gonçalves Rocio	1,137	12
	James Pope	559	6
	Richard Miles	510	6
	Benjamin Bartlett	304	3
	Pantaleão Fernandes	291	3
	Anthony Lynch	194	2
	John West	169	2
	William Goddard	96	1
	John Bisset	76	0.8
1768	James Denyer	899	13
	David Taylor	851	12
	Thomas Loughman	606	9
	James & John Murdoch	405	6
	James Ayres	368	5
	Paulo Teixeira Pinto	358	5
James Duff	325	5	

continued

Table 5.2. Ten largest exporters of Madeira wine in five different years, 1650–1807 continued

Year	Merchant	Number of pipes	Share of exports (%)
1807	Joseph Gillis	320	5
	John Searle	294	4
	Andrew Donaldson	273	4
	Newton, Gordon, Murdoch & Scot	1,985	11
	Gordon, Duff & Co.	1,880	10
	Phelps, Page & Co	1,548	9
	Murdoch, Yuille & Wardrop	1,043	6
	Colson, Smith & Robinson	1,039	6
	Monteiro & Co.	951	5
	George & Robert Blackburn	788	4
Correia de Franca	768	4	
Scot & Co.	763	4	
Christopher & William Lynch	685	4	

Sources: See source note for table 5.1.

Nonetheless, the top ten exporters were the substantial, dedicated wine merchants on the island at any time. A large proportion of the other exporters seems to have been occasional—traders who sold wine only from time to time as an accommodation to customers to whom they sold other goods or opportunistically. In 1650, for example, fifty-six out of sixty-five exporters (roughly 87 percent) shipped 10 or fewer pipes of wine that year—in such a small amount and in containers of a pipe or less that one doubts they would have regarded themselves as being “in the trade.” Indicative of the increase in scale since the middle of the seventeenth century, wine exporters shipped more as the decades advanced. Out of the twenty-eight exporters named in a surviving *saídas* volume for 1807, only two (or 7 percent) shipped 10 or fewer pipes and fourteen exported fewer than 348 pipes (roughly 2 percent of total exports, and the equivalent of 1650’s 10 pipes). While the 1807 records do not list all exporters, what survives suggests a winnowing of the ranks and a decreasing involvement of “small fry.”<sup>5</sup>

Breaking down these shares by ethnicity, one learns that, in 1650, there were five Portuguese merchants among the ten largest, and they managed 45 percent of all exports. The largest wine exporter—Matthew Da Gama—was Portuguese, and he handled 21 percent. Two English merchants, two Flemish, and an Italian all competed, and it is to men like them that natives like Da Gama lost out in

the ensuing seventy-five years. In 1699, there were again five Portuguese merchants among the top ten exporters, but now they garnered only 14 percent. The largest two exporters were English—Richard Richbell, who managed 28 percent of all exports, and his compatriot William Bolton, who managed 27 percent. The remaining top exporters were Dutch, Portuguese, French, and English, but none handled more than 7 percent of all exports. By 1727, only two Portuguese men—Marcos Gôncalves Rocio and Pantalcão Fernandes—ranked among the ten largest. All other significant exporters were English; one of them, Charles Chambers, Sr., dominated the trade, shipping one-third of all wine exported. Over half (55 percent) was managed by the eight largest British merchants.

Forty years later, no individual trader dominated as Chambers once had. Between 1748 and 1774, many British and American “small fry” swarmed to the island to establish a house, and many a British or American sea captain thought himself capable of acting the merchant. English-speaking foreigners continued to dominate. Of the top ten exporters of 1768, Paulo Teixeira Pinto was the only Portuguese, and his share was a mere 385 pipes (5 percent). The nine British or British diaspora traders among the ten largest managed even more of the exports, 63 percent, than they had in 1727. Scots and Americans now figured prominently: the former managing 29 percent of the exports, and the latter 9 percent.

By 1807, the French and Napoleonic Wars had seriously disordered the trade and led to a realignment in dominance. Two Portuguese firms—Monteiro & Co. and Correia de Franca—now ranged among the top ten, sharing 9 percent of the trade between them. In addition, the British had stopped the advance of the Americans, returning the “balance of trade . . . much in favor of the English.”<sup>6</sup> Many American firms that had mushroomed in the heady days of the 1760s and 1770s had since joined British firms. As well, some of the older American firms unraveled, most notably the Hill and the Scarle and Pintard houses. Other American concerns faltered from fiscal imprudence. By the 1810s, the British were resurgent. Of their firms, four were primarily Scottish, three English, and one Irish. Together, they managed 54 percent of exports.<sup>7</sup>

While the British retained the upper hand, citizens of the new United States remained active participants in the trade, despite encountering severe obstacles to their continuance in it. In 1727, some 52 percent of the ships whose entries and exits included listings for the nationality of ownership were British ships, and 40 percent Portuguese. By 1768, some 87 percent were British; only 5 percent were Portuguese. In the prerevolutionary shipping registers of Funchal, colonial British American vessels were included in the British imperial total, and it is not possible to distinguish metropolitan from colonial ownership. But by 1807, after record keepers started making such distinctions, the Portuguese, British,

and Americans had almost equal shares: the Portuguese owned 31 percent of the fleet, and the Americans edged out the British, 32.9 percent to 32.5 percent, for the largest volume of shipping. The nationality of the captains underscores the important place that Americans had come to hold in the Madeira wine trade. In 1727, of the fifty-six ships that dropped anchor in the harbor and reported the nationality of masters, some twenty-two (39 percent) had British captains, and another fourteen (25 percent) British American captains; only nine (16 percent) had Portuguese captains. By 1807, captains from the Azores, Madeira, and Portugal constituted 30 percent of the group, in witness to the increasing strength of the Portuguese, whereas 32 percent hailed from Britain and the States in equal measure.<sup>8</sup>

#### “FOUNDING PARTNERS”: NECESSITY, EDUCATION, AND RELIGION

The dominant British exporters came from the middling ranks of their birthplace communities, which stretched from Aberdeen, the Spey Valley, and Glasgow in the north to Norwich in the east, London and Plymouth in the south, and Bristol, Cork, Dublin, and Liverpool in the west. To a man, they were younger sons, having come from middle- or, in a few cases, lower-income families that, if they could help at all, provided only for their eldest. Distant experiences and nonfamilial resources became imperative.

Many escaped from the lack of opportunity in the places of their births and the farms and villages of their childhood and spent time in large port towns, regional capitals like Dublin and Edinburgh, and even the great metropolis London. Thomas Loughnan was one such man on the move—the son of a modest Wapping brewer of Scottish origin, who could do little but wish him well when he married in 1770.<sup>9</sup> Joseph and William Phelps of Dursley, about twenty miles northeast of Bristol, were born in the 1740s into a fairly comfortable family that had long been active in the Gloucestershire woolen industry, but by the time they came of age that industry had been wracked by the transition from household to factory production and the family was left with nothing. Joseph and William found it more advantageous to make a go of it elsewhere: Joseph went to London in the early 1770s, while William moved to Madeira later that decade.<sup>10</sup> Walter and Robert Scot, who came to the island in the late 1720s, were younger sons in a branch of one of the Borders’ largest clans, the Scots of Lauder, Berwickshire, although in their case an older brother, John, preceded them by several years.<sup>11</sup> John Barrett was an impoverished only son languishing in Brosely, Shropshire, when his uncle James Pope made a place for him in his counting-house on the island. John Leacock was even less well provided for by family: his father, a weaver, died in 1736 and he had no “useful” relatives, so his mother

enrolled him in Christ's Hospital, a school for orphans. Five years later, the only option open to the penniless "Blue Coal" boy was a seven-year apprenticeship to William Murdoch and John Catanach in their Madeira wine house—that is, a long apprenticeship with the friend of a friend in a land he had never seen. The four Duff brothers left their family farm alongside the Spey to toil as clerks in Edinburgh and London in the 1760s before joining their uncles James and Alexander Gordon in Madeira.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the distributors were refugees who had fled their homelands for religious reasons, like the Huguenot Pierre Vallette, who left France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, went to England, where he was naturalized, and subsequently established a business in Madeira, which he plied through the 1710s. Others sought safe haven for political missteps, like support of the Stuarts. Dominick Sarsfield was harried out of southern Ireland for the part he played in the Williamite wars of the late seventeenth century. Francis Newton and Alexander Gordon of Letterfourie (plate 9) fled Scotland, where they had fought for the Young Pretender at the battle of Culloden (1745).<sup>13</sup> Other distributors found in the island not political but economic refuge. Newton and his brother Thomas were younger sons of a penniless minister in Aberdeen. On coming of age at the time Francis moved to Madeira, Thomas set himself up as a dry goods merchant in New York, until near-bankruptcy "encouraged" him to join his brother several years later. There he found another New Yorker, the improvident George Spencer, who had left the colony in embarrassment in the 1740s and the house of Isaac Gualter Bradick.<sup>14</sup>

Itinerancy, education, and religion united most founding traders in the work of establishing a business. Their movements are clear. But their education is difficult to ascertain precisely. British traders were literate, having received some primary instruction back home. Of the 333 English-speaking foreigners working on the island between 1700 and 1815, some 23 received secondary education and 8 attended university. At least two received medical training and worked as doctors. Three more acquired an education through the British army or navy. Distributors' religion is even more difficult to identify, yet the little surviving information we have suggests that it made Madeira comfortable for the Catholics among them and gave the rest a reason to band together against the dominant Catholic culture. Most of the 542 Portuguese, barring the handful of *converso* Jews, were schooled in Catholicism. Of the 333 English-speaking foreigners, there were at least two dozen Catholics. The wastrel George Spencer "became a Roman Catholic to serve his own particular Interests," and there were probably more like him, inasmuch as aspiring but unattached young men often lodged with "a Roman Catholick Family." The rest, one surmises, were Protestants of

one stripe or another, who felt a need to cohere. There were at least a dozen Quakers and Huguenots. But this was loose Protestantism: the lack of regular Protestant services and a wide adherence to the principles of Freemasonry irrespective of religion or nationality suggest a weakening of religious ties among both Protestants and Catholics.<sup>15</sup>

#### "LEGACY MERCHANTS": INHERITANCE AND OPPORTUNISM

In the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries, Madeira's trade was dominated by foreign bachelors. One of the more prominent, James Pope, died single in 1743 and bequeathed his business to his nephew John Barrett. When Barrett died three years later, he, too, had never wed. Nor had James Smart by the time he was found dead in his bed, having "overloaded his stomach" with lobster. Early on, most foreigners remained single: Benjamin Bartlett, James Gordon, and Francis Newton, to name just three, all enjoyed "the stile [of] a bachelor." This entailed living above the countinghouse or in meagerly furnished rented rooms and partying at Bachelors Hall, a spa up in the hills above Funchal that was open only to single men and their guests. The amenities of the island or the religion and xenophobia of the natives discouraged the raising of foreign families in the first century of the wine trade.<sup>16</sup>

Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, the export of wine came to be dominated by married men, as did many early modern trades, and for these men passing on a legacy in business was easier than for bachelors; indeed, it was imperative.<sup>17</sup> New entrants often married the sister, daughter, or heir of a fellow British or American merchant and established a household, while other enterprisers brought wives and sometimes children with them and raised families. John Leacock Sr. was among the former. After his apprenticeship to Catanach & Murdoch expired in 1749, Leacock remained with the firm as a salaried clerk. On the death of Murdoch in 1757, he left it to form a wine-trading partnership with George Spence—a move in large part facilitated by his marrying Murdoch's "housekeeper," a widow who had inherited substantial property from him. Leacock's competitors Robert and John Scot had done much the same a decade before, if more traditionally: Robert married Elizabeth, the sister of his partner John Pringle, while John married American exporter Dr. Richard Hill's daughter Harriet. Other exporters brought wives with them. Hill had married Deborah Moore in Maryland, and she bore him three children there before relocating with him to Madeira in 1739 and bearing four more. Several generations later, William Phelps briefly traveled to London to wed in 1783 and quickly embarked with his new wife for Madeira, where they raised seven children.<sup>18</sup> It was rare for foreign exporters to marry Portuguese women.<sup>19</sup>

Merchants begat merchants. Upon foundations of family, the English-speaking merchants started erecting multigenerational houses the same way enterprisers did throughout the Atlantic world: bringing up “their own relations to business in preference of others,” unless, of course, “a handsome fee accompanies a stranger, or he happens to be recommended by a particular address & experience in affairs, or known accuracy & fidelity within the counting house.”<sup>20</sup> What constituted “relations” was an issue, of course, and the meaning broadened. By the middle of the eighteenth century, through a rather porous system of preferences, many of the houses that were built on close family relationships had become larger, more loosely affiliated. Although many partners were still related by blood and marriage, as often as not they were connected less directly.

Close connections between firm and family were a prominent mark of most export wine houses before the American Revolution. Many firms were built by one family, with the partnership being divided among fathers, brothers, sons, sons-in-law, and cousins, as were Lamar, Hill, Bisset & Co., Searle & Co.,<sup>21</sup> Gordon & Gordon,<sup>22</sup> Hayward & Co., Haddock & Co., Nowlan & Burgess, Leacock & Sons, and Phelps & Morrissey. Many others were founded on the union of two or more families and, as the century progressed, their numbers increased. An instructive if extreme example is that of the firm established by Thomas Loughnan, who was linked by blood and money to at least five different firms. Loughnan surfaced in Madeira as early as 1753, when he apparently began trading in the island on his own; his father, the proprietor of the Fox Brew House in Wapping, acted as his London agent. In 1770, Thomas returned to England to marry Philadelphia Fergusson, the daughter of the Irish sea captain Robert Fergusson of Cork and the granddaughter of the Scots land magnate Alexander Fergusson of Craigdarroch. Loughnan fathered four daughters in Britain before moving back to the island in the early 1780s. Through his wife, Loughnan became connected to her grandfather Alexander’s cousin Charles Fergusson, a London wine merchant, who in the late 1750s had formed Fergusson, Murdoch & Co. and who later worked through Shirley, Banger & Co. In addition, Loughnan became tied to Thomas Gordon, one of the principals in Newton, Gordon & Murdoch, for Charles Fergusson’s daughter Jean had married John Hamilton Dempster of Skibo, whose sister married Thomas Gordon. Furthermore, through his wife, Loughnan became linked to James Fearn of Fearn Brothers, James having married Philadelphia Loughnan’s younger sister. The only firm Loughnan ever officially joined was Scot, Pringle & Cheap, which he did in the 1780s, and that tie was tightened when Loughnan’s daughter Zepherina married its partner Henry Veitch in 1796.<sup>23</sup>

The commercial union of two families often included intermarriage, but that

was not necessary. Francis Newton never allied himself through marriage to any of his many partners. On escaping from Culloden, he found work as a bookkeeper in Alexander Johnston’s London countinghouse. There he prospered, and three years later Johnston offered a generous salary should he continue in the work. He refused. Instead, he accessed Johnston’s global network of correspondence and secured a place in the Madeira firm of one of Johnston’s contacts, João José de Vasconcelos, “the great[est] man on the island.” Johnston arranged for Newton to receive a decent salary, bed, board, washing and, most important, “free liberty to trade” for himself. In time, Newton found the setup restrictive and left the post to partner with a dry goods merchant—George Spence of London—who agreed to procure orders for wine in Britain and handle exports of cloth to Portugal. “Jealousy” slowly insinuated itself into the operation. Sensing the likely demise of their relationship, Newton began building yet another firm. He brought into the house his younger brother Thomas, working independently in New York, naming him his agent there. He also employed his nephew David Young as his clerk, and his older brother Andrew Newton of Norfolk, Virginia, as his Chesapeake agent. Having thus strengthened the organization, he broke with Spence and, within five months, entered into a new partnership with his brother Thomas Newton and with Johnston’s nephew Thomas Gordon of London, who had recently come out to Madeira. Johnston provided nearly all the capital for the new operation. The Newtons, Spences, and Gordons never intermarried, but their firms nonetheless prospered; the connections between the Newtons and Gordons remained close through the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

Marriage alone could not have sufficed to build an enduring business, of course. Whatever the external conditions and relationships that pushed them from their homeland and caused them to pursue trade, Madeira’s dominant exporters were essentially opportunity seekers. If they lacked inherited wealth or economic opportunities at home, they possessed “strong” ties of kin and “weak” ties of kith, and they doggedly deployed both to their advantage in building businesses. They never cut themselves off from families and friends, even those who had nothing to offer them in their early years, and they used their time in Madeira to knit together whatever connections they could, calling for startup capital, seeking suppliers, offering work, and seeking customers.<sup>25</sup>

Newton’s case is instructive on the manipulation of ties, for it took the Scot three tries to find among friends of friends and other “weak” relationships a partner he could respect and remain with. The importance of weak extended non-familial ties to an operation founded on strong intertwined family relations characterized the opportunistic construction of the house managed by the Scots and Pringles. Walter and Robert Scot came to the island in the late 1720s and estab-

lished the firm of Scot & Scot; several years later, their older brother John (who had gone out to Madeira before them) joined as a partner. In 1731, when Walter decided to go it alone, Robert and John combined forces with John Pringle, an erstwhile Borders neighbor. Marrying Pringle's sister, Robert moved to London in 1737 to manage Scot, Pringle & Scot's growing affairs in the metropolis. Thereafter, the firm was managed by Walter Scot (who had returned to the fold), John Scot, and John Pringle for about twenty years, until John Scot settled in Yorkshire in 1755, Walter Scot retired to London two years later, and John Pringle returned to Scotland three years after that to claim an inheritance. With only Walter Scot making occasional visits to Madeira, the firm joined forces in 1761 with an "outsider," Thomas Cheap, whose family had connection neither to the Borders nor to the Scots and the Pringles, yet whose value was undeniable. Cheap had previously worked for a competing house in London, and he had ties to the British legal world (for he was a relative of the Scots jurist Alexander Wedderburn). The alliance with this nonrelative proved advantageous. In 1763, he gained the island's British consulship, and the post brought the firm more than an ordinary share of business. Several years later, the firm took on Charles Murray of Philiphaugh, John Pringle's first cousin and Robert Scot's son-in-law, and, before Cheap resigned as consul, he arranged for Murray to replace him. But the value of intertwining blood and connection through a lock on the consulship was not lost on the new generation; by maintaining a balance, the firm continued to dominate the foreign community for the next fifty years.<sup>26</sup>

### CREATING CUSTOMER NETWORKS

The must and production goods needed to manufacture wine could be bought; the knowledge of how to combine them could be learned. The wherewithal to begin in business could be provided by those with whom the exporter shared blood, membership in some group, experience, or expectation. Often, components and know-how could be obtained from competitors. But customers—people who purchased the wine and the most important asset of each trader—could not be bought or borrowed. Finding them, cultivating them, and satisfying them comprised an exporter's most important challenge, and the one to which wine distributors turned most of their attention.

Madeira's exporters approached the difficulty of creating a customer base as a network task. It is probably senseless to try to define yet again "network"—the idea is so vast, and so little precision can actually be attached to it in an early modern business context. It should suffice to consider it "any collection of actors . . . that pursue repeated, enduring exchange relations with one another

and, at the same time, lack a legitimate organizational authority to arbitrate and resolve disputes that may arise during the exchange."<sup>27</sup> A successful trader was someone who could build and manage such ordering structures. Madeirans approached the linked challenges of finding, cultivating, and satisfying customers as a network matter: they made use of the preexisting networks they brought to the business; and they built new networks. This was a requirement not just for them but anyone working over oceanic-scale distances using the transportation and communication technologies of the day. Madeira's networks are significant for presenting three main traits possessed by other operatives, in and out of the economic realm, in bold relief: relationships were personal, ties were nonhierarchical, and participation was voluntary. Moreover, they are equally valuable as they help distinguish networks from other forms of commercial and social organization, such as markets, hierarchies, and formal institutions; additionally, they focus on the realities confronting network members—the achievement of success and the avoidance of failure.<sup>28</sup>

Founding partners of Madeira's wine houses began by appealing to personal contacts: to their families and to the patronage and peer groups from which they had come. Almost always, these groups were based on shared ethnic or religious background. Hardly a week went by in the career of an exporter when he or his correspondent did not appeal to fellow members in ethnic and religious groups. In this, he was typical of Atlantic merchants everywhere. Yet, over the course of his career and especially after 1750, the successful Madeira distributor broadened his networks. He extended them beyond personal connections, building new customer relationships with more impersonal—what are now thought to be more "businesslike"—attitudes. By 1815, decisions were based less frequently on whom someone knew and more often than before on whether the decision made sound business sense, as determined by third-party calculations. Even so, the networked business approach never faded.

### KIN, PATRONAGE, AND PEER NETWORKS

Deploying defined kinship connections—interpreted loosely to include fellow members of an ethnic group or religious minority—was the most important way to establish a business and develop a correspondence. A sole reliance upon them was seldom if ever depended upon, although it was useful as a springboard. Dr. Richard Hill's first customers in the early 1740s were his son and son-in-law back in Philadelphia; consignments of provision goods from there and Maryland that is, from "the family of our relations," who were all Quakers—kept him from failing in his first three years on the island. Hill's contemporary Francis Newton counted his older brother Andrew in Virginia among his first buyers after he

moved to the island in 1748. Of the roughly fifty correspondent relationships his firm struck in its first ten years in the trade, over three-quarters were with blood relatives or fellow Scots. Toward the end of the 1750s, it targeted doctors and lawyers trained in Scotland, “playing the Scottish card” with men of like experience. Similarly, the Nowlan & Burges firm received its first orders in 1759–62 from family members, especially those still residing in Burges’s native Ireland. Family constituted the lifeline for entrants, even as late as 1815, when John Howard March set up business and relied primarily upon his brothers Joseph and Clement in New Hampshire and his cousin Thomas in New York for capital and orders for several years.

Madeira exporters also called on their patrons. These individuals might bear kin affiliation, but just as often did not. Usually, a patron was someone who had previously nurtured the merchant, granted him protection, and lent him support to advance the interests of both men. Frequently, patrons were former employers, yet from time to time they were current correspondents, albeit far more influential politically, commercially, and socially than the rest. In the middle of the seventeenth century, for example, Diogo Fernandes Branco regularly sold wine to two merchants: João Fernandes in Barbados and José Ferreira in Newfoundland. Whether either had once been his master or were now simply correspondents or agents is unclear, but the three men had known each other from the time they had all previously worked together in Brazil. No kin relationship is discernible. What is clear is that the two used their money and continuing influence in Brazil to advance his interests there in commercial and noncommercial ways. Resort to such men was common. In 1695–1714, William Bolton found business in Barbados through William Heysham, a brother of his friend Robert Heysham of London and a promoter of Bolton’s Caribbean interests. The same was true of Bolton’s contemporary Duarte Sodré Pereira, whose agents—Aaron Lamego in Jamaica, Joseph Ward and Benjamin Mason in Barbados, and Manuel Alves Correia and Miguel de Crasto in Curaçao, all of whom he had met during his stay in Brazil—lent support to his operation and built his business.<sup>29</sup>

The house of Newton & Gordon offers some of the best examples of the extension of networks. When Francis Newton began shipping wine in 1749, he shipped first to Jamaica, to Samuel Johnston, a leading Jamaica merchant and planter who was also the brother of his former London employer. Newton would later trade with another Johnston brother, Patrick, a Barbados planter. Several former friends in the Borders, coming from more elevated families, found it of value to extend Newton their favors: Walter Hunter, William Ellworthy, and George Lawder. All had settled in Jamaica and in the 1750s Newton began drawing on them for orders, advice, and recommendations.<sup>30</sup>

Peer networks, of necessity, gradually emerged in the evolution of any firm’s trading. Wine was commonly sent, distributors reported, “for the use of *particular friends*.” In effect, almost all existing ties were utilized. “Early attachments” were often regarded as “the most lasting,” noted one schoolfellow of Thomas Gordon: “They often reap much a happiness in point of society, business or advancement in life.” There was “vast advantage,” many thought, to boys “being sent to publick school,” for it brought them business down the road. Certainly, Gordon used contacts previously made while attending the Mercer’s School in the City’s Old Jewry in his search for customers. John Corrie of Charleston, James Plunderleath of Roxburghshire, Andrew Robertson of London, and Basil Cooper of London bought from Gordon and funneled him their suggestions as to other potential customers. In the same way, Christ’s Hospital in Hertfordshire—not a “hospital” in the common sense of that word but a school that prepared the orphaned or homeless children of London freemen for apprenticeship or university—funneled consignments to John Leacock for sixty years until his death in 1799. Such ties were both emotional and instrumental.<sup>31</sup>

Overlapping sets of relationships with peers also gave shape to emergent business. After Thomas Newton joined his brother in Madeira in 1756, he wrote a volume of letters to men with whom he had no more tie than that he had once dwelled among them, having worked in New York for eight years as a dry goods merchant in the 1740s and 1750s. He wrote twenty letters a day, all with the same pitch. Evan Cameron had been Newton’s partner in a dry goods firm, and so Newton wrote Cameron almost immediately. He had rented rooms with Malcolm Campbell, and, based on their “*intimate friendship*,” he begged Campbell to use his “utmost endeavours to procure” him “the consignment of a vessel & to speak to all” his “friends & acquaintances to give” him “the preference.” “Old acquaintance” with Dr. Robert Knox and “*intimate friendship*” with his brother, as with Anthony Sarly, were enough to win an order. Cameron, Campbell, Knox, and Sarly were all immigrants whose company Newton had kept in New York. More to the point, they were all equals—at least in standing and rank. Whether mates or just members of the same age or social set, Newton had little hold over them—they had to be wooed.<sup>32</sup>

The value of all three bonds—kin, patron, and peer—was immense, at least in the early stages of building a business. Merchants with such connections knew each other and communicated independently of commerce. Because of these more full-bodied ties, information about product quality, reputation for adhering to the ethical standards of the commercial community, responsiveness to customers’ wishes, and fair dealing traveled fast and far. Communication was generally easier in networks built with such links, where the parties implicitly shared

premises regarding interaction. In uncertain times and ventures, trustworthiness was enhanced by these structures, in which all parties assumed they had shared interests and predispositions.

#### EXTENDED NETWORKS

Yet firms that succeeded found they had to move beyond the base of familial and ethnic connection. It was a lesson learned by exporters in most midsize and large firms, although a reality that has been ignored by most network historians. In some sense, the traders' reorientation grew out of their reflections on the extent to which kinship ties did not always work for them. Fathers fought their sons, and vice versa. Brothers squabbled and failed one another. Rivalry among siblings was as strong then as it always is. Cousinage was a concept so vast and loose to at times be almost content-free, despite the nearly constant, closely affectionate salutation of "dear cousin" that opened many a business letter. As Henry Hill knew from years of frustration—despite Quaker relatives' insistence on brotherly love—"no disputes are so disputable as those between relations."<sup>33</sup>

And so the channels for distributing wine became less personal. Typical was Newton & Gordon's development of a relationship with the New Yorker John Burnett. Thomas Newton was "well acquainted" with Burnett and, responding to a request for contacts, Burnett "promised" Newton that he would ask his brother in Antigua—the planter David Burnett—to give "preference" to the firm. For over two decades, Newton & Gordon made the most of this more remote type of connection. Their correspondent in Norfolk—the merchant John Riddell, a friend of Gordon from childhood—sounded yet another variation on the theme. When Riddell quit trading to return to Scotland, he suggested that Newton & Gordon transfer the handling of their Norfolk business to Logan & Gilmour, a stranger to the Madeirans; having dealt with it for over twelve years, however, Riddell could vouch for the Virginia firm's veracity and connectedness.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, slightly more impersonal connections, although not necessarily more formal, were forged by encounters with and approaches to acquaintances, friends of friends and, increasingly, strangers. As the decades passed, most firms grew "ever ambitious" of extending their network to "gentlemen of character." "Character" often consisted of having numerous friends and a willingness to share them. Two groups were especially desirable to expansively minded traders: sea captains with contacts in port towns and merchants with correspondents in regions surrounding those towns. Newton & Gordon had long dealt with sea captain Alexander Stupart, whose vessel had regularly called at Funchal and Kingston, and, pleased with his handling of affairs, the firm made its reliance upon him annual. It did so primarily because it did not "know a man better calculated for . . . picking up

orders among his friends in Jamaica." Similarly, Captain Stephen Singleton was "extensively engaged in the Madeira trade" in the 1810s, and, as a result, John Howard March found him ideal and wanted to "structure an engagement with him," as he could "obtain many orders for wine." Friends of correspondents and of friends—increasingly very attenuated ties—often passed through the island with "a friendly letter of introduction," and the exporters exerted influence on them to buy or promote their wine as recompense for being treated so well. Even without a visit, the power of a common acquaintance was great. Alexander Johnston of St. Kitts, for instance, urged his neighbors the traders Unwin & Neech to procure wine from Newton & Gordon, and the latter did so in 1783 and for the ensuing two decades. Most remote but over time hugely significant were total strangers. Many visitors called without warning or introduction. Charles Manly, who arrived without letter of introduction but plenty of initiative, ingratiated himself with John Howard March; given March's kind reception, Manly's brother in Gran Canaria subsequently bought Madeira from March and, in turn, sold Canary wine to him. "Entertaining such strangers as we have no connection with" exposed exporters to new customers and emergent tastes, as well as to new ways of making goods or dispersing products.<sup>35</sup>

#### IDENTIFYING WITH CUSTOMER NETWORKS

What does this combination of kin, patron, and peer relations and more extended, seemingly impersonal ties suggest about how commercial lives were conducted? It is no exaggeration to say that a Madeira trading house—indeed, any circum-Atlantic commercial operation—was defined by its customers. In many senses, an Atlantic merchant's identity was his customer portfolio. This is not the way individual identity has usually been conceived. Historians, anthropologists, and other scholars have more often than not presented family, ethnicity, and religion, as well as class and gender, as the chief determinants of personal identity. These factors were certainly at work in Madeira trading, and in very explicit ways. But successful merchants expanded their horizons beyond their communities of origin and built customer networks that supplemented, if they did not supersede, their families and backgrounds. These networks defined the merchants to themselves and to their peers. It is impossible, of course, to be certain how historical personages exactly thought of themselves; one cannot interview them, and the relatively unreflective, action-oriented people who became wine exporters left little personal commentary. But one can divine some perceptions through their behavior and from oblique references in their letters.<sup>36</sup>

Family, nationality, race, and religion were all important ingredients of the



Madeira merchants' identities. Identities were grounded in kinship, and kinship brought real benefit to the merchants. Partnership formation was often faster among blood relatives, and contractual issues—who could provide initial resources, who was responsible for firm direction, and how gains would be divided—were often easier to negotiate. Members of a family participated because it was a *tontine* of sorts—surviving relatives might benefit and inherit. Moreover, family played these roles because members remained connected over long periods of time, pursued varieties of activities, and, it was presumed, shared goals and ideals; often, they did not have to specify the range of activities and assumptions in the detail they had to when associating with strangers. The elements of affiliation generally existed as part of a package, and usually the participation of members did not demand a balancing of parties in any exchange.<sup>37</sup>

Family association also gave entrée to nonfamily members—potential partners and customers—by aligning Madeira's merchants with people who already knew the reputations of the strangers. It created, in doing so, "social capital" for both exporters and strangers who were unfamiliar with each other but who recognized each other's smaller family or larger clan. "The role of family affiliation vis-à-vis others relies partly on its value as a signal of personal traits—honesty, fidelity, skill, and so on—and on the degree to which the family takes responsibility for the obligations and actions of its members." That is, family affiliation signaled authority, discipline, altruism, and solidarity to the rest of the world. Families constituted recognizable collective characters, which became embedded in the identities of members. All this made them especially valuable in forming a network.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, family ties held no monopoly on understanding, sharing, or trust; "the benefits of the ideal family were ephemeral," particularly "when inter-cine strife was common." Limiting oneself to family, even extended family, limited opportunities for achievement. As a result, savvy merchants expanded their bases of contacts, customers, and correspondents. As their commercial activities grew and became less centered on their initial circles of relatives, patrons, and peers, their identities—their senses of who they were—expanded. The various links among acquaintances, friends of friends, and strangers were what sociologists call "weak ties," in contrast to the "strong ties" of friends, neighbors, and relatives. Common religion and ethnic links could function as strong or weak, depending on the degree to which they injected similar or dissimilar points of view into the relationship, although a shared moral vocabulary probably made them more strong than weak, given the penchant of fellow religionists and ethnics for avoiding in-group criticism. Weak ties are more exchange-oriented and less intimate, intense, and time-consuming than relations with relatives, neigh-

bors, or friends. Weak ties have strong informational advantages, for someone to whom one was weakly tied was "more likely to move in circles different from" one's own and have "access to information different from that which" normally one receives. Because people with strong ties are usually similarly situated, they often did not have access to the information about different peoples, places, and resources that was needed in transoceanic business.<sup>39</sup>

Madeira merchants' weak ties often arose from contacts with ship captains, visitors who stopped at the island, and second-, third-, and even fourth-hand links to friends of friends. These ties imprinted commercial identity as powerfully as did strong ones. A merchant's customer portfolio certainly reflected and summarized his origins, yet moved beyond them. It is this understanding that Thomas Lamar conveyed to Henry Hill when reminding Hill that the "interest" of their firm lay "naturally in America." Its founder and two of its partners came from Maryland and Pennsylvania. But a customer base should be "pursued [there] by every eligible method," to wit, by moving far beyond recognized ties of consanguinity.<sup>40</sup> The Scarles likewise pursued New Yorkers, and the Brushes Bostonians, whether they knew them personally or not, and in time pushed well beyond the bounds of each. Predominantly British firms like the Leacocks and Gordons turned to England and Scotland. Such men built their portfolios of customers by integrating the emigration patterns of their families and friends, their own various travels, their choice of partners, and the like—fundamentally, by aggressively pursuing tenuous, often distant commercial opportunities.

This expanded, almost symbiotic identification with customers revealed itself in a number of ways. Table 5.3 details the geographical distribution of three firms' customers in the second half of the eighteenth century. Newton & Gordon (and its successors) focused on England and the West Indies: 171 of its 210 customers during the early 1770s lived in one of these two places, as did 246 of its 273 customers a decade later, and 303 of its 404 customers at the end of the century. In the late 1750s, Newton & Gordon's first correspondent in Barbados was Patrick Johnston. In Jamaica, it served Philip Pinnock, James Nasmyth, Donald Campbell, James Kerr, and Nathaniel Beckford—some of the more important landholders there. By 1782–85, it had at least 33 regular Jamaica customers, more than any other Madeira firm: 7 individuals and firms in Kingston, another 7 in Spanishtown, 2 in Savanna-la-Mar, and 17 on undisclosed plantations. In addition to regular customers on which it relied for annual orders, Newton & Gordon shipped to a large number of more occasional, irregular buyers; there were 67 such customers in three years in the early 1780s. Consistent with their English and West Indian interests, Newton & Gordon sympathized with the British at the outbreak of war.<sup>41</sup>

Table 5.3. Geographical distribution of three firms' customers in the eighteenth century

Geographical area	Newton & Gordon			Leacock		Lamar, Hill, Bisset & Co.		
	1770-1772	1782-1785	1797-1798	1763-1765	1797-1798	1762	1767	1796-1797
England	79	121	112	27	19	9	11	1
Of which London	71	111	102	26	17		9	1
Scotland	7							
Ireland	1	2	1			1		
Holland		3				1		
Spain		1				1		
Portugal	1	5	7			2		
Madeira	1	1			1			
British Canada			3					1
New Hampshire			3					
Massachusetts			3	1		16	6	
Connecticut						3	1	2
New York	1	3	3	1	1	2	18	
New Jersey						1	1	
Pennsylvania	1	1	7	3		22	13	2
Maryland	1		1	2		4	9	
Virginia	4		5	14		33	39	16
South Carolina		1	29	1	1	1	12	2
Georgia			5					
West Florida	4							
West Indies	92	125	191	33	22	9	13	6
Of which Jamaica	67	100	116	13	3	2	3	
Of which eastern								
West Indies	25	23	52	18	19	7	9	5
Of which Barbados		1	4	2				
Africa			11					
India and Asia		9	20					
Unstated	18	1	3	1		24	9	9
Total	210	273	404	83	44	129	132	39

Sources: Newton & Gordon Bills of Lading Books, 1770-72, 1782-85, 1797-98, Cossart, Gordon Papers, Madeira Wine Company, Funchal; Leacock Bills of Lading Books, 1763-65, 1797-98, Leacock Papers, private collection, Funchal; Lamar, Hill, Bisset & Co. Inventories, July 1, 1762, July 1, 1767, 1796-97, folders 3-4, Lamar, Hill, Bisset & Co. Papers, Edward Wanton Smith Collection, 4 folders, 1762-1802, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. The 1796-97 Lamar, Hill data, in a List of Outstanding Debts, is partial, but no more complete accounting has survived.

John Leacock's firms were likewise identified with England and the West Indies, but they never matched the scale of Newton & Gordon's engagement. Between the 1760s and 1790s, he saw his firms increase the number of shipments managed and nearly double the number of pipes exported. Although Spence, Leacock & Spence shipped extensively to British North America in the 1760s, 60 of their 83 customers lived in England or the Caribbean. In the latter region, it supplied customers in Antigua, where Leacock's brother lived, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts, and Tortola. By the century's end, the firm's successor, Nowlan & Leacock, had moved farther afield, having added the Bahamas, Demerara, Martinique, Montserrat, St. Croix, St. Vincent, and Santo Domingo to its Caribbean portfolio, plus new destinations in India and England. Like Newton & Gordon, the firm was slow to return to prerevolutionary customers in the United States market; when it did, it discovered that American-identified firms—those firms with American partners and British firms whose correspondence with the self-conscious “Americans” emphasized their respect for the new country—had saturated the place. The Leacocks' customer base, and so the firm's attention and identity, became imperialized, turning more to India and to lands that Britain annexed or occupied in the 1780s and 1790s, like Demerara. While they had no customers per se residing in India, as table 5.3 notes, they began to fill ships that went there on a regular basis so that their cargoes could be reexported to London after a stay in the subcontinent. They began to supply as well a large London intermediary, Cleland, White & Co., which first bought several hundred pipes in 1798 for resale in India and the next year another 500. Given such large orders, India loomed larger in their sense of who they were as businessmen.

Lamar, Hill, Bisset & Co., in contrast, was a North American firm heavily engaged with the mid-Atlantic and upper South colonies and states, especially Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. Before the Revolution, Richard Hill leveled his sights on Philadelphia, where his family was established. During the Revolution, the firm, headed by his son Henry, attempted to run the British blockade of the North American coast and supply the colonists. By heritage, ideology, and business interests, it always identified with a place it thought was “rising fast to wealth & consequently to luxury,” and it stood well positioned to answer the “call for much” of Madeira's wine after the war. This shows in its customer lists. In 1762, 82 of the firm's 129 customers lived in what became the United States, 59 hailing from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia alone. Five years later, 99 of 132 customers were from the future States, including 61 from the same three jurisdictions. Even after the firm's business had been intentionally downsized at the end of the century, its distinctive focus remained: 1 customer hailed from

England; 1 British Canada; 2 Connecticut; 20 Pennsylvania, Virginia, and South Carolina; 6 West Indies; and 9 undesignated markets.<sup>42</sup>

With respect to identification with customers, it was not just that the distributors dealt with buyers in a greater number of places around the world as the century advanced and, perhaps paradoxically, that they specialized in serving customers in certain regions. They also showed sympathy with the areas with which they traded and often took on their causes as their own. They sometimes advocated the political causes of their customers, even if the support contravened their own national allegiance. The Leacocks and the members of Gordon, Duff & Co. became expert not only in East India Company affairs but also in governmental administration of the subcontinent, and constantly supported efforts—in England and India—to open up the country and reform its legal system. The Americans—the Hills and the Searles—were almost slavish in support of the colonists during the revolutionary agitation of the 1760s and 1770s. But the pro-British Newton & Gordon, which initially supported Britain's fight against its colonists, adopted a more moderate tone as the conflict evolved; during the 1790s, it staunchly defended the Americans against the quasi-military assaults of the British. In the last third of the century, most firms in Funchal also began to express concern and lobby actively for the passage of Portuguese and American laws that eased their trade with their customers and protected customers' commercial property.

In other ways, too, the identity of exporters became intertwined with that of their customers. Some distributors became poachers, stealing customers from other traders. Such behavior was anathema to them before 1763. But, by the final third of the century, customers had become critical to the profile of any firm, and so were vigorously fought over. Nor would just any customers do: distributors became more “class conscious,” in the sense that whom they served became a “brand” of their firm. Whom an exporter supplied—regardless of family or ethnic tie—became more important to its image than where its partners came from. In this way, the idea of “a quality house”—not a term exporters used or a concept they fussed about in the 1690s—emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. The “first houses” did not deal in adulterated, mixed, north-side, and low wines. They tried to avoid India or navy business. For them, “the quality of the wine is the chief thing.” In short, they aggressively, obsessively pushed the plan of providing quality to quality. Scot, Pringle & Cheap was perhaps the leading house in purveying quality wine in the 1760s, joined by Newton & Gordon, whose pursuit of the niche began in the 1780s. The Hills earned a reputation for shipping “nothing but wine of the first quality” in that decade, too, although they always had difficulty meeting the demands of their customers, at the same time that the

Leacocks also struggled to enter the tier of “quality houses.” What each of these firms did or tried to do was ship only London Particular and perhaps New York grades, plus rarer varieties like Malvasia and Sercial. Not surprisingly, those who adopted this approach prided themselves on a higher than average percentage of customers regularly taking a pipe or two each year and in a personal knowledge of their customers.<sup>43</sup>

#### MANAGING MADEIRA'S CUSTOMER NETWORKS

Madeira exporters struggled to build a business and make a profit by constructing customer networks. Once built, how were they managed? In essence, they handled these structures by carrying on multiple sets of interactive, transoceanic conversations about the wine—how it was made and packaged, how it was shipped and distributed, how it was displayed and consumed. The conversations, as we have already seen, were not limited to verbal communications. Nor were they restricted to offering products, filling orders, arranging financing and shipping, and negotiating prices. Rather, they were full and frank exchanges about the improvement of the product, the elaboration of distribution channels to suppliers and consumers, changes in tactics, clients, and venues, what constituted fair prices, the construction of a drink made to the taste of a new market, and the like. Such conversations, at a deep level, were coordinating mechanisms whereby transatlantic businessmen determined what was a saleable product, who was a good partner, and what was a satisfactory transaction.<sup>44</sup>

“Conversation,” in the early modern sense of the term, was the action of dealings with others or things. It need not have been public or oral, although modern scholars have inexplicably reduced it to speech acts. It embraced not only what was spoken but also what was done in complement to words. It might have taken a few minutes or hours; but it also might have spilled over days, months, or years. It need not have involved just two parties. The important ingredient was an “interchanging of thoughts” with another—a “commerce of minds” the poet Cyril Tourneur called it—and this was something that could be effected in writing and across water. Conversation construed in this manner had to exhibit two characteristics. There had to be a subject: participants had to have a focus for their talk, a center around which to exchange their ideas. Such was the gist of Samuel Johnson's bon mot that he had “had *talk* enough, but no conversation,” for there had been “nothing *discussed*” by the two parties. Second, the conversation had to be collaborative: each participant had to have the opportunity to offer his knowledge and articulate and rearticulate his position. As Henry Fielding acknowledged, conversation was “that reciprocal interchange of Ideas, by which

Truth is examined. Things are, in a manner, *turned around* and sifted, and all our knowledge communicated to each other.” Conversation, then, was, among other things, a highly nuanced, enlightened metaphor for the Atlantic commercial world. It drew together the ideas of learning with exchange, truth with commerce. Throughout, it implied the triumph of civil discourse, with the insistence that reason, courtesy, and articulation could explicate the world and reconcile differences. Merchants who wrote about wine to others across the seas might have been surprised and flattered to have their letters and accounts labeled “conversations”—a rather fanciful word for their earnest, mundane discussions!—but they would have recognized why the label fit.<sup>45</sup>

Madeirans' conversations were not part of a metropolitan master plan. Rather, they were nonhierarchical, voluntary, and self-organized discussions among complementary goal seekers working mainly around the Atlantic basin, each responding to the opportunities in his local market and at the same time connecting to multiple, other, similarly motivated yet differently influenced correspondents residing in different places. Fortunately for the twenty-first-century observer, a great deal of this discourse was epistolary, and a large portion has survived. In addition, the conversations were increasingly intense, as exhibited in the rising volume of correspondence and growing deployment of agents and partners to the customers' localities. By means of correspondence, wine exporters, uncoordinated but certainly copying each other's successful moves, inculcated the ideas and aspirations of customers.

#### CONVERSATIONS CREATE NETWORKS

Transatlantic trade networks—indeed, transatlantic trade—sprang from conversations. In recent years, social scientists have proliferated typologies of networks—some useful for certain purposes, some for others. At least four properties that they ascribe to networks quite broadly are applicable to the exchange structures that emerged in the early modern Atlantic wine trade: information flow between members, conflict resolution, increased flexibility, and the enforcement of norms. Conversations were the mechanisms that enabled these properties to be fully realized.

Nonhierarchical conversations with customers, suppliers, agents, and friends provided Madeira traders with information about the opening of markets, the good or “miserable state” of credit, the presence of disease that would close a port to their wine, the tactics of other exporters, the bankruptcies of correspondents, the progress of vessels around the globe, the passage and enforcement of restrictive regulations in consumer markets, the tastes of specific communities, and so on. When Newton & Gordon first pushed into Georgia, it approached the

Savannah firm Inglis & Hall. “We should be glad to hear from you & know something of the trade & produce of your province, if any quantity of wines could be disposed of to advantage, what qualities,” it wrote, “with every other particular which may occur to you necessary for our information.” As few Georgia vessels had come to Madeira, it was “in the dark with regard to the qualities or prices of your produce” or the colonists’ call for wine. In doing so, the firm acknowledged the importance of information flow to itself and to would-be customers.<sup>46</sup>

Much of the conversation passed on rumor or speculation of a sometimes intimate, personal, and sensational nature. By letters from noncustomers and word-of-mouth reports from captains and passengers, the partners of Newton & Gordon in Madeira heard in July 1772 “the melancholy news of sundry great failures in London” that “in general” ran “much among the Scotch houses,” and that their erstwhile patron Johnston’s sometime partner Thomas William Jolly was “gone in the common wreck.” The insinuation was that Johnston, their metropolitan agent, might also be embarrassed. Before hearing from Johnston or their own London partner, the Madeirans wrote to another firm in London, asking for confirmation of Jolly’s business and cutting their losses with correcting orders. Decades later, hearing a rumor that “immense quantities” of brandy had been captured and carried to England, without waiting for verification, the firm changed its plans for supplying itself with spirits, canceling orders from continental sources and ordering supplies to be bought in London instead. Some of the reportage, as of Johnston’s supposed 1772 insolvency, was groundless, yet exporters were forced to deal with it as if true and to clear the slate. They strove to correct the misinformation whenever possible. In this Johnston succeeded. Not all were so fortunate. At one point, “some wise men” in Madeira, “who journalize[d] other men’s business and behavior to their friends in London and who also receive[d] journals of what their friends in London hear, see and imagine,” averred that Thomas Murdoch planned to ship five hundred pipes on a certain vessel (figure 5.1). There was no truth to the allegation, and Murdoch did his utmost to dispel the rumor. But most islanders never believed him, and the high prices that persisted among the growers as a result persisted through the year.<sup>47</sup>

Conversations with customers also helped resolve conflicts. The expanse of water separating them restricted the ability of Old World sellers and New World buyers to track and observe each other directly. In order for trade to occur at all, base levels of trust had to be established. Disagreement potentially threatened trust, because, if unresolved, it cast an almost immovable shadow of sharp dealing on at least one party and resulted in loss of business. Accordingly, even before any action was taken and any accusation was made, a pointed conversation

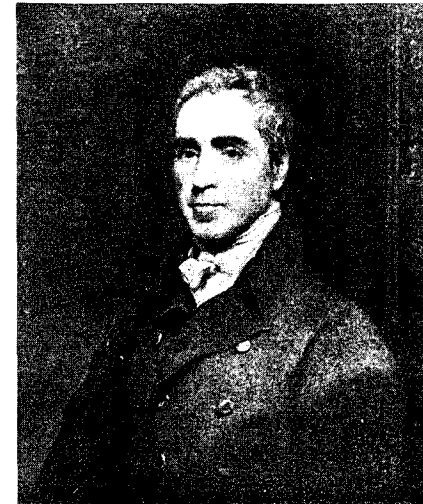


Figure 5.1. Thomas Murdoch  
(1758–1846).

Source: © Royal Geographical Society,  
London.

with clear meaning held in extenso from far away, if skillfully managed, might cool hot tempers. In effect, a conversation figured as something like arbitration before a lawsuit. If an importer proffered questionable bills or exhibited suspicious creditworthiness, the exporter would ask a correspondent or agent in the importer’s community to encourage the individual in person or through writing and thereby effect repayment. Vice versa, as well: if a Lisbon house was treated falsely by a Madeira firm, that house might approach another Madeiran to effect reconciliation, as was the case when John Parminter of Lisbon approached Newton & Gordon about questionable bills tendered by Smith & Ayres, and get the former to write or talk to the latter. Persuasion, exporters instructed junior partners, was central to profit making.<sup>48</sup>

Once divisions became public, distributors minimized any damage by making conversation personal and face-to-face. This tactic was particularly useful when the exporter wanted to remain on good terms with the correspondent. In the 1760s, for example, Newton & Gordon’s Boston correspondent John Rowe, a highly regarded merchant, questioned the amount he owed the company. With such a magnate, getting “the proceeds . . . out of his hands” was tricky and had to be done “with the greatest caution & prudence”; accordingly, the firm chose not “to affront him or show him any reason that” it was “dissatisfied with his

usage” but rather to order its own Thomas Newton in New York to visit Rowe in Boston. In the end, Rowe still refused to pay: the approach did not work this time. But often it did. Sometimes when a correspondent refused to pay for wine delivered, a distributor brought a new party into the conversation, drawing on a local with whom the offender had a more intimate acquaintance or who could apply pressure to him. Firms frequently found occasion to adopt these less aggressive, more conversational tactics. In 1803, Newton & Gordon asked its New York agent Robert Lenox to recover money “with delicacy” from two Virginians, which he had to do via the post.<sup>49</sup>

Conversations between commercial correspondents could increase firm flexibility and speed in handling trade. A network of customers helped a distributor ride out hard times in overseas markets. When a market was glutted with wine, an exchange of letters with a customer on the spot informed the distributor of excessive supply and made the case for shipping the wine elsewhere. Such was the situation when the master of a Salem vessel found “dull sale” in Georgia for wine acquired from Scot, Pringle & Cheap. He wanted to send his cargo to Carolina. Since the Madeirans’ agent there could give “no encouragement to that idea,” their correspondent in Salem redirected the cargo to himself. More dramatically, correspondence with the East India Company, India-bound captains, and members of the military and civil establishments on the subcontinent facilitated many exporters’ sending their wines to fresh addresses in South Asia when the North American ports were closed to British ships during the Revolution.<sup>50</sup>

Conversations were, lastly, a powerful means of exerting transoceanic control. Because the relationships among sellers and buyers were multiple, overlapping, and noncoercive—that is, because they were a network, as opposed to a hierarchy or a single link—accounts of infractions of economic and social norms spread rapidly to all network members. In relating such infractions, participants in the Atlantic wine trade articulated their own norms and implicitly committed themselves to them, at the same time that they reported on and warned about others’ lapses. Early in his career in Madeira, Francis Newton unabashedly disclosed to correspondents that another exporter was, in a most untraditional manner, begging from any supplier for imports into Madeira and in turn offering wine at prices settled in advance before the imported goods were seen. Newton warned that this was a “way to make a man bankrupt in this business.”<sup>51</sup> Newton’s was a complex communication. The Scot was making his correspondents aware of the risks incurred by trading with such an imprudent gentleman, and this was valuable advice. The gentleman in question did go bankrupt five years later, and the correspondents who heeded Newton’s suggestion avoided entanglement. At the same time, Newton was committing himself not to offer prices on imports

before he had seen them and ascertained their quality, and was telling his correspondents, many of whom were his suppliers, not to ask him to do so.

Traders did not distinguish strongly between business/professional and social/personal infractions, and so there was often a strong moral tone to their description of wrongdoers, as Newton’s ire suggests. When John Leacock notified customers that his former partner Spence had overextended himself through land speculation in America and thereby bankrupted himself a second time, his breathless, horrified tone left no question whether he believed this reflected badly on Spence’s character. When Richard Hill wrote a Philadelphian about the looseness of a competitor’s practice, he felt it threatened the competitor’s ability to honor his commitments. Not honoring one’s commitments was one of the gravest commercial sins where oceanic distances were in play. In predicting his competitor would fail in this way, Hill was attempting to insulate himself from the economic ostracism and social opprobrium that would ensue by establishing a different set of standards for himself. Hill may have particularly needed to establish standards, as he had himself gone bankrupt back in Maryland, yet such pronouncements were not peculiar to men with his past; all distributors used them to assert and inculcate correct rules of deportment. James Duff’s 1802 bankruptcy was explained to correspondents as a matter of evil over good: it was a “contemptible sin,” one “solely owing to his extensive and very imprudent engagements as an insurer, which is a vile gambling trade.” Marien Lamar’s rejection as a partner could be easily accepted by his confederates given his “wrong behavior”—which in his case was lethargy and a fondness for “the baneful practice of immoderate drinking.” Pointing out or commenting on good or bad character or behavior became an important way to maintain network control. Thus were commercial codes of behavior replicated. No one reading epistolary exchanges would have missed either the message or the goal.<sup>52</sup>

#### CUSTOMERS TALK BACK

Much of the extant record for Madeira wine traders’ exporting and marketing appears in the letters they wrote to others. As a result, most of what we can reconstitute is the traders’ side of the conversations, and, sadly, in the case of Madeira, since only a handful of Portuguese traders’ letters or accounts have survived, most of that side is the foreigners’. But, of course, customers were actively managing their suppliers, even as the suppliers were managing them and, luckily, some of the customers’ letters have survived as well. Through the conversations they participated in, customers were actively involved in the design, assessment, and distribution of the product. The exporters constantly asked customers to give their opinion on the wines previously sent. The buyers talked back. In doing so,

they participated in the invention of the modern Madeira wine, as we have seen, providing opinion that helped turn a cheap, simple table wine into an expensive, complex, and highly processed luxury product.

Customer interaction and conversation pressured distributors in a myriad of ways, many of which were unrelated to the product's manufacture. One sees this in bold relief in the negotiations that led to a late eighteenth-century shift in payment arrangements. Distributors as early as 1640 had required as compensation for wine of the first quality either specie or a bill of exchange drawn on London. "Great sacrifices" on the part of the customer "& much advance of capital" were expected if an exporter was to send "so scarce & valuable an article." But "few houses" in Atlantic consumer markets, "except those of the first capital & connections," could pay in this way. After the American Revolutionary War, awareness grew that commercial life had changed in ways that weakened the hands of distributors and strengthened those of the customers. In particular, American consumers began demanding new terms for compensation. By the early 1790s, Madeira exporters began allowing unheard-of payment periods and locations and interpreting discharge more flexibly. They would in future allow buyers

from 12 to 18 months credit on the amount if payable in London, according as the order might be limited or extensive. But if instead of drawing at this extended period upon London, it should by you be preferred that we should receive our payment in America, we would allow the same credit, with this additional circumstance: that when the amount should become due instead of its being paid or remitted, we would request you to invest the sum in such produce as would suit our market, that the commission on the shipment, as also the opportunity employing your own vessels might be derived to you from the transaction

This was a transatlantic commercial relationship that had integrated considerably: the parties were each the other's suppliers *and* customers; they relied on each other's judgment; and they were frank about each other's gains. Overall, they trusted each other. Yet, this was not a disposition that Americans found congenial and, over several years and in countless letters, the two groups whittled down a more acceptable arrangement, one where customers prevailed. The exporters would allow credit of up to two years and the choice of bills upon London, Lisbon, Philadelphia, or New York. In return, the customers acquiesced in matters of product and cargo, waiving final say over the makeup of the cargo and the taste of the wine. "In order to maintain long-term cooperation, repeated sequential communications, decisions and negotiations" over credit were staged, and significant concessions were granted to Madeira's overseas contacts.<sup>53</sup>

SENDING OUT VISITORS TO AND ESTABLISHING  
AGENTS IN CONSUMER MARKETS

By the late eighteenth century, most middling and large firms were intensifying whatever conversations they were having with customers by sending partners to America and Britain "to settle a correspondence." The practice had long occurred. Benjamin Bartlett, for one, stopped at New London in 1717, but did so mainly because it lay on his way home to England. Many others did likewise. Purposive, designed trade missions did not become commonplace until the second half of the century. Competition for buyers made them necessary. Dr. Richard Hill went expressly to America to "drive all before him" in the 1750s—to procure wine orders from old and new customers and arrange for American consignments—or, less politely, to trounce the competition. He first sallied forth in 1754, calling on friends where he landed, in Lower Marlborough, Maryland, in his hometown of Londontown, in Baltimore, and in Philadelphia, from which he departed. In all, he spent three months on his journey. His appetite whetted, he returned two years later. Hill landed at Norfolk, Virginia, and moved on to Williamsburg and then his native Ann Arundel County. Intending to return in two years, he left from Norfolk, but near shipwreck caused his vessel to turn back and forced on the exporter a more extensive foray lasting another year, during which he called on acquaintances and strangers in Virginia, Maryland, and New Jersey.<sup>54</sup>

The 1750s saw others rushing to do the same. In 1754, Gedley Clare Burges left his sometime partner Robert Jones in London and, with Jones's letters of recommendation in his brief, set out on an elaborate "visitation of the counties," taking in Liverpool, Dublin, Cork, Waterford, and Bristol. Early the next year, George Spence made a journey to Scotland to drum up orders. Spence's partner made it clear what his goal was to be: "Your principal study." Francis Newton hectored, "ought to be to procure orders and consignments." After Newton parted with Spence and aligned himself with Thomas Gordon, the latter traveled to Bristol and Liverpool "to procure a good deal of business" for the house in 1758. In America, Newton's brother Thomas, the third partner in their newly reconfigured firm, secured the support of New York general merchant John Provoost, and the two traveled throughout New York and New England, where, in addition to prospects, they encountered the Madeiran John Scarle and an agent of the Madeiran Andrew Donaldson, who were also working to procure "an opening to a larger correspondence." Charles Murray, sweeping through most cities between St. Augustine and Boston, drummed up business for Scot, Pringle & Cheap in 1765. Ten years later, he repeated the itinerary. The success of Murray's

trips in particular raised such envy that, on the eve of the Revolution, at least four other firms were planning “a tour through America & the West Indies,” “with the sole purpose” of acquiring “some more friends in those quarters.” All hoped such “tours” would “make . . . many good correspondents & obtain many orders for wine.”<sup>55</sup>

As the size of the island export community grew after 1750 and competition heated up, export houses appointed agents in London, Philadelphia, and New York. Eventually, some settled partners in Britain and Anglo-America to monitor commercial developments and secure new correspondents. When Francis Newton arrived in Madeira in 1748 and allied himself with George Spence, he relied on his partner to handle affairs in London, which largely meant procuring orders for wine and financing the outbound cargo. After about a decade, Newton parted company with Spence and turned to an erstwhile London employer, Alexander Johnston, to handle his affairs on a part-time basis. This new arrangement persisted even after he allied with Thomas Gordon in 1758. Within three years, there were “so many partners residing in London” who were able to devote more time and procure more orders than Johnston, a representative with other, often conflicting interests, that Newton & Gordon began to worry. Like other firms of its size and ambition, it eventually sent a partner to reside in the metropolis. It was not enough to cover only London, however; American ports needed personal management as well. Newton & Gordon had already sent Thomas Newton to New York in 1758. When he died in 1766, it appointed John Provoost its agent; four years later, when Provoost’s efforts began to flag, they appointed Waddell Cunningham.<sup>56</sup> Lamar, Hill & Bisset’s Henry Hill, and Searle Brothers’ James Searle likewise settled in Philadelphia (figures 5.2 and 5.3). Although “having partners on the spot” was not a feature of transatlantic trade early in the century, it became one after 1750. It was at the century’s end the sine qua non of doing business “in the Madeira Way.”<sup>57</sup>

In the aftermath of the American Revolutionary War, every house of any size or pretension had to have an agent in Britain and the States. Their proliferation seems to prove the opposite of Philip Curtin’s sweeping claim that, as cross-cultural commerce grew and evolved, the need for agents subsided. What drove the push in Britain was the growth of a London-based India business for wine when, in the 1780s, the East India Company opened up the competition for supplying the subcontinental forts, troops, and civil servants. In principle, a distributor could have placed bids from afar, but most firms found it helpful to wine, dine, wheedle, and cajole the directors on the spot. By 1785, there were at least ten resident partners all clamoring for the lucrative supply contracts. “Every foreign establishment ought and must have a partner to reside in London.”<sup>58</sup>



Figure 5.2. Henry Hill (1732–1798).  
Source: John J. Smith, ed., *The Letters of Dr. Richard Hill* (Philadelphia, 1854). Courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.



Figure 5.3. James Searle (1730–1797).  
Source: Courtesy of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia, The Stouffer Collection, vol. 10, fol. 66



The push for agents in America came from a different quarter—demography and wealth. “The importance of the American trade”—a function of the remarkable growth in its population during the eighteenth century—made Madeirans think it “superior” to their trade with any other place. Accordingly, many firms appointed not just resident agents but also supracorrespondents or supra-agents. Before the war, it had been customary to have a correspondent in each of the major port towns; this person handled goods, procured orders, managed finances, received remittances, paid drafts, and dunned tardy debtors. After the war, as security seemed assured and population continued to expand, all firms who were heavily engaged in “the America way” appointed a single agent across all states to handle most of their American affairs. Newton & Gordon, for instance, first employed Jeffrey & Russell of Boston in 1791 and Robert Lenox of New York four years later to oversee all of its American affairs. Lenox, a twenty-five-year-old Scot, was the consummate intermediary. At the time of his appointment, the firm’s need for consolidation had grown immense—not only were its customers more numerous and its exports more voluminous but American banking and insurance had developed to such an extent that one needed an American to realize and negotiate the rapidly proliferating commercial and financial possibilities. By 1802, although the firm still corresponded directly with a few large wholesalers, its “chief reliance” was on Lenox. It did “not allow any cargoes except what Mr. Lenox sends to be drawn for upon”; all the firm’s transactions in America—indeed, any request “for any information concerning us”—went “more or less through that Gentleman’s hands.”<sup>59</sup>

#### CARING FOR ISLAND VISITORS

One final way that the Madeirans managed a network was to attend to any and all comers, whatever the likelihood of eventual custom. Given its geographical position, Madeira evolved into a natural way station for travel to Africa, the Americas, and India. Passengers stopping there had to stay somewhere if their ship lay at anchor for more than a few days. The flea- and rat-infested vessels, stinking of rancid food and human excrement, held little allure. Foreign travelers stayed with the exporters, most of whom were British and Protestant, the latter an advantage to Protestants passing through a Catholic land. Even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was “not a tolerable Inn, nor a decent lodging to be had in the town.” One inn dignified with the name of “the British Hotel” was open, but it was in reality “little more than a miserable ale house.” So the houses of Madeira distributors became hotels, and “the great hospitality” of the distributors made the want of comforts “less felt.” But reception and entertainment were

not entered into out of altruism; they looked upon it as work—as a way of procuring orders and consignments.<sup>60</sup>

Care of island visitors was not restricted to commercial men and their companions. Mere tourists came to be regarded as likely targets for sales. As we have seen, the island became an Atlantic attraction in its own right, not merely a staging post for overseas settlements. Scientists came to investigate the production of the wine, voyeurs the “Gothic” practices of Portuguese Catholics, and aesthetes and budding Romantics the drama of the landscape. In addition, as the Atlantic medical community popularized the benefits of Madeira’s climate for the consumptive and of its wine for the gouty, invalids floated to the island in droves.

To all these visitors, the exporters opened their doors. There were some costs, of course. Long-term patients and convalescents might rent villas, but until they did so they stayed with exporters and, often, the sick were so far gone that removal to a rented villa was impossible and so they stayed with the merchants until they were buried at the merchants’ charge. More willingly, merchants opened their homes “for the reception of the passengers stopping for refreshments . . . in their way to Asia or America.” This was a considerable undertaking but a fruitful one. Providing a refuge gave merchants a link to individuals with new information and correspondence; it brought them in contact with people from different backgrounds and empires and with different social and economic networks; it facilitated the initiation of trust relationships. Cross-fertilization went both ways, of course. It exposed Atlantic sojourners to new ideas, too, and the distributors made sure that among them was the practice of drinking a wine that perhaps the consumers had not considered before and in a manner they might not have seen. By physically creating an environment of openness, distributors could more easily access new information sources and consumer contacts as diverse as the empires they inhabited. Many a future customer or correspondent began with a merchant providing a room or a meal to a visitor who arrived at his door with the flimsiest of introductions.<sup>61</sup>

The importance of forging customer contacts among noncommercial types so as to better bridge distinct groups and distant markets was immense, even if it is hard to calculate today. Not all merchants were as enterprising as James Murdoch, who gave printed cards to his guests telling them “to apply” on their return to London to Murdoch’s agent, whom Murdoch had instructed “to be attentive & solicit” business and “find out” whether they had “any friends or connections that can be serviceable” in terms of generating orders for wine. Yet, taking care of onetime visitors and treating them—as well as established contacts—as poten-

tial customers was considered just another part of doing business, another way of creating social capital. All firms consciously extended their reach in such a way. Most merchants shared Murdoch's zeal and seized the chance to extend their network. It was not uncommon in a busy week for an exporter to feed two dozen at dinner and to offer a bed to half that number. Newton & Gordon and Leacock & Sons frequently hosted as many as twelve visitors at a time, even in slow months, and most guests were not established correspondents. That is not to say that hospitality imposed no bother. The extra expense and extraordinary diversion "which breaks in upon" a house and "its management of business" were privately grumbled at as intolerable. Yet the hospitality persisted through the nineteenth century, for the "behavior & attention" that a distributor lavished on "all Madeira visitors" enabled him, "by his acquaintance, to enlarge & benefit his mercantile connections."<sup>62</sup>

#### MARKETING TO WINE CUSTOMERS

Madeira exporters built, extended, and managed customer networks through extensive conversation. Their goals in using such talk were commercial: to sell Madeira wine to larger numbers of customers at rising prices. Consequently, much of the conversation can be described as "marketing," as the merchants set out to stimulate demand, adopting the techniques emerging in other sectors of the Atlantic consumer market and inventing a few of their own. They sensed via research emerging trends among drinkers. They shaped new products that satisfied drinkers' tastes and determined the most effective ways to seize their imaginations, whether through advertisement or outlet. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the talk proved fruitful, achieving its desired end: Madeira, as we have seen, became a sought-after luxury product commanding high prices. Exporters made Madeira the most expensive wine of the day, as customers used product and price to validate personal successes.<sup>63</sup>

The distributors stimulated demand by raising their prices and introducing new varietals and blends, as we have seen, and by devising new terms to accompany the grades, as we shall see. To the same end, they deployed more explicit marketing techniques. Naming the wine became an art few traders could resist. "From interested motives," exporters and their agents began "to give whimsical appellations" to the wine in the late eighteenth century, calling it after the ship that carried it, like the "U.S.S. *Constitution*," or the family or group that ordered it, like "The Supreme Court." While "a Madeira merchant stares & smiles" at the terms, knowing them "to mean nothing," such monikers and others, like "Pedro," "Brazil," or "Conventicle," imparted to customers the sense of a limited edition

or exotic origin and persuaded them "that unusual excellence in the liquor accompanies those appellations."<sup>64</sup> Similarly, exporters also tried tying their wine to famous customers. Some merchants wooed buyers by boasting about famous military and political customers—a ploy that both amused and irked competitors. John Marsden Pintard bragged "much of shipping General Washington's wine," one partner in the Lamar, Hill, Bisset firm fumed, even though the Hill firm "used formerly to supply him . . . to his satisfaction." General Washington's or Lord Nelson's purchase and praise of a wine or the fact that a firm's wine had graced the table of a dinner for Alexander Hamilton or the Prince Regent was used to recommend a pipe of the same lot to future purchasers. Never without an agenda, John Howard March, who had learned from the best while a clerk in the Newton & Gordon house, constantly dangled before would-be buyers the names of his best customers, including President James Madison, Secretary of State Monroe, and Justice Bushrod Washington. It was, March presumed, an honor for Americans to have their wine drawn from the same vats.<sup>65</sup>

Madeira distributors also used material props to support their conversations about wine, marketing both the alcohol and a style of drinking to accompany it. They adopted and encouraged the use of elaborate paraphernalia to differentiate its grades and distinguish it from other wines. Corkscrews of increasingly intricate and fanciful designs, silver bottle and decanter "tickets" (wine labels) etched with the word *Madeira*, two sizes of crystal decanters also etched with the word, small crystal glasses suitable only for heavily fortified drinks like Madeira, and the like: the distributors introduced these into their own households and recommended them to visitors and correspondents as the indispensable trappings of a knowledgeable wine connoisseur. After the 1760s, island firms began ordering "low, round decanters for the table while at dinner" from English glasshouses and, to go with them, "low, heavy glasses for them to hold as little as possible." On occasion, tumblers might be used instead of stemmed glasses, but, they had to be fit "for seeing [the] wine." Making use of the proper glassware at their own tables, exporters introduced visitors to "the art and mystery of drinking Madeira" and then sold them the glassware that they carried in their Funchal retail shops so that wine novices could replicate the rituals when they returned home. They thus provided their contacts a basis for selecting and using accoutrements, conduct, and attitudes and for constructing references and comparisons.<sup>66</sup>

Along the same lines, the distributors later in the century turned to "prestige packaging." They constructed special pipes, painted customers' names on them, and decorated them with personalized insignia and crests. They took their cues from Ceded Islands' planters who needed pipes immune to the attack of the worm and who requested painted casks and iron hoops. Exporters acquiesced,

happily charging them extra. In time, they realized that what was born of necessity was growing into “general fashion” and so promoted the decoration as if it had been their own idea. In the same vein, they cut purchasers’ surnames into the staves and purchasers’ initials into the bungs. In customizing the package this way, they enhanced its value: a pipe that “pleases the eye, has a neat and attentive appearance to the owners of the liquor, & is of a real service to the cask” was more easily marketed to consumers. To safeguard buyers’ interest “against change or improper treatment” shipboard or wharveside, some firms even started stamping “a private mark” unique to each customer on the inside of the bung.<sup>67</sup>

Madeira distributors conversed with their customers over oceanic distances. They deployed a variety of narrative devices in their conversations: reports of events and data, analysis of the effects of the events and data on the direction of business and social life, appeals to third-party authorization and validation, offers of business relationships and, later, debates about their management, authoritative pronouncements on the product and how it should be used and enjoyed, cajoling and solicitous expressions of interest in correspondents, and flattery, to name just a few. The immediate goal was to sell wine; the longer-term goal was to establish relationships with people who would buy wine repeatedly and recommend it and the firm to others.

Customer networks emerged from these conversations. The structures were not phenomena of individual traders or customers, still less individual transactions, but properties of the relationships among the individuals: that is to say, the actions out of which the relationships rose were conversations. The economic and social trading system that resulted was genuinely a system of networks—of sets of relationships with many nodes. Distributors were connected to each other; customers were connected to each other; distributors were connected to consumers; and both groups were linked to other merchants, agents, correspondents, and customers around the Atlantic. This form of economic and social interaction dominated oceanic trade before 1815, in contrast to arm’s-length trading or hierarchies of power relationships. Arm’s-length trading always raises the issue of trust, which is why mercantile dealing flourishes in direct, eyeball-to-eyeball exchange societies where goods can be inspected and services validated. At the same time, hierarchical relationships require monitoring and feedback, which are information-intensive in their own way. Networks, at least Atlantic-scale networks such as those the Madeira trade engendered, succeeded where these other two forms did not because they conserved on information. This may seem unusual, because the foregoing has emphasized how participants spread information through networks. But while they did spread information and ex-

change services, the knowledge and action required of each actor was reduced, and most of the information an actor required was local to him.

More specifically, transatlantic trade emerged from customer networks that in turn emerged from continual, complicated, often confusing conversations about commodities—how they were made, improved, and packaged; how they were shipped; and how they were stored, displayed, and consumed. Conversations built and maintained the networks that bound people together between firms and across roisterous waters and imperial divides, transforming a collection of dispersed operatives into a commercial infrastructure that was larger than the sum of its parts. Conversations spread information, created understanding—sometimes misunderstanding—among parties, and gave common cause to widely dispersed agricultural producers, distributors, and consumers. The geography of Madeira’s distribution suggests that commercially minded people were almost “encoded” to converse.

Madeira’s exporters held conversations first with preexisting, personal relationships: kin, patron, and peer. When these ties ran out or failed them, they made up new personal relationships, for example, with dinner- and houseguests, even strangers, and conversed with them. Some connection was needed, if only a general one. If there was a sufficiently important business reason, they engineered a relationship with a stranger and gave it the appearance of the personal. The hint of personal connection told all relevant parties that the participants were abiding by the rules of the game.

What were the effects of conversations with strong and weak network members? In short, Madeira flowed. It flowed to nearly every place in the world where European powers were extending their reach: regional markets for consumption opened and thickened in the West Indies, North America, the East Indies, and northern Europe. Desired prizes were the large port cities of British America, the capital cities and forts of the Presidencies of India, Britain’s largest cities and, to a lesser extent, Lisbon, the larger Brazilian ports, and Portuguese settlements in India and Southeast Asia. But they were not all. Worldwide destinations for the exporters’ wine doubled between 1700 and 1815. In sum, the world received “more & more . . . the attention of a Madeira concern” as the Madeira exporter became more adept at conversing with it.<sup>68</sup>