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The British Empire and the American Atlantic on Tristan da Cunha, 1811–16

James Fichter

The first permanent settlement on Tristan da Cunha was established in 1811 by the American Jonathan Lambert. News of Lambert's claim, which followed ceremonies of possession recognised by both British and American observers, spread throughout the Atlantic. Doubts soon emerged, however, as to Lambert's nationality and as to whether he claimed the island for himself, for the United States or for Britain. This article considers Lambert's settlement, the promulgation of his claim and the re-casting of both Lambert and his claim as British, an act which implicitly recognised the strength of Lambert's claim while appropriating that claim for imperial ends. Because Britons and Americans claimed sovereignty and ownership in the Atlantic in similar ways, the competition between British and American claims to Tristan sheds light on those ways' common British roots.

It was Saturday, 5 January 1811. Captain Heywood and the *Nereus* had made Tristan da Cunha the previous afternoon, wearing 'abreast of a waterfall' on the north of the island and sending crews ashore for 'sea elephants', in which, the captain reported, the 'island abounds'. Some men strayed into the hills and reported back 'wild hogs & goats', but most stuck to the black sand beach they had landed on, just east of the cascade, where a stone point admirably protected them from the 'swell & surf' of the sea. Heywood walked the shore, his men skinning kills. On the eastern end of the cove, landing parties found signs of habitation: a freshwater well, a 'hut', 'rudely built', of which 'little but part of the walls now remained', 'several empty casks, & two or three copper bottles'. Heywood surveyed the detritus: 'Americans', he thought. It merited a letter to Brazil.¹

The Americans returned the next day. They came in the *Baltic*, bound for Gough's Island to retrieve a sealing party left the previous year. En route, three Americans

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landed to be, as Heywood explained, ‘settlers’. Heywood’s second lieutenant gave them ‘all the assistance of his [own] boats crew to land the provisions and stock they had brought with them’. One claimed to have been ‘some months on the island before & collected much oil’ and was the ‘owner of the hut, casks & bottles’ on the beach. He brimmed with enthusiasm for his settlement. He talked of goats and hogs in the interior, the ‘most delicious flavor’ of the fish, caught from rocks with nothing more than a ‘common wicker basket’, and seemed so assured of the inevitable progress of his future colony that Heywood thought he seemed like a beatitude, taking, as best the captain could remember the verse, ‘no thought for the morrow about what he should eat or drink or wherewithal he should be clothed’ [Matthew 6:31]. Well Heywood may have wondered how the American would find these things. And yet Heywood did not think him, as the verse might suggest, unconcerned with worldly affairs; indeed, the American had come to the island for very worldly reasons. Heywood thought him ‘industrious & persevering’ and imagined that, after a few years’ collection of seal oil, he would have enough to ‘return home with a competence at least’. The captain romanticised the business, as a seaman far from home might: ‘by labor & fatigue & under circumstances of peculiar privation’ the American would ‘doubly enjoy & value’ his store of funds back ‘in the society of his family & friends.’²

The American was Jonathan Lambert, seaman. Born in 1772, he was in 1811 fast approaching 40 and might have felt weary of life at sea at an age when captains repaired to life on land. Lambert’s father had sailed the South Atlantic, and Lambert himself had sighted Tristan previously.³ It is unclear when he first landed there – he later recollected releasing a goat on the island in 1805 – but in any event the island’s prospects were fast increasing.⁴ By the start of 1811 the major southern ports between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, St Helena, and Mauritius, were in British hands or guarded by British ships, and the United States and Britain were on increasingly bad terms. Americans needed a station to Asia free from British influence.⁵ This was Lambert’s plan for Tristan. The *Boston Gazette* reported his departure in August 1810, and the news spread along the America seaboard.⁶ The article, perhaps Lambert’s or an acquaintance’s, declared his purpose as ‘supplying all ships outward bound to the Cape Good Hope, and E. Indies’.

In Brazil, en route to Tristan, Lambert talked of Tristan further. The American consul in Rio de Janeiro contributed ‘coffee tree’ and sugar cane seedlings and various seeds. From there Captain Lovel, who had brought Lambert from Salem, Massachusetts, carried Lambert, his supplies and two other men to Tristan da Cunha, where Heywood and the *Nereus* met them. They arrived on 6 January 1811.⁷

Lambert’s settlement endured in one form or another until a British force conquered the island in 1816. The conquest was part of a larger effort to garrison the South Atlantic against any attempt to free Napoleon Bonaparte from St Helena. Tristan’s subsequent absorption into the British Empire obscured its first years of settlement, the first *American* years of its history. For before Tristan became part of the British Empire it was part of the American Atlantic. Transfers between Britain and the United States were not uncommon, but the influence of one is often

overlooked where the other prevailed. The American presence on Tristan and the island's transition to British rule reveal much about the early-nineteenth-century empire and the ways Americans continued to shape the British Atlantic after American Independence. This is not at first apparent, for the Anglo-centric perspective of many records and the deliberate distortions by British authors have turned the first years of Tristan to myth. Lambert's settlement presented a significant challenge for British officials, since Lambert claimed Tristan with 'ceremonies of possession', as Patricia Seed calls them, recognisable to Britons and Americans alike. In order to obscure US interest in the island, British officials thus appropriated Lambert and his settlement as 'British'. Thus, by obscuring the counterparty's claim, Britain could take Tristan without risking a dispute. New British and American archival evidence and a re-reading of known documents brings to light Tristan's American years and the solipsistic imposition of British claims: Tristan was not contested because in taking Tristan British officials made it appear that there was nothing to contest.⁸

I

Tristan da Cunha is a tiny, wind-swept island in the South Atlantic. It covers 30 square miles, most occupied by a 6,000-foot volcano. A small plain to the north west, two square miles in size, provides the only flat land. It is within the latitudes of the 'roaring forties', the westerly winds that carry ships around Africa to Asia. It is also remote: the nearest mainland, Cape of Good Hope, is 1,700 miles away.

Jonathan Lambert and his two men, Thomas Currie and another man known to us only as 'Williams', found Tristan uninhabited.⁹ The British, Dutch, French and Portuguese had each considered settling Tristan but preferred bases elsewhere. All that was left of their wanderings were some wild boars and goats, released on the island for fresh meat, and two oil casks from the camp of an earlier expedition for 'sea elephants'.¹⁰ Tristan had a modest natural harbour and plenty of fresh water, but it was small; the two-square-mile plain was expected to support only thirty families.¹¹

At the end of January 1811, not a month after Lambert's arrival, the British merchant brig *Charles* reached Tristan. Benjamin Seaver, its American captain, worked the Rio-Cape route. Seaver had heard of Lambert's plan in Brazil;¹² Lambert appears to have talked about Tristan to whomever would listen, and such an outlandish undertaking no doubt made good conversation. So, short of 'good Water' and long on curiosity, Seaver sent out a boat and crew. They soon found Lambert, along 'with two other men', on shore.¹³

Seaver followed; the settlement charmed him. Lambert was probably pleased to show off his new home, which, he told Seaver, was to be known as the 'Isle of Refreshment'. Since their arrival Lambert, Currie and Williams had 'cleared for a Garden' a 'spot of Ground' a 'full two Acres' in size, all 'laid out in neat Beds, with Radish and Cabbage plants growing in great luxuriance'. The little plants poked up 'more than an inch above the surface'. 'Indian corn, potatoes, and the pumpkin vine, with the water and musk-melon' also grew there, no doubt thriving on the unspoilt topsoil, which, when turned up with a spade, 'appeared full two feet deep'.¹⁴

‘Not three fathoms’ away, Seaver found ‘a large run of Water’ that trickled down the mount, ‘meandering towards the Sea, then falling abruptly about fifty feet’ onto a ‘shingly Beach, presenting the most beautiful Cascade’. With a long hose and a launch to bring the water into the harbour, Seaver thought that ‘any Vessel might be watered’.¹⁵

Seaver left and Captain Lovel returned from Gough’s Island around 4 February. He found they had cleared fifty acres of land, probably by burning off brush, ‘and planted various kinds of seeds’ in part of it. They also planted the ‘coffee tree’ and sugar cane, which, along with some of the seeds all ‘looked very promising’.¹⁶

II

On 4 February 1811, with Lovel’s vessel anchored off shore, Jonathan Lambert formally declared ‘absolute possession of the Island of Tristan da Cunha. . .solely for myself and my Heirs forever’. ‘And as no European powers whatever had hitherto publicly claimed the said Islands, by right of discovery, or of possession . . . I constitute my individual self the sole proprietor’ of the isle. Lambert signed the document and had Andrew Millet – another Massachusetts seaman who had joined him, Williams and Currie on the island – sign and witness it before sending copies abroad. Lambert’s declaration appeared in the *Boston Gazette* in July 1811.¹⁷ Copies and summaries appeared in scores of American newspapers.¹⁸

Lambert’s claim to Tristan has been discarded, scoffed and jeered at for its ‘eccentricity’, even by sympathetic readers. This is understandable, but, wild as it seems, Lambert’s claim was real. Tristan had been unsettled. Though ships had stopped there previously, and sealing crews had resided there for a season, none had made Tristan their home. There were no prior claims to own the land, and no state asserted sovereignty over it. With no state affiliation, there was no formal apparatus to claim or decide ownership. There were no titles, no deeds and no land court such as Lambert’s home state of Massachusetts had, where a deed or title might be registered. Tristan was *terra nullius*, empty land. And in such cases jurisdiction fell to the first occupant, Lambert. To claim ownership is not to own outright, but Lambert settled and improved the land, made a written claim, had it witnessed and saw it broadly published thereby giving notice (a notice sufficient to attract British attention). It is hard to imagine how he could have made a more formal claim. British claims in the New World were often based on *terra nullius* arguments, as Anthony Pagden, Lauren Benton and others have demonstrated. Tristan provided a twist to the standard *terra nullius* argument. On the American mainland *terra nullius* had been used to justify Britain’s presence against Spain’s papal grant and Native American occupancy. But on Tristan there was neither Spanish claim nor Native presence. The island was *terra nullius* in a way North America was not. It was also *terra nullius* in a way Britons and Americans could both recognise, for Lambert had claimed Tristan the only way any American knew how – the British way – by settling and improving it. This distinguished Anglo-American sovereignty disputes from Anglo-Spanish ones. Lambert’s settling and improvement were certainly greater than those of John

Byron, who in 1765 had claimed the Falklands for Britain by planting 'a garden' and then promptly left. (A party intending more-permanent settlement arrived subsequently but dated its claim to Byron's 'garden'.) If Britain considered a cursory garden basis for its claim to one set of South Atlantic islands, what was to prevent British law from recognising another gardener's claim to Tristan? The British settlement in the Falklands did not last – the Spanish forcibly evicted the British settlers in 1770, occasioning a major diplomatic dispute – and this was another way the British experiences in the Falklands and Tristan were linked: it became readily apparent that such islands, however fine on a map, were not worth war in Europe. And so Britain took Tristan, unlike how Spain took the Falklands, without the counterparty realising there was anything to dispute. Though it appeared odd to later readers, contemporary Britons did not doubt Lambert's claim; instead, they asked for what nation Lambert claimed Tristan, a query predicated upon the claim's validity.¹⁹

Naming manifested possession, and Lambert named what he possessed. He renamed the island group and the main island the 'Islands of Refreshment', the dependency Inaccessible, Printard and its other dependency, Nightingale, Lovel, after the captain who had brought him there.²⁰

Later writers later claimed Lambert also assumed sovereignty over the islands. Lambert became the 'toy king' of Tristan, its emperor and a 'mini Napoleon at heart'.²¹ The most authoritative scholar on the subject, E. H. Fairbrother, found it quite 'amusing'.²² Charles Dickens claimed in an ostensibly non-fiction piece in his magazine, *All the Year Round*, that Lambert had 'invested himself with the sovereignty' of the island and taken the title of 'Prince of Tristan d'Acunha, and Lord of Nightingale and Inaccessible Islands'. But Lambert claimed no such titles; in any case, if he had, he would have called himself 'Prince of the Islands of Refreshment', not 'Prince of Tristan d'Acunha'. Still, for Dickens and other imaginative souls the proclamation of 'Prince Jonathan' marked the 'commencement of his reign'.²³

Such epithets are amusing, but they obscure a larger truth. Lambert never claimed a kingdom for himself, but his declaration suggested a sovereignty claim of some kind. By asserting that 'no European powers whatever had hitherto publicly claimed the said Islands, by right of discovery, or of possession', he cleared the way for a claim himself; his further declaring 'myself and my people' bound by 'the laws of nations. . .and by no other laws whatever',²⁴ would seem to preclude the laws of the United States, of which Lambert was a citizen. This was not unreasonable; no US legislature claimed jurisdiction over the island. Lambert may well have considered himself independent: he sewed a flag for his dominion and announced it to the world, so that it 'shall forever be the known and acknowledged Flag of these Islands'. The flag, sewn of red, white and blue pieces of waxed burlap, survives. The colours, not those of which sacks or clothes were usually made, suggest Lambert brought the cloth to Tristan for a flag (see Figure 1).²⁵ A flag was no small sacrifice; cloth was scarce on Tristan, and the cloth would have made fine patches for Lambert's and his companions' increasingly tattered clothes.²⁶ Lambert also established a second flag, white, for the 'merchant Service, which may now or hereafter belong to any inhabitants of these islands', which does not survive.²⁷ Still if Lambert considered his domain sovereign, he never declared it so,

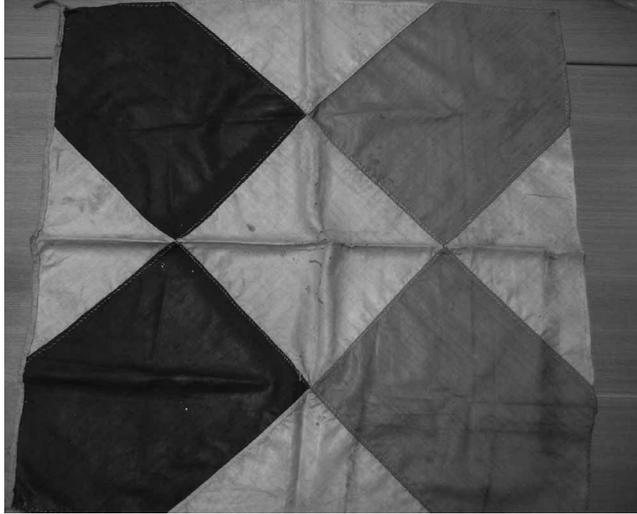


Figure 1 Lambert flag flown on Tristan da Cunha²⁹

and flags do not always equate to states. Given how clearly he claimed ownership, it is striking that Lambert did not claim sovereignty more overtly. He did not, for example, issue a declaration of independence.²⁸ Nor did he appoint himself ‘king’, ‘prince’, ‘emperor’ or anything of the sort. The three men on the Island of Refreshment were never legally independent, not least because no government ever recognised the Islands of Refreshment.

Since neither the United States nor Britain considered Tristan independent, Lambert’s claim to own the islands also formed the basis for a US sovereignty claim over them. Along with their shared principle of *terra nullius*, both the United States and Britain considered that in such cases jurisdiction, and hence potential sovereignty, went with the first occupant. This potential US claim was the often unspoken concern animating British officials. US citizens’ occupation, use of and claim to land were reasons enough for the US government to assert sovereignty elsewhere. In the end, Lambert’s domain was occupied by British arms, yet before 1816 British officials were unsure how to parse Lambert’s claim. Between 1811 and 1816, British officials made numerous, conflicting attempts to claim rule over the Islands of Refreshment, not by undermining the validity of Lambert’s claim, but insinuating that that claim was on behalf of Britain.

The British conquest squelched the possibility of US sovereignty but did nothing to alter the validity of Lambert’s claim to ownership. This claim has never been tested in court since no inheritor of the claim has known of it. Under British law, ‘continuity theory’ provided that pre-conquest legal institutions be retained. Landholding rights were retained as well, provided a landholder could present documentary proof of possession under the previous regime or that the land be occupied and improved, that is that there be a building erected or fields maintained. Such was the land policy applied to colonies as diverse as New Amsterdam and Hong Kong

Island.³⁰ This is not always readily apparent, for the Crown in theory owns all British lands. In colonies with improvements to land which British culture could recognise (which often excluded Native American land use), British administrators applied a system of deeded land ownership, either providing for nominal leases and *de facto* ownership through quit-rents or granting outright freeholds. When the British arrived in 1816 Lambert's stone hut remained and the fields were still tilled. Though Lambert died before the British arrived, other settlers stayed on, maintaining continuous occupation. None of them asserted ownership of the land, but they continued to improve and maintain the land and the hut – acts recognised by Britons as signs of possession.³¹ Lambert's claim to own Tristan passed to his unknowing heirs, who may retain a claim to freehold or quit-rent ownership of the island or compensation from the British government in lieu thereof.³²

III

Lambert saw the settlement as a business. He intended to pay the 'strictest attention to Husbandry' and encouraged vessels to stop to 'supply themselves with those articles of which they may be in need' 'by a fair and open traffic'. They could 'call at Reception', 'the landing place on the north side a little to the East of the Cascade', and a boat would tender to them.³³ For Lambert, Tristan was a good living, though hardly an illustrious one. His father had been a small-time captain in Salem, whose trade with Cape Town soured after the 1795 British conquest. Correspondents there complained that, due to British restrictions, they could not purchase 'articles much wanted in this Colony' from him.³⁴ It is unclear whether Jonathan ever received any inheritance when his father died in 1804. In any case he was certainly not a man of means, for he was desperate enough to leave his wife, Mary, in Salem for his trip to Tristan. In his proclamation, Lambert declared the 'cause' for his going there was his 'desire and determination of preparing for myself and family, a House where I can enjoy life without the embarrassments which have hitherto constantly attended me, and procure for us an interest and property, by means of which a competence', which would be 'far removed beyond the reach of chicanery and ordinary misfortune'.³⁵ Perhaps this was rumination upon losing out in his inheritance or upon his general lot in life. Lambert seems to have expected that he would return to Salem. Indeed, to one interlocutor Lambert explained his desire simply to 'obtain property sufficient to return with comfort, to my home'.³⁶

Yet Lambert lacked official US sanction or any means of defence, and it is hard to imagine the US government being able or willing to help. One American naval captain had laid claim to Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas, but the US government, preferring expansion closer to hand, did not pursue the claim. In 1816 the Admiralty noted a paper 'in a Glass Bottle buried on the Island of Nooahuvah', 'being a Proclamation of the American Captain Porter taking possession of the said Island'.³⁷ One imagines the US government, had it known of its potential claim on Tristan, would have been equally uninterested.

IV

On 9 February 1811 Seaver reached Cape Town. There he sought out Governor Caledon and began shaping the story of Tristan towards his own and, though an American citizen, British ends. After seeing the governor Seaver wrote three letters: to the governor; to Rear Admiral Stopford, commanding British naval forces at the Cape; and to John Pringle, East India Company agent at the Cape.³⁸ In his letter to the governor he described ‘what may be done towards the settlement of the large island’ ‘[i]n compliance with your Lordship’s request’. Seaver had designated himself Lambert’s spokesman at the Cape, explaining that:

Mr. Lambert expressed to me his desire that I would communicate to your Lordship that he set out with views he trusted would be considered by the British Government and the honourable East India Company laudable, and deserving *their protection and assistance* And whenever the sanction of the British Government, he then would most solemnly *declare himself allied to that government*; and by permission *display the British flag on the island*, reserving to himself always the governorship, provided an equivalent could not be agreed upon.³⁹

This contradicted Lambert’s desire not to be governed by anyone, and his decision to fly his own flag rather than the Union Jack and to submit only to the ‘laws of nations’ and ‘no other laws whatever’: that is, his expressed desire that the colony at Tristan not be British. If Lambert had wished to incorporate Tristan within the Cape Colony and the British Empire, he could have written to the governor himself. He did not. As for ‘reserving to himself always the governorship’, these, as the rest, were Seaver’s words, not Lambert’s, and they sound rather like Dickens’s apocryphal Prince John story. Seaver alone indicates Lambert ever asked or considered Seaver to be his spokesman or associate. Indeed, Lambert may well have been wary of Seaver. His proclamation, his word announced to the world, pre-empted what usurpers or latecomers might say on his behalf. And Lambert issued it, as best can be dated, just after Seaver left.

On 2 March Seaver wrote to Admiral Stopford, conveying much the same message as to the governor. He claimed Lambert sought British ‘protection and assistance’ and ‘that he would declare himself allied and a subject to His Britannic Majesty, and by permission would display the British Flag on the Island’. He also discussed, ominously for Lambert, the various anchorages and defensive points about the island.⁴⁰ On 4 March Seaver wrote to John Pringle. Pringle found ‘the whole narrative’ ‘interesting’, but little more and enclosed a copy in his report to London the following day. The island, he noted, was well positioned for ‘watering & refreshing’ outbound ships. But the Company already used St Helena and the Cape for that.⁴¹

Of the three recipients, the admiral was most interested. Stopford sought additional details from Captain Warren of the *President*, whom he ordered to Tristan to verify Lambert’s intentions directly and to assess the island’s naval value.⁴² Pringle found Warren’s information ‘very much to be depen[ded] upon’ – perhaps in implicit contrast to Seaver’s. According to Pringle, Warren thought Tristan worth taking ‘before any other nation seizes it’. Vessels not wishing to touch at the Cape – American or perhaps French – ‘would be sure of obta[ining] excellent water in abundance and

without any difficulty or delay – vegetables also would soon be plentiful and fruit with variety of other refreshments in a short time.’ Pringle reported that Warren found several small plains ‘very fit for cultivation’ on the island, all quite small, ‘divided from each other by perpendicular Cliffs and only accessible by Boats’. Pringle therefore recommended that twenty or thirty men be sent to the main plain on the north shore of the island, and that a ‘Meutello Tower’ be built to defend the settlement from assault.⁴³ Warren followed up on the idea of additional settlers that December, asking after the possibility of white settlers – Lambert replied that he could take ‘8 or 10 industrious families’ – and separately after the possibility of ‘Negroes’, to which Lambert replied he could take twenty men, women and children. (It is unclear whether Warren meant free Africans or slaves.) Yet, despite Seaver’s letter and whatever additional information was available that March, Admiral Stopford took no action to capture, settle or establish a tower upon the island but instead asked the Admiralty for further instructions.⁴⁴

Pringle also suggested that the settlement was already British, attributing to Warren the false claim that Lambert was born Scottish and could therefore ‘give no claim to the United States of America of which he calls himself a citizen.’⁴⁵ Lambert was born in Massachusetts, a descendant of over 100 years of Salemites. But the point was true enough from the British perspective, since Britain did not recognise the right to alienate allegiance to the Crown. One had to be born in the United States *after American independence* not to be a British subject in crown eyes. Those born in the American colonies under British rule were never recognised by the British government as US nationals only, and even questioned the possibility of their dual nationality, though the US government considered them American. This was the root of many British impressment claims during the early 1800s and abetted the creeping sense of American illegitimacy in British minds, which became a source of British revanchism in 1812.⁴⁶

Thus, within months of Lambert’s first settlement, two bases – both false – for a British claim to Tristan emerged: Seaver claimed Lambert wished to become a British subject, and Pringle claimed on Warren’s behalf, rather contradictorily, that Lambert already was one. If Lambert or the other settlers on Tristan could be made British, however fictively, Britain might assert a claim to the island which would be legitimate in its own courts, Lambert’s manifesto notwithstanding. Stopford’s letter to the Admiralty and the policy which resulted were based on the premise that Lambert could be considered to be under British aegis.

V

Unfortunately for the Admiralty, Seaver was not a reliable source of information. Seaver tried various means to make a living in Cape Town; promoting Tristan was only one. At first Seaver’s schemes seemed worth patronising, but, the more money Seaver requested, the less forthcoming the Cape government became, until Seaver and his plans for Tristan lost all credit with the Cape government. His letter to the governor, ‘in the name of Mr. Lambert’, requested money, supplies and a vessel to ferry colonists to the island or, as he explained later, ‘for some little assistance, that

I might be enabled to return to the Island, as my private means are not sufficient'.⁴⁷ Seaver had been carrying mules to the Cape but the vessel 'broke up' leaving him on land, probably unpaid. Soon he commanded the *Charles* and brought back a cargo of 'tobacco, sugar, and tar'. This was hardly a high-value cargo; when the *Charles* left the Cape again in 1811, Seaver stayed behind.⁴⁸

Seaver had brought 'vaccine matter' on the *Charles* as well. For this he received a bounty, but in May 1811 he petitioned for more money – the vaccine, he claimed, was expensive – and he expected he 'would be amply remunerated' for his charity.⁴⁹ It was odd for a captain to take a loss for charity's sake and then expect to be paid for it,⁵⁰ but the governor gave him another 100 rix dollars.⁵¹ Seaver petitioned for more. Considering 'him amply remunerated', the governor turned him down.⁵²

Seaver then returned to his project for Tristan, where he proposed moving with the *Endeavor*, a nine-ton sloop he commanded and probably owned. On 3 September he informed the governor he planned to take 'such seeds and plants with other necessaries as may be possible to be put on board so small a vessel, for the purpose of forming an establishment, on the said Island to refresh, and succor any Vessels which may occasionally pass in that track of sea'. He asked to be 'allowed to carry such persons from this Colony, as may voluntarily embark'. It is unclear what his relationship was to be with Lambert's party.⁵³ Seaver seems to have meant the *Endeavour* as a tender for the island, though it is difficult to see how such a small sloop could survive the South Atlantic swells.

On 6 September a new governor took over at the Cape and acted quickly upon Seaver's letter.⁵⁴ Replying to Stopford, the Admiralty had ordered forces at the Cape to 'afford the Persons already settled on that Island, any Protection or Encouragement which might be within [their] power'.⁵⁵ Thus Seaver's assumption that British influence would be welcome on Tristan begat that influence. And with naval forces at the Cape too few to establish a permanent presence off Tristan, Seaver became the means for Britain to assert itself on Tristan cheaply. Governor Craddock immediately granted Seaver's request, provided Seaver's settlers take out passports from the Cape before leaving.⁵⁶

But money trouble kept Seaver at the Cape. He had bought supplies for Tristan but had no means to pay. On the point of leaving he was arrested for debt, and his vessel and supplies were seized.⁵⁷ The ensuing suit, counter-suit and appeal tied up Seaver and his supplies for months.⁵⁸ Such legal troubles, he explained to the governor, 'must in all probability defeat' his plans for Tristan. He would need another 1000 rix dollars.⁵⁹ The governor demurred, but took care the case be resolved quickly, lest Seaver's plans for Tristan 'be defeated by Delay'.⁶⁰ By the end of 1811 Seaver watched the 'few hands' who were willing to come with him on this 'Speculation',⁶¹ 'artificers'⁶² and 'handicraft men',⁶³ 'leaving him daily being wearied out hourly [by] disappointment'.⁶⁴ Court costs ate up his funds, and his vessel was 'perishing from the heat of the sun & worms'.⁶⁵ He took out a salt license and shipped salt to the Cape while his case was pending appeal, but in the end he lost both the appeal and the *Endeavour*, which broke up soon after he lost the case.⁶⁶ Finding no artificers

or handymen willing to go, he sought out 'Free Banditti or convicted Slaves'. But he could not find any willing slaves or convicts, or at least any masters willing to release them.⁶⁷ Broke, he asked for more vaccine money. The governor's secretary declined.⁶⁸

With war between Britain and the United States looming, Seaver next sought to give up his nationality, hoping to relinquish US citizenship rather than be caught at the Cape or Tristan as an American. He asked to become a British subject and a burgher of the Cape to further his work with his 'Associate' Lambert on Tristan, where he now planned not only to farm but hunt whales.⁶⁹ He failed in this, too, and was last heard from at the Cape procuring asses for the government before making Brazil.⁷⁰

In South America Seaver's name fell further. He appeared in Rio de Janeiro in December 1812 'with a letter of recommendation' from the Cape – written, perhaps, to get rid of him – and, according to the British ambassador there, a plan for 'colonizing the Isle of Tristão da Cunha, and to have come here for the purpose of procuring Vessels and Stores'. Seaver referred to Lambert as his 'Partner or Coadjuter'. But the ambassador was wary. Another Briton in town, 'possessing a strong Claim to belief from Character and Good Conduct', 'assured' him Seaver had been 'concerned in divers Acts of piracy' in the Pacific.⁷¹

Perhaps to keep ahead of such rumours, Seaver went to Buenos Aires, then in the middle of a war between Spanish and revolutionary forces. He persuaded Captain Bowles of the *Aquilon* to give him a passport to the army 'before Monte Video', a letter to the commanding Spanish general and a 'Flag of Truce' to send it over. When Bowles doubted 'his National Character', Seaver swore, 'in the most formal manner, that he was both by birth and Principles a Subject of His Britannic Majesty' – he was not – and 'proposed. . .to take the Oath of Allegiance again in my presence'. Bowles relented, and Seaver crossed to Montevideo where he captured two vessels and made a 'similar attempt' several others. Dragging Britain into such 'Piratical Proceedings', as one clerk called it, hardly helped Ambassador Strangford, then negotiating between the Spanish and the revolutionaries. To him Seaver's actions 'amply confirmed' an 'unfavorable Judgment' of Seaver and revealed the 'Settlement of Tristan da Cunha has been a mere pretence'. No one connected with Tristan merited the 'Favour or Protection of His Majesty's Government'.⁷² The 'order for aid + protection to Seaver' was subsequently rescinded, and inquiries begun into whether 'any more decisive steps should be taken by H. M. Naval forces against this person'.⁷³ Bowles cursed the raiders that swarmed Rio de la Plata for 'the great value of the Merchant Ships trading' there, 'a set of adventurers whose only object is gain'. Such men, he explained, represented 'themselves as Englishmen or Americans as their interest dictates'. For Strangford, the association with Seaver poisoned Lambert's reputation as well, but we might be more charitable: it was on Seaver's word alone that Lambert and Seaver had any 'association' at all.⁷⁴

People and colonies did not shift fluidly from British to American and back again. But, as Bowles noted, in the early nineteenth century claims about them did. Thus sailors stated they were British or American depending on who asked.

The result – Britons absconding from naval duty on American vessels and Americans impressed into British naval service – had little to do with one’s actual nationality. Likewise, even though Tristan was not British in any meaningful way before 1816, government policy operated on the assumption that it and Lambert were. Seaver ‘pressed’ Tristan into imperial service. Impressment created its own reality – one was made a British seaman, whether one had been British before or not – and so Seaver’s ‘impressment’ of Lambert and Tristan created an official reality of its own. Historians of Tristan, aware of Seaver’s initial efforts in Cape Town have accepted that reality. But they have been unaware of the Admiralty’s subsequent disavowal of Seaver. The disavowal had consequences: if Seaver’s claims could not be trusted, Lambert’s settlement could no longer be considered British. This was fine if the Admiralty wished to withdraw ‘aid + protection’, but, were His Majesty’s ships to return, they would need some other way to make Lambert’s settlement British, lest his claim have been staked for another power.

VI

Captain Warren’s questions for Lambert (Warren reached Tristan in December 1811) reflected the British interest in the island which Seaver’s intimations, then believed, fostered. Warren asked after winds, timber, anchorages, objects that would determine whether Tristan could be a viable outpost. Yet in his questions – Warren listed forty-four – he did not ask Lambert’s nationality or under what government Lambert fell. Perhaps he assumed, from Seaver, that Lambert’s presence made Tristan British, or perhaps he knew not to ask too closely.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Warren’s interview and other sources shed light on Lambert’s own ideas for Tristan.

The *Salem Gazette* printed a letter purportedly written by Lambert to his brother during Warren’s visit. The letter is of unknown provenance, and several details mentioned in the letter vary from other, more reliable accounts.⁷⁶ Yet in it Lambert noted Warren’s vessel and gave a reasonably accurate assessment of Warren’s mission to learn ‘the nature of my situation, and history of the Island’, though this was no great secret.⁷⁷ The letter indicated the ‘English Government’ was sending twenty settlers to assist Lambert on Tristan – perhaps a reference to the ‘industrious families’ or ‘Negroes’ Warren has asked about. In this account Lambert found Warren’s officers sanguine about their country’s ability to ‘send me some real assistance’, though in the end only token aid, and no score of settlers, was forthcoming.⁷⁸ Neither to his brother nor to Warren did Lambert suggest he relinquished control or ownership over the island.

Warren found an enduring settlement in Tristan. The situation was more secure; the first plantings on the five-acre plot the settlers cleared had largely prospered. Potatoes were to be the staple; there was half an acre in when Warren arrived, the second crop. These were ‘the Produce of only 12, saved from my original Stock’, Lambert explained, the rest he had lost landing. He hoped to get sixty to eighty bushels out by fall, replanting half the next spring with ‘an acre of Barley’. There were ‘small Patches’ of various other grains: barley, wheat and oats along with buckwheat, turnips, vegetables and

clover. The settlers ate turnips, their bread long since run out, until the potatoes came in.⁷⁹ Melons failed, but then again it was not cold enough to freeze, and the weather stood at a medium perfect for most crops they knew.⁸⁰

Their homes were humble, three 'Jaackstraw's' huts, thatched with 'Reed grass' and walled with fieldstone, with dirt for a floor and, one imagines, wattle mortar, since there was no lime. It was barely enough to keep their heads dry in the rainy months, and perhaps not even then: Lambert kept a mat of skins for inclement weather, too.⁸¹ Poor though he was, Lambert had clearly settled and improved the land.

The mountain was covered with brush, much 'the size of an apple-tree', cleared by fire or by collecting firewood.⁸² The men captured pigs from the island's feral population, taming them. They maimed some with gunshot, others they 'knocked down', probably with clubs. They took to taming well and 'come from the Bush, when I call them', Lambert explained, 'and eat out of my hand'. There were domesticated pigs, brought over from the mainland, but their offspring had a hard time, and the sow's first litter was found 'dead under a bush'. Three from the second lived, subsisting on dandelions, as the formerly wild ones did, though these latter also foraged off 'strawberry leaved' geraniums, supplemented with fortnightly 'sea elephant' 'to keep them in heart'. A few wild goats continued to roam about. Lambert fantasised about acquiring sheep, goats and rabbit 'to stock the island with game'. To Warren, he suggested importing asses.⁸³

The men also caught birds: 'black-cocks', by the hundreds with the help of a dog, 'very fat and delicate' in the fall. '[A]lbatross, mollahs, petrels, sea-hens &c' orbited their mountain and stood to make fine feathers, a tradable good, were the men not too busy farming. Such birds were not hard to get. Captain Heywood found the sealers on Gough's Island attracted 'large flocks' 'by lighting a fire in the night some where up in the hills' and knocking them down 'with sticks'. Lambert's party also bred fowl, and he aimed for fifty 'breeding geese' to sell to passing ships. They bred 'Dunghill fowl' and ducks; though fish guts had choked their turkeys and most of their ducks the previous winter. They also had one cock, two hens and some half-grown chicks.⁸⁴

And of course the islanders ate fish. They fished from the rocks, sheltered from the waves by the thick kelp reef ringing the shore.⁸⁵ On calm days, they hove off 'on a kind of raft of six pieces' and took 'many sheephead crayfish, gramper, and large mackerel', but wind and waves usually kept them on shore, where they used sea 'elephant' as a bait and brought in 'Mackerel, Grouper, Perch & crawfish in immense quantities with hook and line'. 'A boat would be victuals and drink to us', Lambert wrote.⁸⁶

Lambert began to consider sealing. He had made no great attempt to harvest seals yet, 'not being in want of them', and the settlers were busy in the early months, having neither time nor barrels for oil. They filled the twenty casks they had 'found on the Island'. This amounted to eighty seals harvested in the year since landing, roughly 1,000 gallons of oil. Time spent sealing could not be spent farming, but Lambert was willing to try any business that might answer.⁸⁷ 'Sea-elephants', or elephant seals, pupped in August and September. Lambert counted a thousand born on the

main island. Amid their gardening and fishing duties, the settlers killed two a week, usually lancing them.

And now in December 1811 he proposed to another American, Captain John Briggs, 'to join me in the business of making oil and skins on these islands.'⁸⁸ This would be a considerable undertaking. Briggs was to send twelve workmen and a mason down to Tristan, along with his younger brother, and 'a small fishing schooner of about 50 tons', to harvest fish and seals, 'two or three asses' to haul 'blubber and skins' and coppers, boilers and assorted equipment to render fat to oil. Salt would be needed to cure skins, which he would sell along with the oil in Brazil. Lambert hoped the farm would feed the men, and asked Briggs to split the concern halfway, Briggs supplying capital, he supplying labour and direction, as he had 'no money to advance'. Lambert estimated the total cost, with the men paid in shares, at \$2,000.⁸⁹ It was hardly outlandish: Captain Lovel of the *Baltic*, who had ferried Lambert out to Tristan in the first place, had been en route to pick up a sealing crew, and American and British crews regularly sealed in the South Atlantic. Yet Lambert's initial settlement was smaller than the sealers Lovel had left behind.

VII

A notice in US newspapers announced Lambert's success on the island. It was reprinted widely, announcing the little 'plantation' had 'sufficient stock of pigs and all kinds of poultry, oil, wood, fish &c to supply vessels' and offered supplies at a 'more reasonable [price] than at any port this side the Cape Good Hope'.⁹⁰ The notice, intimating that Lambert had 'been nearly two years employed' on the island, appeared in American papers in December 1812. That same month the *Repertory & General Advertiser*, a Boston newspaper, published Seaver's letter to the governor at the Cape, written nearly two years earlier. The *Repertory* got its copy from the *Calcutta Mirror*, which served the British in Bengal, indicating the breadth of interest in Tristan.⁹¹

It was also published seven months after his death. For, on 17 May 1812, Lambert and Williams set out in a fishing boat and drowned. News of Lambert's death trickled out slowly. A notice did not appear in the *Dedham Gazette* until 1814. The British governor of St Helena, who had some interest in developments on Tristan, obtained a definitive account of Lambert's death only in 1816. Thus a spate of newspaper articles about Lambert's settlement on Tristan came out after he had died.⁹²

By the time news reached Salem Lambert's wife had passed away, and so his brother asked the Reverend William Bentley, Salem's constant diarist, to pray for him. Bentley pondered the passing in his diary.

This is the bold adventurer that seized upon an Island in the Great Ocean & collected a few companions to inhabit it, & gave notice that he should supply all circumnavigators. He perished when fishing in his boat with some of his Companions. He was a man of real genius & intrepidity. Nothing common would satisfy him & he had acquired all that general knowledge which observation in Men & manners could supply. He had a ready tongue & good pen, and enquiring

mind & a power to know & possess what circumstances could give him, at the instant they appeared. I knew him intimately well.⁹³

VIII

Interest in Tristan atrophied until Bonaparte's imprisonment on St Helena. Then, when Lieutenant William Milne proposed a 'very useful' albeit 'small scale' settlement on Ascension, he emphasised its use in preventing an escape from St Helena. Should a foreign agent – and 'an American is the best counterfeit of an Englishman', Milne explained – attempt it, Ascension would be an ideal place to smuggle the French emperor. The Admiralty sent Milne's advice on to George Cockburn, Napoleon's escort to and first prison-keeper on St Helena.⁹⁴ Cockburn agreed that 'taking possession of Ascension' would 'prevent America or any other nation from planting themselves there . . . for the purpose of favoring . . . escape from hence of General Bounaparte'.⁹⁵ Similar logic applied to Tristan.

Bonaparte's imprisonment left a fair number of navy lieutenants unemployed. Milne soon found himself on land and, one imagines, with few prospects. So he proposed to settle Tristan. He wrote of Lambert's settlement, its facility for preventing Bonaparte's escape and supplying Britain's Indiamen, and assured his readers it was 'at present unoccupied'. He wrote of the abundant fish: the *President*, he said, had served up 'two pounds per man' in 'a few hours with hooks and lines'. He raved of 'most excellent vegetables . . . cultivated by an American, named Lambert' and skins 'suitable for the China market and oil for England', and of the significance a British settlement on Tristan would have, asking to 'take possession' of Tristan for himself and Britain. Milne's settlement would check US interests on the island. Americans, thought Milne, would 'no doubt try to rival Great Britain in the China Trade'. Milne thought this 'Inducement to possess Tristan de Cunha to prevent other nations especially the Americans from' using it, either for skins or 'as a refreshing stage to India'.⁹⁶ Milne effectively grasped Britain's negative interest in the island: possession of Tristan was most valuable in that it denied the island to others, either as a means of escape or a 'stage to India'.

Lord Bathurst ordered the naval force at the Cape to 'take possession of the little island of Tristan da Cunha' in late 1815 to prevent Bonaparte's escape from St Helena. However Bathurst was unsure who was on Tristan or what other states might claim the island, so he provided that, if 'the Forces of any other Nation. . . occupy the island as a National Possession, the British Commander is to abstain from any hostile Act', and report to the Admiralty instead. Similar orders were given to the captain of the vessel dispatched to take the island and the lieutenant in charge of the landing party as well as for the vessel sent to Ascension.⁹⁷ Bathurst wanted to avoid confrontation with US forces without further deliberation. Conflicts in the South Atlantic, such as on the Falklands in 1770–1, or further abroad, such as the Nootka Sound controversy, could occasion crises closer to home; the logic of 'no peace beyond the line' no longer applied and Bathurst did not wish to add to Anglo-American territorial disputes if he could avoid it.⁹⁸

On 14 August 1816 Captain Festing of the *Falmouth* landed and took formal possession of Tristan da Cunha for Britain. Festing found two men on the island, Currie and a lad, who, he claimed, ‘appeared glad to place themselves under the protection of the British Flag.’⁹⁹ Festing set a small garrison on the island and departed for the permanent occupation force at Cape Town.¹⁰⁰ Festing appears to have been unwilling that the two men on Tristan stop his mission, and they did not appear to represent a governmental force. Festing returned with reinforcements on 28 November 1816. At this time he ‘found’ Jonathan Lambert’s flag, which he took.

Lambert’s and Williams’s death left Thomas Currie the sole original settler on the island. When Festing arrived, Currie suggested Lambert had absconded, noting he had rowed out ‘*under pretense* of fishing and collecting wreck’, and that Currie had ‘never heard of them since’.¹⁰¹ So began one of many rumours about Lambert’s demise. Other writers suggested more nefarious ends, but without proof. There is no evidence that Lambert did not die while fishing, the simplest conclusion, and the idea that Lambert drowned on Tristan was common knowledge or at least commonly assumed among British officers and men even before 1816.¹⁰²

Who was Currie? Later writers found him a cheat, someone who poked around the garrison’s tents drunk, looking for scraps and hinting at ‘buried treasure’. Legend embellished his tales. Some claimed he spent ‘handfuls of gold from some hidden store’ on drink at the garrison canteen, and a ‘handful’ of gold could buy an awful lot of drink. One version held that, primed with enough rum to reveal his hoard, he was on the verge of pointing it out when he died. But there was no treasure – why else would Currie beg at the garrison canteen, rather than leaving the island with his loot?¹⁰³ Later writers even claimed Lambert and Currie were pirates, landing upon their arrival ‘a big iron chest of loot, the plunder doubtless of many wild affrays upon the Spanish Main’.¹⁰⁴ (This meme may have originated in Seaver’s ‘Piratical Proceedings’, of which the British garrison was likely aware.) But it is hard to imagine that wealthy pirates needed money for a sealing business. Indeed, Currie was destitute; asking the British commander for money, he claimed he ‘never received either money nor any other remuneration from Lambert for all my labour’.¹⁰⁵ Lambert had no money either – if he had, Currie could have paid himself – and Lambert probably offered Currie merely a share of the proceeds, as he had Briggs. Indeed, Currie promised the lad on the island wages as well, and it is unclear where *those* wages were to come from. Currie was a down-and-out, poor, alone and desperate enough to settle on an island in the middle of nowhere under Lambert, a man who was hardly up-and-coming himself. And despite the opportunity of passing ships – half a dozen American warships touched at Tristan in just the first half of 1815 – Currie never left, either as seaman or passenger, perhaps he preferred life on Tristan; at least there he could fill his belly.¹⁰⁶

Yet Currie had informed Festing that ‘Jonathan Lambert took possession of the three Islands of Tristan de Acunha in a formal manner’.¹⁰⁷ It was ‘formal’ at least in the sense that both Britons and Americans recognised it as such. Now, with Lambert’s flag in hand and backed by forty officers and men, Festing had to deal with this formality, so he asked Currie to sign an affidavit that he had ‘never seen any

Colours hoisted or displayed on this Island but those of His Britanic Majesty'.¹⁰⁸ (This contradicted Festing's idea that the island was not British previously, implied in his description of the islanders 'glad to place themselves under the protection of the British flag' when he arrived.) Currie, poor, pliable and wretched, signed. The flag was not a claim of possession in its own right, but a label which explained in the name of what state Tristan had been claimed. And now, with British colours said to be there from the beginning, Lambert's possession could be said to have always been British.

What followed was surrealist farce. Rear Admiral Malcolm forwarded Festing's letters to the Admiralty. 'Captain Festing of the *Falmouth* informs me', that 'the two men he found on that Island stated to him that they had never seen the American Flag displayed in it, and that an English Union Jack' – supposedly left there by a British captain in 1813, but of which there is no direct evidence – was 'hoisted to American Vessels of War' during the war of 1812. This was an audacious proposition: ships kept several national flags as rouses of war, but Currie, in defiance of this custom, is supposed to have amused American crews with a Union Jack. Here the latent concern for the American flag, and a potential American sovereignty claim, comes out. Festing ensured he could not be accused of exceeding orders by offending a 'national possession', should the Foreign Office later receive a US complaint. The weight that Lambert's claim to Tristan, based on his and his fellow settlers' proclamation, improvement and occupation, carried – especially with Seaver's intermediation disregarded – necessitated this. Rather than ignore Lambert's claim, which had a real basis in British law, the claim was simply made British, and Currie made to sign an affidavit that only the British flag, and hence only the British claim, had been there all along. The decision to record Currie's testimony in a legally binding manner rather than in a few notes is significant, suggesting a concern that this version of events should withstand future scrutiny.¹⁰⁹

Rear Admiral Malcolm substantiated this by enclosing Currie's affidavit and then, oddly, Lambert's flag. They lay hidden in the Admiralty's files: a flag that did not exist, the proclamation explaining its intent and the oath that it had never been flown, tucked away out of sight. Yet the Admiralty clerks spotted the discrepancy, underlining Festing's note that '*Jonathan Lambert took possession of the three Islands of Tristan de Acunha in a formal manner*', a point to which Currie was not compelled to swear in the affidavit, and sending a copy to Lord Bathurst to 'call his attention to this point'.¹¹⁰ Bathurst's response has not been found. Yet from subsequent actions his orders might be guessed: carry on, hoping the US government did not notice. It worked.

In one final (and unintentional) master-stroke, Lambert's flag went on display in the Public Record Office museum. It was portrayed for much of the twentieth century as Dickens and Fairbrother interpreted it: an oddity, the darling flag and the incredible claim of an improbable man, which was true enough. But as an oddity it hid in plain sight, unbeknown to twentieth-century viewers, an American claim to Tristan and an American history of the island.¹¹¹

The idea of a British imperial presence on Tristan before 1816 was based on two fictions. The first, Seaver's, was disregarded by the Admiralty but remembered by

historians, as Seaver's letters became reprinted in newspapers worldwide while the Admiralty's deprecation of his 'Piratical Proceedings' lay hidden in the navy's files. The second, that Lambert flew only the Union Jack, was equally false. The settlers probably flew whatever flag suited the occasion, British, American or Lambert's own; such flags signified only convenience. But, as Festing himself noted, Lambert's ownership rested on more than a piece of cloth; Lambert had claimed the land, cultivated it, established a continuous possession and given notice: he had taken possession of Tristan 'in a formal manner'.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- [1] 'A report concerning the Islands of Tristan d'Acunha and Gough, as represented by Captain Heywood of His Majesty's Ship Nereus', enclosure to M. de Courey to Admiralty, 5 Aug. 1811 [R 2 Oct] British National Archives, formerly Public Record Office (henceforth PRO) ADM/1/20.
- [2] *Ibid.*
- [3] Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 402, 403, 405.
- [4] For 1805, see Samuel Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers, given by Mr. Lambert, resident on the Island of Tristan d'Acunha', 22 Dec. 1811, PRO ADM1/64 R41.
- [5] M. de Courey to Admiralty, 5 Aug. 1811 [R 2 Oct], PRO ADM1/20.
- [6] *Boston Gazette*, 30 Aug. 1810; *Salem Gazette*, 31 Aug. 1810; *New-York Commercial Advertiser*, 1 Sept. 1810; *Mercantile Advertiser*, 1 Sept. 1810; *Federal Republican Commercial Gazette*, 3 Sept. 1810; *Paulson's American Daily Advertiser*, 3 Sept. 1810; *New-York Speculator*, 5 Sept. 1810; *The Columbian*, 4 Sept. 1810; *Public Advertiser*, 3 Sept. 1810; *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial & Political*, 6 Sept. 1810; *Spirit of Seventy-Six*, 7 Sept. 1810; *Vermont Centinel*, 7 Sept. 1810; *American Watchman*, 8 Sept. 1810; *Providence Gazette*, 8 Sept. 1810; *Hornet*, 12 Sept. 1810.
- [7] 'Thomas Currie's Account of His Coming to the Island', in Fairbrother, 'Tristan da Cunha', 153; *Shamrock*, 27 July 1811; *Boston Gazette*, 30 Aug. 1810. Different dates exist for the arrival on Tristan. Currie gives 27 December 1810; Heywood gives 6 January 1811. Lambert told Warren the latter. Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41.
- [8] Hornsby, *British Atlantic*; Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession*, 16–40.
- [9] 'Thomas Currie's Account of His Coming to the Island', in Fairbrother, 'Tristan da Cunha', 573.
- [10] Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41.
- [11] John Pringle to William Ramsay, 11 March 1811, British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections. Henceforth OIOC. Cape of Good Hope Factory Records, G/9/7 ff 210–11.
- [12] *Collections of Massachusetts Historical Society*, Second Series (henceforth *Mass. Hist. Coll.* 2nd Ser.), II, 125.
- [13] Seaver reached Tristan on 28 January 1811, finding Lambert had arrived twenty days prior, though he dated Lambert's arrival as 27 December 1811. Seaver to Stopford 2 March 1811 in Theal, ed., *Records of the Cape Colony*, VIII, 7–9; Pringle to Ramsay, 5 March 1811,

- OIOC G/9/7 f 160. Lovel said it was 'about the first of January' when he left them. *Shamrock*, 27 July 1811.
- [14] Seaver to Stopford 2 March 1811, in Theal, ed., *Records of the Cape Colony*, VIII, 7–9; *Mass. Hist. Coll.*, Second Series, Vol. 2, 125.
- [15] Seaver to Stopford, 2 March 1811, in Theal, ed., *Records of the Cape Colony*, VIII, 7–9.
- [16] *Shamrock*, 27 July 1811.
- [17] Lovel probably brought the declaration to Boston, as suggested by the editor's note: 'The following communication was handed us by a gentleman, who is witness to the facts therein stated, and who thinks, notwithstanding the appearance of eccentricity with the narrative gives, that Mr. Lambert and his associates will found an important and highly valuable settlement.' *Shamrock*, 27 July 1811; reprinted from *Boston Gazette*, 18 July 1811.
- [18] Papers reprinting Lambert's declaration include *The Balance, and State Journal*, 30 July 1811; *American Watchman*, 3 Aug. 1811; *Connecticut Miner*, 5 Aug. 1811; *Carolina Gazette*, 10 Aug. 1811; *Green-Mountain Farmer*, 12 Aug. 1811. Brief summaries appeared in *Connecticut Gazette*, 24 July 1811; *New-Bedford Mercury*, 26 July 1811; *Norwich Courier*, 31 July 1811; *Alexandria Gazette*, 29 July 1811. The article received attention outside the United States as well.
- [19] Goebel, *The Struggle for the Falkland Islands*, 233 and fn 39; Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 76; Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures*, 168; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 9, 12, 30–32.
- [20] PRO ADM1/67–68. On the power of naming, Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 82; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 32–33.
- [21] Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha'; Mackay, *Angry Island*, 31; Crawford, *I Went to Tristan*, 55–56.
- [22] Fairbrother, 'Tristan da Cunha', 569–70.
- [23] Dickens, *All the Year Round XVIII* [listed elsewhere as volume 38], 'A Diminutive Dependency', 111–14.
- [24] PRO ADM1/67–68.
- [25] This flag may be related to merchant house flags. Upper and lower left corners are blue, upper and lower right corners are red.
- [26] Lambert mentions cloth bartered from passing ships. Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 402.
- [27] PRO ADM1/67–68. The extant flag is described in several newspapers, though it varies from the description that 'the four white diamonds bear the letter W'. *Shamrock*, 27 July 1811; *National Intelligencer*, 27 July 1811; Brander, *Tristan da Cunha*, 53 n. 1; cf. Fairbrother, 'Tristan da Cunha', 572. This flag may have been projected for a future 'merchant service'.
- [28] Armitage, *Declaration of Independence*.
- [29] PRO ADM1/67–68.
- [30] Norton-Kyshe, *Laws and Courts of Hong Kong*, I, 7–8; Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 77.
- [31] Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession*, 16–40.
- [32] Lambert's estate was probated in Massachusetts. Massachusetts State Archive, Boston, *Essex County, Massachusetts Probate Index*, 1638–1840, File 16200. Salem, Massachusetts may also have a claim to recover its poor relief for Mary Lambert from her third of Jonathan's estate.
- [33] PRO ADM1/67–68.
- [34] Reenen & Co. to James Henry Craig, Cape Town Archives Repository, Cape Town, South Africa (henceforth CTAR) BO 100 13.
- [35] PRO ADM1/67–68.
- [36] Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41.
- [37] Island of Nooahuvah, 5 Jan. 1816, Cap S 8, PRO ADM/12/178 Admiralty Digest.
- [38] Letter to Governor Caledon can be found in *Mass. Hist. Coll.* 2nd Ser., II, 125. Curiously, it does not survive at the Cape.

- [39] *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
- [40] Seaver to Stopford, 2 March 1811, PRO ADM1/63 R221.
- [41] Pringle Ramsay, 5 March 1811, OIOC G/9/7 f 160. Seaver's letter to Pringle does not survive, only Pringle's cover letter, OIOC B/153 113. Notably, by this time even St Helena was an inadequate supply post, unable to feed itself and visiting crews without importing foodstuffs from Cape Town.
- [42] Warren may have made one or two stops on Tristan. His interview with Lambert is dated December 1811, but Pringle referred to Warren's thoughts on Tristan on 11 March 1811 (OIOC G/9/7 and G/9/3). If there were two interviews, the Cape shipping records suggest the first was made en route from Plymouth, possibly after stopping at St Helena. CTAR PC 3/1; CTAR POS 3/1/1.
- [43] Pringle to Ramsay, 11 March 1811, OIOC G/9/7 ff 210–11
- [44] Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41.
- [45] Pringle to Ramsay, 11 March 1811, OIOC G/9/7 ff 210–11.
- [46] As late as the US Civil War, Parliament considered Americans born before 1783 British. See *Wilson v. Marryat*, King's Bench; Caitlin Anderson, "National Characters".
- [47] *Mass. Hist. Coll.*, 2nd Ser., II, 125. Seaver to Stopford, 2 March 1811, in Theal, ed., *Records of the Cape Colony*, VIII, 9.
- [48] 'Archives of the Port Captain and Dock Superintendent Table Bay Harbor. Register of the Arrivals and Departures of Ships June 1806 – Jan 1824', CTAR CO 3882; CTAR PC 3/1.
- [49] Quotation from a later claim for yet more money from this vaccination. 25 March 1812, CTAR CO 3889 No. 373.
- [50] Seaver to Caledon, 3 May 1811. CTAR CO 3882 Memorials Received 1811, II, No. 134
- [51] CTAR CO 4314. Register of Memorials Received, 2 Jan. 1810 to 10 June 1811, No. 134, 7 May 1811.
- [52] CTAR CO 4314. Register of Memorials Received, 2 Jan. 1810 to 10 June 1811, No. 185, 1 June 1811.
- [53] Seaver to Henry George Gray, 3 Sept. 1811. CTAR CO 3885, Memorials Received 1811, V, No. 1
- [54] The outgoing governor judged the matter 'a subject of high policy' and waited to see whether his replacement would arrive 'in the fleet now in the offing'. Presumably, the replacement would know London's wishes. CTAR CO 5712, Schedule of Papers submitted to the Governor, 1811, 4 Sept. 1811, B. F. Seaver.
- [55] William Shield to Henry Alexander, 6 Sept. 1811, CO 33. Also C. Bird to William Shield, 12 Sept. 1811, CTAR CO 4831, and C. Bird to J. A. Truter, 12 September 1811, p. 6. Also J. Barrow to Vice Adm. De Currey, 8 May 1811, PRO ADM2/934 23.
- [56] William Shields to Admiralty, 21 Sept 1811, PRO ADM1/3441.
- [57] CTAR GH 48/2/5 760; CTAR GH/51/1 296–97.
- [58] CTAR GH 48/2/5 698–701.
- [59] Seaver to Cradock, 27 Sept. 1811, CTAR CO 3885 No. 31.
- [60] CTAR CO 4316 No. 31, 4 Oct. 1811, Mr Seaver, CTAR CO 5712, 1 Oct. 1811, B. F. Seaver.
- [61] CTAR GH 48/2/5 798–99.
- [62] CTAR GH 48/2/5 813.
- [63] CTAR GH 49/8 989.
- [64] CTAR GH 48/2/5 813.
- [65] CTAR GH 49/8 989.
- [66] Seaver to Cradock, 19 Nov. 1811, CTAR CO 3885 No. 93; CTAR CO 4316 No. 93, 30 Nov. 1811, Mr. Seaver. CTAR CO 5712, 28 Nov. 1811, B. F. Seaver.
- [67] Only the governor's reply survives. Henry Alexander to B. F. Seaver, 8 May 1812, CO 4832 65; cf. CTAR CO 5781, 8 May 1812.
- [68] CTAR CO 5702, 24 April 1812; CTAR CO 5713, 25 March 1812, B. F. Seaver.

- [69] CTAR CO 3890 No. 597, 27 May 1812. Unclear what happened to Seaver's application. Note on envelope reads, 'will refer the Memorialist's application to England in order to receive the instructions of H. M. minister upon this case'. Other sources suggest the issue was decided at Cape Town by the Fiscal, with the 'Decision' being '[b]efore concession . . . mature deliberation' (CTAR CO 5713, 26 May 1812, B. F. Seaver). List of permissions to remain in the colony omits Seaver, suggesting he made no formal application. The list is not a complete list of immigrants, however. CTAR CO 6055, II, 16–20.
- No correspondence with London about this in Cape Archives from 1812. However, in November 1812 Governor Craddock replied to a London circular requesting information on immigration regulations, noting 'precautions taken' on 'the admission of Strangers into this Colony' and promising 'that every practicable attention will be given to prevent the entrance of any improper Person' (Craddock to Bathurst, 18 Nov. 1812, CTAR GH 23/4 Despatch No. 38, 80–81). Officials at the Cape and the secretary of state in London both granted permissions. CTAR GH 28/5, Enclosures to Despatches, Despatch No. 38, Earl of Macartney, 13 May 1797. Stopford wrote Seaver a letter to Admiral Dixon at Rio, suggesting Seaver did not become a Briton or a Cape burgher. Strangford to Castlereagh, 24 Dec. 1812, PRO ADM1/4224.
- [70] Henry Alexander to Seaver, 15 Sept. 1812, CTAR CO 4832 348.
- [71] Strangford to Castlereagh, 24 Dec. 1812, PRO ADM1/4224. Accuser claimed the piracies occurred in 1808–09.
- [72] Extract Captain Bowles, HMS *Aquilon*, to Government of Buenos Ayres, 4 Feb. 1814, and Strangford to Castlereagh, 12 March 1814, PRO ADM1/4229; Tristan da Cunha, 8 June 1814, Secy of State, PRO ADM/12/166 21; Street, 'Lord Strangford and Río de la Plata', 507.
- [73] W. Hamilton to J. W. Crocker, 8 June 1814, PRO ADM1/4229. Overleaf comments by Admiralty clerk.
- [74] Captain Bowles, HMS *Aquilon*, Buenos Aires, 10 Feb. 1814, PRO ADM1/1557.
- [75] Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41.
- [76] Letter identifies Warren's vessel as a frigate, while the Cape shipping registers identify it as a ship. 'Extract of a Letter from Captain Jonathan Lambert, at Tristan d'Acunha, to his brother in this town, dated Feb. 11, 1812', *Salem Gazette*, 8 Dec. 1812; reprinted elsewhere, including *Constitutionalist and Weekly Magazine*, 15 Dec. 1812.
- [77] Letter notes the *President* at Tristan, though the voyage was no secret. In the letter, Lambert noted an Irish brig which left behind 'a boat and two Irish farmers', contradicting the population count he gave Warren. Perhaps he was concerned the Irish not be pressed, perhaps he was boosting his cause. Lt. William Milne Holborn, 16 Oct. 1815, PRO ADM1/3029. Lt. M. 441 Warren's report, as summarised by Pringle, suggested that twenty or thirty families could be supported on the island, perhaps these were Lambert's twenty settlers.
- [78] Secondary sources note the Royal Navy sent one vessel to Tristan annually, though never with reference to primary sources. Lambert may have corresponded with the governor of St Helena, though St Helena Archives have no record of this. 'Extract of a letter from Capt. Timothy Bryant, of the ship *Endeavour*, of Salem, dated Amsterdam, July 17, 1816', *Paulson's Daily Advertiser*, 20 Nov. 1816.
- [79] *Salem Gazette*, 8 Dec. 1812; Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 402.
- [80] Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41; *Salem Gazette*, 8 Dec. 1812; Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 402.
- [81] Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 398–99. Lack of lime mentioned in R. W. G. Festing to Rear Admiral Sir Pultney Malcolm, PRO ADM 1/67 n.p. Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41.
- [82] Lambert to John Briggs, 21 Dec, 1811, in Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 399; reprint of 'Tristan d'Acunha &c. Jonathan Lambert, late sovereign thereof', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, VI, Dec. 1818. Fire mentioned in Festing to Malcolm, PRO ADM1/67 n.p.

- [83] Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41; Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha'.
- [84] Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 399–401; Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41; 'A report concerning the Islands of Tristan d'Acunha and Gough', enclosure to de Courey to Admiralty, 5 Aug. 1811 [R 2 Oct], PRO ADM1/20.
- [85] The kelp ring, 15 to 20 fathoms deep and a quarter of a mile offshore, circled part of the island. Mackay, *Angry Island*, 27. The boat left behind by the Irish brig, if it existed, was apparently already lost.
- [86] Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 401; Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41.
- [87] Lambert to Briggs, 21 Dec. 1811, in Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 403; Warren, 'Interrogatories and Answers', PRO ADM1/64 R41.
- [88] Lambert to Briggs, 21 Dec. 1811, in Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 403.
- [89] Marshall, 'King of Tristan D'Acunha', 403–05.
- [90] *Paulson's American Daily Advertiser*, 16 Dec. 1812, reprinted in *Constitutionalist and Weekly Magazine*, 15 Dec. 1812.
- [91] Seaver's 1 Mar. 1811 letter is dated 28 Feb. 1811 in the article. *Repertory & General Advertiser*, 1 Dec. 1812. For reprints, see, among others, *The Columbian* (New York), 1 July 1813. Summary in *Essex Register*, Salem, MA, 20 Jan. 1813.
- [92] Lambert's death is given as 'In Salem', though the author may mean 'of Salem' in the *Dedham Gazette*, 23 Sept. 1814. For the St Helena governor's account, see *Paulson's Daily Advertiser*, 20 Nov. 1816.
- [93] Bentley, *Diary*, IV, 282.
- [94] William Milne, 23 Aug. 1815, PRO ADM 1/3029 Lt. M. 441 1816.
- [95] Cockburn to Admiralty, 22 Oct. 1815, PRO ADM 1/66.
- [96] From his familiarity with these islands, he was either on board the *President* in 1811 or knew someone who was. In his letter on Ascension he mentions that he had visited that island. William Milne, 16 Oct. 1815, PRO ADM1/3029 Lt. M. 441 1816.
- [97] Bathurst to Admiralty, 3 May 1816, PRO ADM1/4236 Secretaries of State. Similar orders were given for Ascension. Cockburn to J. K. White, 17 Oct. 1815, PRO ADM1/66 R88; Malcolm to Festing, 30 July 1816, and Malcolm to Lt. Rice, 30 July 1816, PRO ADM1/67 n.p.
- [98] Gould, 'Zones of Law'.
- [99] Festing to Malcolm, 12 Sept. 1816, PRO ADM1/67 n.p.
- [100] Malcolm to Somerset, 21 July 1816, PRO ADM1/67 n.p.
- [101] 'Thomas Currie's Account of His Coming to the Island', PRO ADM1/67 n.p, emphasis added.
- [102] William Milne, 16 Oct. 1815, PRO ADM1/3029 Lt. M. 441.
- [103] The legend of Curry's treasure – haunted, of course, by his ghost – survived better than the story of Lambert. Crawford, *I Went to Tristan*, 58–59; Booy, *Rock of Exile*, 4.
- [104] Mackay, *Angry Island*, 30. The passage is in quotation marks, but Mackay gives no citation. The phrasing suggests the document was another secondary source.
- [105] 'Thomas Currie's Account of His Coming to the Island', in Fairbrother, 'Tristan da Cunha', 573.
- [106] 'A return of American vessels of War that touched at the Island of Tristan da Cunha', PRO ADM1/67 R 160.
- [107] 'Thomas Currie's Account of His Coming to the Island', PRO ADM1/67 n.p.
- [108] Oath. Somerset Camp, Tristan De Cunha, 7 Dec. 1816, Sworn before A. J. Cloete, PRO ADM1/67 n.p. 'Embarkation Return of the Detachment ordered to embark on board His Majesty's Ship *Falmouth* for the Island of Tristan de Acunha', Pultney Malcolm, PRO ADM1/67 n.p.
- [109] Malcolm to Crocker, 26 Jan. 1817, PRO ADM1/67 n.p. Flag was supposedly left by Captain Richardson of the *Semiramis*. His account not found in Admiralty files. Currie complained his fowls and ducks had been 'taken away by the American Privateers', but this is not

necessarily an indication that this was in response to his flying the British flag. American crews would have been perfectly capable of robbing Currie in any case. Indeed, few likely paid for meat and vegetables when they outnumbered the islanders three or four to one. 'Thomas Currie's Account of His Coming to the Island', PRO ADM 1/67 n.p., signed by Festing. Currie kept a journal of arrivals on Tristan in early 1815, noting numerous Americans. 'A return of American vessels of War that touched at the Island of Tristan de Acunha from January to May, 1815', in Fairbrother, 'Tristan da Cunha', 572–73.

[110] Festing to Admiralty, 11 Sept. 1816, and Admiralty clerk's notation upon it, PRO ADM1/1813.

[111] Curator Notes, PRO ADM1/67 n.p.

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