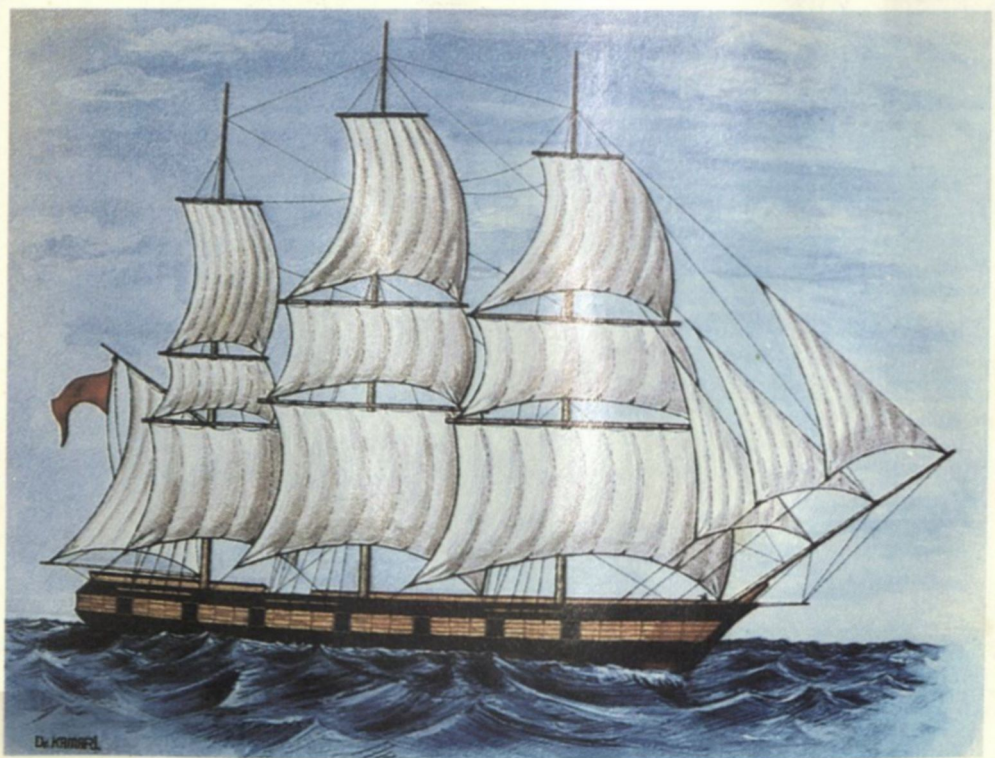


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A FRIENDSHIP TWO CENTURIES OLD :  
THE UNITED STATES  
AND  
THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



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SULTAN QABOOS CENTER  
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A FRIENDSHIP TWO CENTURIES OLD :

THE UNITED STATES

AND

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

Printed in Honor of the 150th Anniversary of the Arrival in New York in 1840 of  
the Omani ship *SULTANA*

FRONT COVER:  
"Omani ship *Sultana* under full sail"  
(Painting by Dr. Kamari)

# A FRIENDSHIP TWO CENTURIES OLD: THE UNITED STATES AND THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

by Hermann Frederick Eilts  
Boston University

## *Introduction*

The year 1990 commemorates two significant events in the annals of Omani-United States relations. Taken in order of historical sequence, on an indeterminate date in early September, we celebrate the bicentennial of the arrival in Muscat of the first American vessel, the Boston brig, *Rambler*, Captain Folger, ship's master. Similarly, April 30 of this year marks the sesquicentennial of the arrival in New York harbor of the Omani vessel, *Sultana*, sent by Sayyid Sa'id bin Sultan, ruler of Oman and much of the East African littoral, with an official representative aboard, on a goodwill and commercial mission to the United States.

Regrettably, whatever records *Rambler's* master left of his inaugural visit to Muscat are lost. In happy contrast, *Sultana's* three-month long visit to New York, which elicited widespread American public interest, remains indelibly engraved in the historical lore of New York City. Indeed, a portrait of the Omani envoy, Ahmad bin Na'aman, painted by the celebrated contemporary American artist, Edward Mooney, still graces New York's City Hall.

## Oman-U.S. First Contacts

Despite the thousands of miles that physically separate Oman and the United States, the two countries soon discovered they had common interests. Both Oman and the fledgling American republic, at least in their coastal areas, had seafaring traditions. Each was a maritime trading society. Omani vessels out of Sur, Sohar and Muscat had for centuries plied the Indian Ocean, visiting the ports of East Africa, India, the East Indies and even China in search of trade. With the advent of American independence in 1783, after its war with Great Britain, American merchant vessels quickly followed into these eastern seas for the same purpose. The voyage of *Rambler* to the Indian Ocean in 1790, including her visit to Muscat, was undertaken during the presidency of George Washington, a scant seven years after American independence had been attained.

Two years later, in 1792, under less propitious circumstances, another group of Americans made their way to Muscat — this time afoot, over the grueling mountains and deserts of south and central Oman. They were the survivors of the ill-fated Boston ship, *Commerce*, bound for Bombay, whose master had erred in his navigation and wrecked her on the as yet uncharted south Arabian coast near Cape Chancelly (Arabic: *Ras Sharbithat*), notorious for its hidden shoals, monsoonal winds, and treacherous currents.

Of the ship's complement of 16 Americans, only eight survived the harrowing 805-kilometer overland trek to Muscat. Their experiences at the hands of south

Arabian tribesmen were harsh. As they entered regions under the control of the Sultan of Muscat, however, notably in the great Wadi Halfain, they were better treated by villagers and townsmen and finally reached Muscat. There they were welcomed by the Sultan's representative and other local officials and able to recover from their ordeal. All but one proceeded by English ship to Bombay and on to the United States. He who remained was Valentine Bagley of Amesbury, Massachusetts, who worked for two years as a carpenter's mate aboard an Omani-owned vessel before he, too, returned home.

For the next quarter century, American merchant vessels occasionally touched at Muscat. As a rule, their cargoes were not of American origin, but consisted of sugar, tea, spices, and other products of the East Indies. American shipmasters, engaging in the so-called "coastal trade," transported cargoes to Muscat because of its importance as an entrepot for Arabian Gulf commerce, a position it had enjoyed for many years.

Political turbulence in the Gulf, and the constant threat of piracy at the hands of Qawasim freebooters in the first two decades of the 19th century disrupted Muscat's entrepot position. These developments, coupled with President Thomas Jefferson's embargo on all American shipping from 1807 to 1809, a war with Great Britain from 1812 to 1814, and closure of Isle de France (Mauritius) to American ships after British seizure of that island in 1819, reduced the number of such ship visits to ports in the northern Indian Ocean area, including Muscat.



*H. M. Sultan Sayyid Sa'id*  
(Peabody Museum of Salem)

## *Sayyid Sa'id*

Nevertheless, American shipmasters recognized that they were in maritime competition with the substantial Omani fleet of Sayyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id, the great-great-great grandfather of His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id. When not engaged in naval operations against Qawasmi pirates or rebellious East African subjects, many of his vessels regularly were sent on trading missions to East African and Indian ports.

It is eloquent testimony to the vision of Sayyid Sa'id that, despite the element of seaborne competition between Omani and American merchants, especially in the "coastal trade," he still encouraged greater American commercial interest in his realm. Few Arab rulers of any time period were as well-known to and respected by Americans as was Sayyid Sa'id during his long reign (1804-1856). Popularly styled "The Imam" by Americans and Europeans who knew him—although he himself eschewed the title—his domains ranged from Oman proper

to Dhofar in south Arabia and along the East African littoral from Cape Guardafui on the Horn of Africa to Cape Delgado, on the northern border of Portuguese-held Mozambique, and included the clove island of Zanzibar.

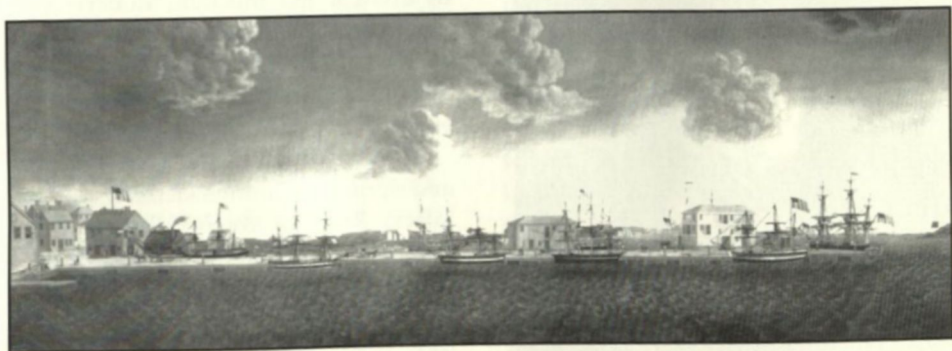
In a period when Americans were ill-informed about Arabs, and when their sparse contacts with Arabic-speaking peoples of North Africa were often contentious, Sayyid Sa'id enjoyed an unrivaled reputation for forceful leadership, decisiveness, friendship, and commercial probity. For the better part of a quarter-century, he maintained close personal and commercial relationships not only with American consuls, shipmasters, and supercargoes who resided in or visited his domains, but also with American merchants who had never left the United States and knew him only through correspondence. Many an American shipmaster benefited from his personal benevolence. Whether to replace lost anchors, to advance funds, or to provide other services, he sought to be of help. Rarely has an Arab leader, anywhere, made so positive an impression upon Americans.

## *Edmund Roberts*

On the American side, it was Edmund Roberts, a native of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to whom credit is due for reviving trade between the United States and the domains of Sayyid Sa'id, and who negotiated and signed the 1833 treaty. Born in 1794, hence only six years younger than Sayyid Sa'id, Roberts was orphaned at an early age. His adolescent years were spent in the home of an uncle, a prominent American merchant who lived in Buenos Aires and later in London and Paris. On reaching maturity, Roberts found that his share of his

uncle's business had shrunk considerably, due to Anglo-French trade restrictions imposed during Napoleonic wars and by the depredations of French and Spanish privateers. Hearsay reports, rather than direct information, stirred his interest in Sayyid Sa'id's domains. In an effort to recoup his fortunes, he chartered a ship in 1827 to explore their commercial possibilities. In the ensuing eight years, Roberts engaged in three separate rounds of talks with Sayyid Sa'id: the first in a purely private capacity, (although Roberts let it be known that he had once been named American consul to Demerara, Guyana); the other two in the capacity of official representative of the government of the United States.

either the British or the French, the United States had no territorial ambitions abroad and was solely interested in mutually beneficial commerce. Roberts proposed that Sayyid Sa'id entrust him with dispatches to the government of the United States, setting forth the terms under which American merchant vessels might be received in ports under the Sultan's control. Might it not also be useful, he suggested, if a commercial treaty were concluded between the two governments? Should this be agreeable to His Highness, as Sayyid Sa'id was called, he promised to have a warship, with an American envoy aboard, visit the ruler's domains in the very next year to negotiate such a treaty.



*Crowningshield's Wharf, Salem, Massachusetts*  
(Peabody Museum of Salem)

## Trade Talks

His initial discussions with Sayyid Sa'id took place in early 1828, in Zanzibar, where the ruler of Oman had arrived shortly after Roberts' vessel. Believing that American commercial ties with the Sultan's realm suffered disadvantages, Roberts urged that American traders receive the same treatment extended to Englishmen. The English, he noted, already enjoyed treaty status of sorts with Oman and thus were accorded a favored position. Moreover, he added, unlike

Sayyid Sa'id was interested. Not only did Roberts' proposal offer promising trade opportunities, but—as Roberts later recounted—His Highness saw in it potential opportunity to obtain needed military equipment that might enable him to drive the colonialist Portuguese out of Mozambique. Before Roberts' departure, Sayyid Sa'id affirmed his desire to place official and commercial relations with the United States on a firm treaty basis.

Following his return to Portsmouth, Roberts enlisted the aid of a relative

through marriage, Senator Levi Woodbury, chairman of the powerful U.S. Senate Commerce Committee, to bring the matter to the attention of appropriate U.S. authorities. Although interested, Woodbury observed that little was known about Sayyid Sa'id's dominions. After the enthusiastic Roberts provided all the information at his disposal, Woodbury discussed the matter with executive and legislative branch colleagues and subsequently predicted that an "agent" would probably be sent to Muscat in the next year to negotiate a treaty.

Despite this optimism, the project was slow to mature. President Andrew Jackson, who assumed office in January



Edmund Roberts  
(Library of Congress)

1829, was preoccupied throughout much of his first term of office with domestic issues. Not until Woodbury became Jackson's Secretary of the Navy in 1831, and convinced the President to mount a naval expedition against Japanese pirates who had attacked an American merchant ship, did Jackson agree to try to place American commerce with all potential trading partners in the Indian Ocean on a sound treaty footing. Sayyid Sa'id's domains were prominent among

these states, in large measure due to the persistence of Roberts and Woodbury. Their campaign was reinforced when His Highness sent a letter to President Jackson, delivered through a Salem mercantile firm, confirming a commercial agreement with the United States.

## Treaty Negotiations

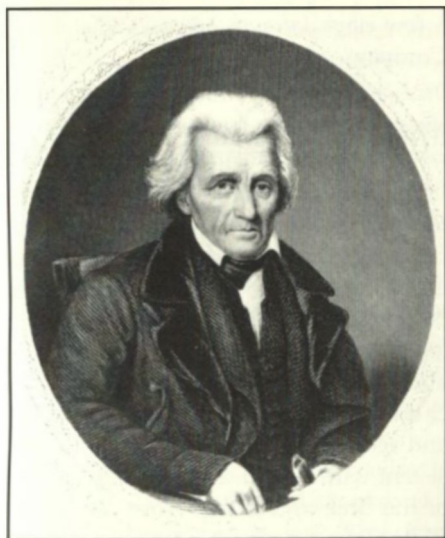
Through Woodbury's influence, the Secretary of State named Roberts as Special Agent and instructed him to proceed aboard the American warship, *Peacock*, to various East Indian and Arabian ports to conduct treaty negotiations. Fearing that the British might seek to disrupt his mission, Roberts was nominally carried on the warship's rosters as "captain's clerk," a ruse that fooled no one and was hardly consistent with the emissary's personality.

After visiting Cochinchina and Siam and signing a commercial treaty with the latter, Roberts aboard *Peacock*, with another American naval vessel as escort, proceeded by way of Mokha to Muscat, arriving on September 18, 1833. The next day, Roberts paid a courtesy call on Sayyid Sa'id and delivered a warm letter from President Jackson responding to His Highness' earlier correspondence.

Roberts then outlined American ideas for a commercial treaty, based upon a standard draft agreement drawn up in Washington prior to his departure. At a second meeting two days later, he formally presented the draft agreement to Sayyid Sa'id and his advisors, and its various articles were orally translated into Arabic by the ruler's interpreter, Sa'id bin Khalfan, a former Omani naval officer. Sayyid Sa'id, Roberts later recalled, accepted the document with only minor modifications.

Attesting to the ruler's magnanimity





Andrew Jackson, 7th President of the United States  
(Brown Brothers, Sterling, PA)

and greatness of spirit, he insisted that the treaty article pertaining to the treatment of ship-wrecked American seamen be amended to specify that Oman bear any expenses incurred in supporting and returning them home. Such treatment, he asserted, was mandated by Arab usage and rights of hospitality. It was agreed that the date of the agreement should be September 21, 1833, and that the document would be signed in English and Arabic versions.

During the next few days, Sa'id bin Khalfan prepared an Arabic translation in consultation with Sayyid Sa'id and Roberts. Actual signing took place on October 3, 1833, with the English and Arabic texts in parallel columns. One copy of the signed treaty was left with Sayyid Sa'id; Roberts took the other for ratification by the U.S. government. On October 4, the day after signing, Sayyid Sa'id, accompanied by a large retinue, paid a formal visit to *Peacock*. The yard-arms of both warships were manned and the vessels fired a 21-gun salute in honor of His Highness. Their salutes were returned by the Muscat forts. It was, by

all accounts, a festive occasion.

Sayyid Sa'id's generous desire to send presents for Jackson was respectfully declined on the grounds that acceptance would violate the U.S. Constitution, but Roberts carried with him a cordial letter of appreciation from the ruler to the President.

## A Return Voyage

After Senate advice and consent had been obtained, the treaty was duly ratified by the President of the United States on June 30, 1834. Shortly thereafter, Roberts again was named special diplomatic agent, this time to exchange treaty ratifications with Oman. He departed on March 25, 1835, once more aboard *Peacock*. En route to Muscat, in the early hours of September 25, *Peacock* ran aground on a coral reef near Masira Island. Unable to float free, and fearing the tribesmen gathering on the shore, the commander sent the ship's cutter, with Roberts and seven crewmen, to seek help. Four days later, after a dangerous trip in their small boat along the south Arabian coast, they arrived in Muscat. Sayyid Sa'id immediately dispatched one of his ships, *Sultana*, and sent orders overland to his governors to provide any necessary assistance. Near Ras Al-Hadd, *Sultana* encountered *Peacock*, whose captain had finally managed to get his ship off the reef, but only after jettisoning her heavy guns.

With *Peacock* safe in Muscat, formal ratifications were exchanged on September 30, 1835. Asked by Sayyid Sa'id when the treaty should go into effect, Roberts proposed June 30, 1834, the date on which U.S. ratification had taken place. Sayyid Sa'id graciously accepted, although this *ex post facto* arrangement meant that a number of American ship-

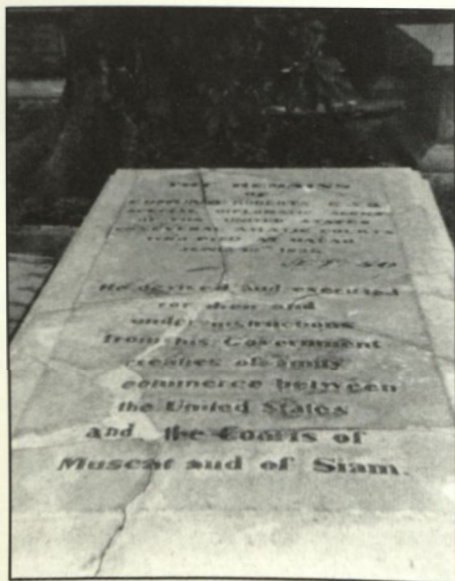
masters, who in the intervening period had paid more than the five percent import duty stipulated by the treaty, could claim reimbursement. After a further round of calls, *Peacock*, with a gratified Roberts on board, departed for Bombay to undergo needed repairs.

As a further token of friendship, Sayyid Sa'id returned the American vessel's guns which had been retrieved by Omani divers.

Small wonder that Sayyid Sa'id received the accolades of American presidents, merchants and seamen alike. Indeed, his exceptional friendship for the United States in aiding the distressed *Peacock*, and returning her jettisoned guns, was reported to the Congress by President Jackson and his successor, Martin Van Buren, with a proposal that a suitable gesture of gratitude be made.

Roberts, who had worked so prodigiously for the treaty, did not live to see its results. He died in Macao on June 12, 1836, reportedly of fever contracted in Siam after leaving Muscat. He was buried

Grave of Edmund Roberts - Portuguese Macao  
(Photo by Hermann F. Eilts, 1987)



a few days later in Macao's East India Company cemetery.

## Merchant Consuls

Once word was received in Washington that treaty ratifications had been exchanged, arrangements were made for the posting of American consuls to Sayyid Sa'id's domains. Richard Palmer Waters, an associate of the firm of John Bertram and Michael Shepard of Salem, Massachusetts, was sent to Zanzibar in 1837 and accredited to Muscat as well. Consistent with American consular practice of the time and many years thereafter, Waters was a merchant consul. Such officials performed consular duties for the government of the United States and private trading activities on behalf of their commercial principals. Waters was warmly received by Sayyid Sa'id, who since 1828, had alternated his seat of residence between Muscat and Zanzibar, the two termini of his extended domains.

American commercial interest in Muscat soon quickened. Henry P. Marshall of the New York City firm of Scoville and Britton was named American consul to Muscat and arrived there on October 14, 1838. A combination of bad health and bankruptcy of his company forced him to leave a short time later. Before Marshall left, however, he named Sa'id bin Khalfan, translator of the 1833 treaty, as acting consul, an appointment subsequently confirmed in 1843 through the lobbying efforts of Bertram and Shepard. Sa'id bin Khalfan provided a variety of consular services for visiting American shipmasters, as well as serving as the principal Omani merchant and broker for American supercargoes, until his death in 1845, whereupon jurisdiction over the Muscat consular office reverted to the American consul in Zanzibar.

For the next 20 years, the Salem firm of Bertram and Shepard virtually monopolized American trade with Muscat. Each year it sent one, two, or three vessels to Muscat laden with cargo. These vessels usually included Zanzibar, several East African ports, Mokha, and Aden on their itineraries.

Occasionally, a New York or Providence merchant vessel might also visit Muscat, but such visits were too infrequent to permit their supercargoes to develop an extended knowledge of the intricacies of doing business there.

Even after Sa'id bin Khalfan's death, and despite the prolonged absence of a resident American consul, American ships regularly visited Muscat and conducted their trading activities without the slightest hindrance. Occasionally, an American whaling ship out of New Bedford, Massachusetts, or another New England whaling port would put into Muscat for supplies. On less frequent occasions, an American naval vessel, bound for the East Indies, would transit Muscat, where its officers could pay respects to the Sultan or his governor.

In addition to specie, American merchant ships primarily brought cotton sheeting, shirtings, and drills. These cotton products, because of their sturdiness in withstanding the rigorous Omani dyeing process, were highly prized in Muscat and throughout the Indian Ocean littoral. In Oman, along the Arabian Peninsula, and in East Africa, they were popularly dubbed "mericani," a term clearly derived from their source. Other products imported in smaller quantities were tobacco, soap, sewing twine, resin, all kinds of ship supplies, shot, powder, and assorted other goods. In return, American supercargoes bought salted goat and sheep skins, wool, gum Arabic, gum copal, aloes, Mokha coffee and most



*Ahmad bin Na'aman, the Sultan's special representative to New York in 1840*  
(Peabody Museum of Salem)

important of all, Omani fard dates.

Some of the cargoes bought in Muscat, like coffee and gum copal, were not of Omani origin but reflected Muscat's continuing status as a regional trading center. Through the intercession of Sayyid Thuwainia, son of Sayyid Sa'id and Governor of Oman, and under the helm of a skillful Omani navigator identified only as "Nuri" in American ship rosters of the period, many Bertram and Shepard vessels also sailed to Gwadar, on the opposite Makran coast and still under Omani jurisdiction, where their supercargoes purchased high-quality wool.

### *Expedition to New York*

As Sayyid Sa'id welcomed American vessels to his ports, he also pondered the utility of sending Omani trading vessels to the United States. Such direct trade, he hoped, might enable him to obtain American products more cheaply than



*Then Vice President George Bush and H.M. Sultan Qaboos bin Said during the Vice President's visit to Oman, April 1986.*



*President Ronald Reagan and H.M. Sultan Qaboos bin Said during the Sultan's state visit to the United States, April 1983.*



*Oman, April 1986  
Then-Vice President Bush reviewing honor guard  
with H.H. Sayyid Thuwainy bin Shahab, personal  
representative of H.M. Sultan Qaboos.  
(Photo by David Valdez, the White House)*

through exclusive reliance on American shipping.

During initial treaty negotiations, according to Edmund Roberts, Sayyid Sa'id suggested that the American representative sail on one of his ships to the United States. Roberts' official status precluded his doing so. Subsequently, during Roberts' treaty ratification mission, in those anxious few days when the safety of *Peacock* was still in doubt, Sayyid Sa'id offered one of his ships to the American envoy. Roberts, he indicated, could continue his treaty ratification mission aboard an Omani vessel should *Peacock* be lost, and by a second Omani vessel to be sent to the United States. With *Peacock's* appearance in Muscat, the idea was deferred.

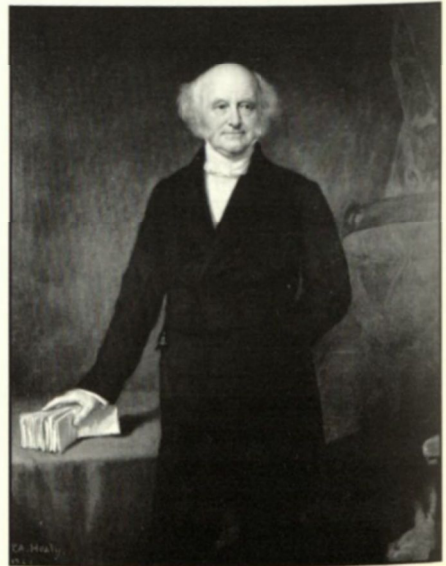
Again, shortly before Consul Waters returned to the United States on leave in 1839, the Sultan proposed sending one of his ships to the United States and invited Waters to sail in her. Since the ship was not yet ready, and because of his doubts about the English sailing master who was to navigate her, Waters declined the offer and left for Salem aboard his brother's ship.

Such a voyage finally took place in 1839, in part because of the urgings of a visiting American shipmaster representing the New York firm of Scoville and Britton. Sayyid Sa'id's ship, *Sultana*, the same vessel that had been sent to the aid of the stricken *Peacock*, sailed from Muscat on December 23. After touching Zanzibar and St. Helena, she arrived in New York harbor on April 30, 1840. Aboard as supercargo and as Sayyid Sa'id's special emissary was his secretary Ahmad bin Na'aman, charged with delivering letters and gifts for the President of the United States and purveying a cargo of Omani dates, Persian wool carpets, and Mokha coffee loaded at Muscat, as well as various articles from

Zanzibar. All of the items were consigned to Scoville and Britton. Since the firm had gone bankrupt shortly before the ship's arrival, Ahmad had to request to go to another New York firm, Barclay and Livingston, local agents of Lloyd's of London, to handle sales and purchases. Various New York merchants bought the cargoes, and the Omanis collected a return cargo consisting of textiles, some cases of multicolored beads, a quantity of muskets and gun powder, china plates, several mirrors and vases, boxes of gold thread, sperm-whale candles, and other items.

Sayyid Sa'id's gifts for the President posed a dilemma. A presidential election was imminent and Van Buren's opponents in the Congress and the newspapers castigated any suggestion that the gifts might appropriately be received by the Chief Executive. Doing so, they contended, would be unconstitutional and unprecedented. After protracted debate, and because of Administration warnings that declining them would be offensive to a friendly ruler, Congress

*Martin Van Buren - 8th President of the U.S.  
(Harris & Gifford, Washington, D.C.)*





Models of First Ladies standing on Persian carpet given to the United States by H.M. Sultan Sayyid Sa'id (Smithsonian Institution)

agreed that they might be accepted on behalf of the government of the United States. Some, such as two Arabian stud horses, were sold at auctions—one to a member of former President Jackson's Cabinet, General John Eaton of Tennessee. Proceeds were deposited in the United States Treasury. Others, such as a Persian carpet, a gold-mounted sword and minor gifts, were accepted on the condition that they belonged to the United States.

Ahmad and his officers were cordially welcomed in New York. A few days later after *Sultana* arrived, New York City officials visited him aboard his ship to extend "the civilities and accustomed hospitality of the City," a distinction rarely accorded foreign visitors. The crew, like Ahmad and his officers, created a sensation and were widely entertained by enthusiastic New Yorkers.

During his stay, Ahmad met New York

Mayor Phillip Hone and other municipal celebrities. He saw all the sights of the city, and was an honored guest on a special train ride arranged by the management of the Long Island Railway between New York City and the rural town of Hicksville. His dignified demeanor, quick intelligence, and quiet sense of humor endeared him to his American hosts.

### *Gestures of Appreciation*

*Sultana's* arrival offered a belated opportunity to extend tangible appreciation for Sayyid Sa'id's unstinting help to *Peacock*. At the suggestion of Commodore James Renshaw, who commanded the New York (Brooklyn) Navy Yard, the U.S. government overhauled *Sultana* at the Naval Yard before her return jour-

ney. The difficult Atlantic voyage had taken its toll and repairs were necessary. *Sultana's* crew participated in the eight weeks of repair work and won the admiration of American naval personnel.

As *Sultana* prepared to depart, the government of the United States presented Ahmad and his crew with several gifts for Sayyid Sa'id. These included a magnificent pleasure barge, especially constructed under the personal direction of the United States' Navy agent, firearms manufactured by Colt, two large mirrors, and a splendid chandelier.



New York docks, 19th century  
(Bettman Archives, New York)

Ahmad had by then discharged his English sailing master for intemperance and lax discipline. In his place he engaged Captain Sandwith Drinker of Philadelphia, a well-known American shipmaster, along with three other American seamen. *Sultana* set sail from New York on August 7, 1840, and, after a long, tedious voyage, arrived at Zanzibar on December 8. Learning that Sayyid Sa'id was en route from Muscat, Drinker decided to remain.

Sayyid Sa'id hoped to retain Drinker and the three American sailors in his employ; he even considered placing a 610 metric-ton Omani ship in regular service between his domains and the United States, but rejected the idea as economi-

cally unsound. He also made plans to send one of his ships to Manila for sugar, and considered a naval foray against Nossi Be on the East African coast, inviting Drinker to command both expeditions. Drinker, recently married and anxious to return to his bride, declined the offers and returned to the United States.

*Sultana's* visit to the United States, judging from Ahmad bin Na'aman's account book, was not a conspicuous commercial success. Most American commodities, Sayyid Sa'id discovered, could be bought about as cheaply from visiting

American vessels as by sending Omani vessels to an American port—and without the considerable expenses entailed in any protracted stay. Sayyid Sa'id occasionally used the prospect of another US voyage for bargaining purposes with shrewd US supercargoes, but although *Sultana* sailed to London in 1842, no Omani ship in this era again visited an American port.

## The Shufeldt Mission

In the late 1870's, some 20 years after the death of Sayyid Sa'id, a new burst of US trade expansion resulted in explo-





Captain Sandwich Drinker  
(Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia)

ration of heretofore untapped markets for the products of American industry. As part of this effort, the US government dispatched Commodore R.W. Shufeldt, a naval officer and a former American consul to Havana, to various ports of the Indian Ocean aboard the *U.S.S. Ticonderoga*. He was to explore trade potentials in areas which had no resident American representatives.

His instructions regarding Muscat and Oman reflected the uncertainty in Washington of the precise nature of the changes that had taken place in the late Sayyid Sa'id's domains since the latter's death in 1856. The absence since 1845 of a consular officer representing the United States in Muscat contributed to such ignorance. Washington seemed unclear, for example, of the implications of the separation between Oman and Zanzibar, which had been formalized in an 1861 British arbitration award.

Shufeldt visited Muscat on November 18, 1879, where he found a Salem vessel, *Taria Topan*, loading a cargo of dates.

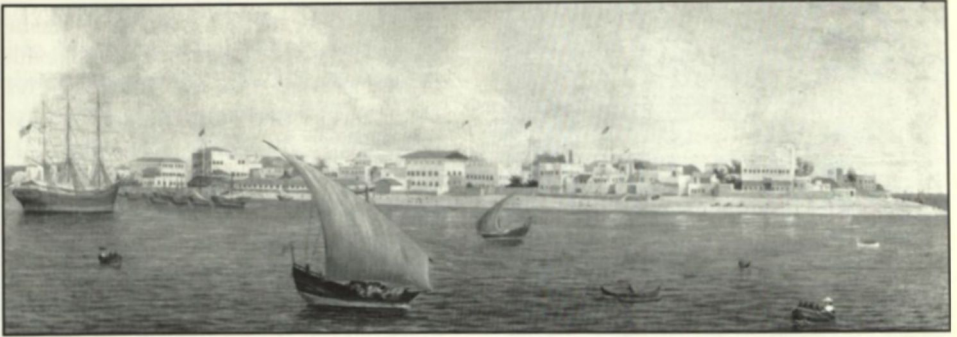
The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869,

the advent of steam navigation in the Indian Ocean, and the shifting cotton textile trade resulting from the American Civil War, had caused something of a recession in Muscat's economy. No longer did American cotton products dominate its marketplace. Their export had been stopped during the Civil War years and replaced in Omani bazaars by cotton textiles spun in India. In talks with the Omani ruler, Sayyid Turki bin Sa'id, a younger son of the late Sayyid Sa'id, Shufeldt broached Washington's interest in re-opening the Muscat consulate. Sayyid Turki readily assented, although noting that American trade had been for many years conducted satisfactorily without a resident American consul. Prior to Shufeldt's departure, Sayyid Turki confirmed his agreement in writing to the reopening of an American consulate. *Ticonderoga's* paymaster conducted independent inquiries during the vessel's stay in Muscat and concluded that there was scope for an increase of trade between the United States and Oman.

### *The Second American Consulate*

Washington agreed with Shufeldt's recommendations that the Muscat consulate be reopened. In the absence of a readily suitable American candidate, Louis Maguire, an Irishman resident in Muscat, who represented a number of European and American firms, was selected as American consul.

Maguire's designation was agreeable to Sayyid Turki, who formally received the new American consul in audience on July 22, 1880. A delighted Maguire reported to the Department of State in Washington that the Omanis had hoisted the American ensign over the Muscati



*Zanzibar Harbor 1878, oil by Charles Porter Brown  
(Peabody Museum of Salem)*

forts and fired a 21-gun salute. All vessels in the Muscat harbor, Omani and foreign, had been decorated for the occasion and the populace of Muscat celebrated the day as a holiday.

The system of using non-American consuls was continued until 1906, when Washington decided that henceforth only career consular officers, not engaged in private trade, should be assigned to all American consular posts. Between that year and the closure of the Muscat consulate nine years later, three American consuls served in the post. Throughout this period, Mohamed Fazel, an Indian expatriate first appointed by Maguire, whose relations with the ruler of Oman were excellent, remained as deputy consul and later as vice consul. He was serving as acting consul in 1914 when World War I broke out and the government of the United States chose to close the post, partly because of commercial uncertainties.

### ***Trade and Missionaries***

By the turn of the century, trade between Oman and the United States had expanded somewhat. A new American product called shooks—a set of barrel staves with accessories to be assembled into crates—offered more attractive pack-

aging for Oman's dates. Small quantities of American lumber, wax paper, flour, and kerosene oil also had been added to the lists.

At the time of the first career consul's arrival in October 1906, available statistics suggest that the total import and export trade between the two countries was slightly less than a quarter of a million dollars. Thereafter, unfortunately, it dropped sharply, particularly in American products sold to Oman. Reasons included Indian and British competition, coupled with the difficulties of Muscat and Matrah merchants in reducing overstocked inventories due to internal distribution problems. Then, too, many American products were simply unmarketable in Oman; others were inadequately packaged to compete effectively.

By then, Oman's date imports to the United States had grown significantly. Inclement weather conditions caused seasonal fluctuations, but for many years about two-thirds of Oman's date exports were consigned to American buyers. Between 1902 and 1913, save for two low crop years, values of Omani date sales to the United States averaged \$100,000. The cheapness and nutritive value of dates caused a surge in American consumption. By 1911, date imports were estimated to be about 16,256 metric tons each year.

Already, however, the date trade was changing. Direct steamship service from Europe and India to the Gulf, from about 1887 onwards, meant that sailing ships, such as those from Salem which had visited Muscat annually, were discontinued. Instead, faster non-American flag carriers increasingly carried cargoes of dates to American markets—often via Indian or European ports. Moreover, internal problems in Oman, beginning in 1913, adversely affected the Omani date industry and presented opportunities for competition from Basra dates, which ultimately usurped much of the American market. In 1920, an American firm, Hills Brothers, established a date packing plant in Muscat, but fluctuating supplies soon dictated its closure.

Brief recognition needs to be given to the yeoman work of American medical missionaries in Oman. In December 1893, the Dutch Reformed Church of America was permitted to establish a permanent station of its Arabian Mission in Muscat. Over the next 70 years—with an interregnum between 1915 and 1928—dedicated American missionaries, most of them doctors and nurses, performed sorely needed medical work for the government and people of Oman. An Arabian Mission hospital was established in Matrah as early as 1909, and medical work was performed in both Muscat and Matrah, as well as occasional medical forays into inner Oman. After the accession of Sultan Qaboos in 1970, the Arabian Mission voluntarily turned over its medical facilities to the Oman government. Missionary personnel continue to work in Oman on secondment to the Ministry of Health. The work of three or more generations of selfless American medical missionaries, even more than that of consuls and merchants, contributed immensely to the creation of people-to-people empathy between the United

States and Oman. Their contribution to American-Omani friendship is indelible.

### *A New Era of Understanding*

Although the American consulate in Muscat was not reopened after World War I, the United States sent its Minister to Iraq, Paul Knabenshue, to Muscat in 1934 with a presidential letter marking the centennial celebration of the 1833 treaty. Welcomed by the Omani ruler, His Highness Sayyid Sa'id bin Taimur, Knabenshue presented an official invitation to the Sultan from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to visit the United States. Accompanied by his father, Sayyid Sa'id bin Taimur arrived in America on March 3, 1938, and toured the country. In Washington, he was formally greeted by Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and was the honored guest at a White House state dinner given by President Roosevelt.

During World War II, Sayyid Sa'id bin Taimur made available the RAF air facilities at Salalah in Dhofar and on Masira Island to US aircraft bound for the Far East. A small number of US Air Force maintenance personnel were stationed at these installations in order to service transiting American aircraft. The United States was most appreciative of his assistance, which contributed to the war effort.

In 1956, with growing prospects for oil in Oman, Washington proposed reestablishing an American consular office in Muscat. In response, Sayyid Sa'id bin Taimur suggested that the 1833 treaty was in some respects outdated and that a new consular treaty should be negotiated. Discussions began in June 1957, with the Sultan personally conducting the talks for Oman. In the absence of a resident American representative, Walter Schwinn, the American Consul

General in Dhahran, regularly shuttled to Salalah to handle the talks for the American side.

After lengthy negotiations, a new Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations and Consular Rights was signed on December 20, 1958, by Sayyid Sa'id bin Taimur and Consul General Schwinn. It superseded the earlier 1833 treaty and, in accordance with Article XII, accorded each party the right to send consular representatives to the cities of the other state. The new treaty was ratified by President Dwight D. Eisenhower on May 9, 1959. It was the privilege of the writer of this article, representing President Eisenhower, to exchange treaty ratifications with Sayyid Sa'id bin Taimur on May 11, 1960, in Salalah.

Following the accession of Sultan Qaboos on August 3, 1970, His Majesty sent a message to Washington announcing his succession, and his determination to honor and respect the treaty relations between the two countries. The US State Department sent a reply on August 26, congratulating His Majesty and affirming the wish of the US government to maintain and strengthen the friendship and cooperation between the American and Omani peoples.

In 1972, the US established an American embassy in Muscat and Ambassador William H. Stoltzfus, Jr., who was also accredited to Kuwait, presented his credentials to Sultan Qaboos as non-resident ambassador. (Patrick J. Quinlan served as resident charge d'affaires from 1972 to 1974.) A year later, in May 1973, an Omani embassy opened in Washington with His Highness, Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Bu Sa'id, as the first Omani ambassador. And in July 1974, with the arrival of Ambassador William Wolle, a resident American ambassador was established in Muscat. Since then, continuing dialogue at the ambassadorial level, in

Muscat and Washington, has significantly strengthened the bonds of understanding between the two countries.

The United States and Oman today share common interests and objectives in the Arabian Gulf area, including peace, regional stability, security and economic development. On June 4, 1980, following an exchange of notes between representatives of the two governments, this cooperation was given concrete expression with the establishment of the Omani-American Joint Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation. There have since been agreements for the construction of a dam in Oman, to provide water for an underground reservoir, and for assistance in fisheries and other development-related projects. The relationship between Oman and the United States stands today as a model of how free people, desirous of improving the quality of their lives, respecting rights of others, and determined to maintain their territorial integrity and political independence, can cooperate for their mutual interest. May that cooperation, inaugurated by the 1833 treaty, long endure and flourish.

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*About the Author:*

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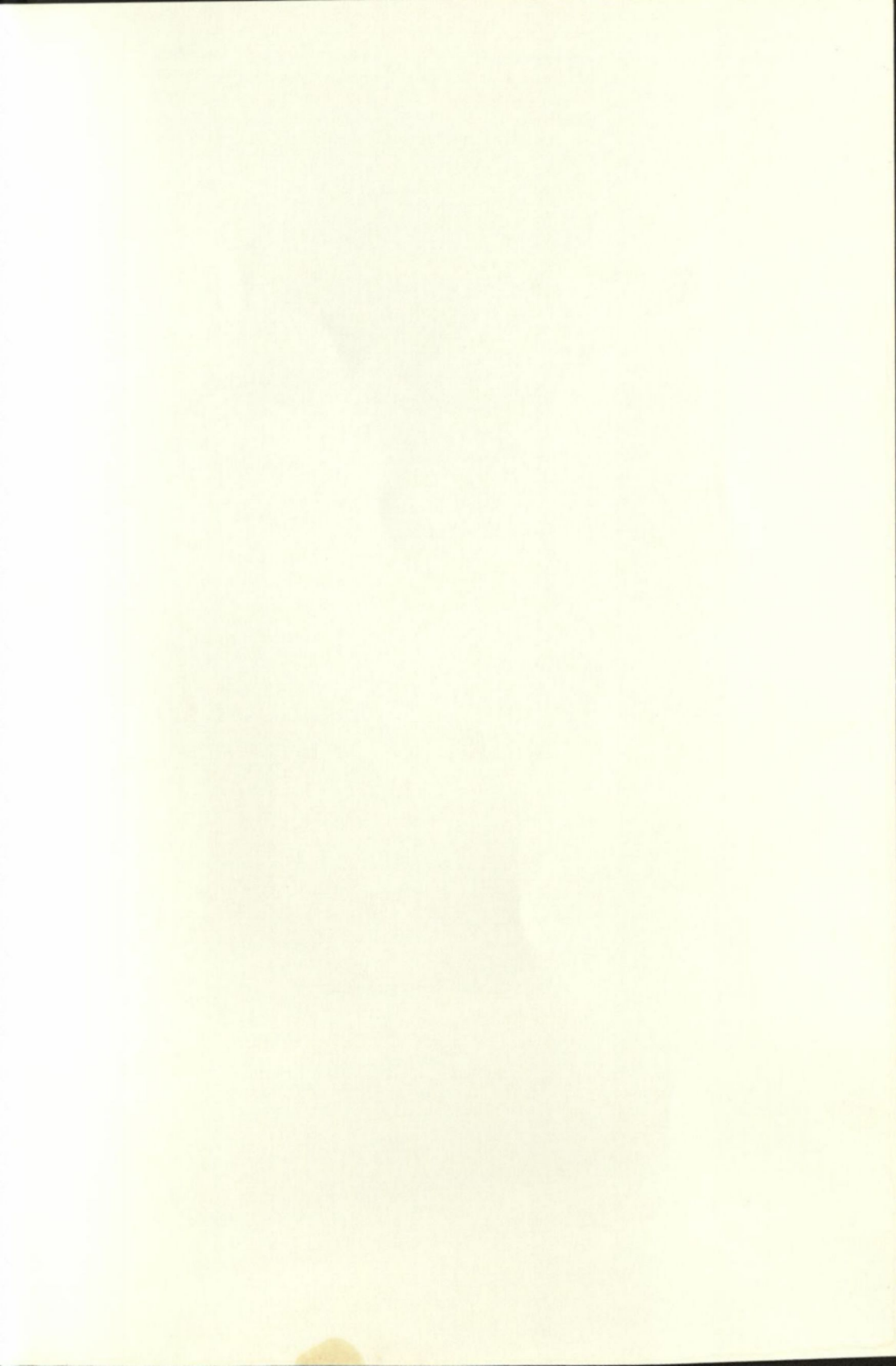
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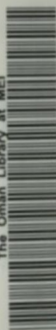
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