JASON BROWN

FROM THE JOURNAL OF ROBERT WILLS

MARCH 4, 1810

This day baffling winds and black clouds ahead. Departed Outermark, Province of Maine, at 8am. Filled away and ran on. At midnight moderate. At 4am orders for the set up of the lee rigging.

MARCH 28, 1810

Father judged us to be abreast of Point Espada. Could not see the land. At midnight bore up across for Cape Tiburon. At 8am stood to the southard and shook reef out of the fore sail. About 10am saw 2 whales. We ran into within 3 miles of the land and stood down.

APRIL 6, 1810

The crew is a poor, miserable set, and we have one man who fights with most every man in the fo'castle. He has pretended to be blind, crazy, and sick. Father thinks he is a queer fellow, and by his looks and appearance you would think he was foolish. But he can converse on any subject equal to any man on board. The men are all of the time peeking upon him, and if they would let him alone he would begin a quarrel with them. If they only point anything at him, he will swear and cry so you would think he was almost killed. He got his razor one night and pretended that he was going to cut his throat. Another time he went missing, and all hands were called up out of their berths. After looking the ship over, they finally found him down in the hole stowed away under some staves of cask. He pretended that he was afraid that some of the men were going to flog him. Another time he got to jawing with some of the men aft, and Father told him to go forward and stay there, so he went to the side of the ship and jumped overboard. All was ex-

citement for a little while, for we did not know but he would drown at first, but I do not think that he had such a thought himself. He knew that the ship was not going very fast and that he could swim till the boat picked him up. He swam toward the boat like a good fellow until the boat got most to him and then he turned and went the other way and told us to let him drown. I do not think there is one aboard the ship but would be glad to get rid of him.

APRIL 10, 1810

Bore N.W. 12 mile L. obs Lon 18”18 74”20. Midnight moderate and fair, continued to tack near the shore. At 8am saw a small schooner in the offing and at 9am she passed under our lee and tacked and stood for us. The schooner was a quarter of a mile astern Cape Bona Maria bearing about S.E.b.S. 3 leagues. Tacked and ran to leeward of the schooner mentioned, who gave signs of his wish to board us but failing. Showed a blue flag with a yellow cross extending through it both ways. He then followed us near the shore when we were obliged to tack and ran before the wind to keep out of his way. He continued to chase us and set his square sail but could not come up with us. We hauled to the W.S.W., and he gave up the chase and steered along shore. Now, for the first time, he showed a large number of men. Father says that the ship was undoubtedly a pirate who wished to run us on board and that we are very fortunate.

MAY 1, 1810

The Cape of Good Hope. The wind blew hard, and the sea rolled mountains high. We did not know but our house on deck would go to pieces, but it stood yet. The galley went over one night, breaking the stove and everything that was in it, including two iron boilers and one large pot. The sea continued to rage with increased fury, and every wave seemed as if it would swallow us up. It roared so dreadfully that the sound is still running in my ears. I shall never forget that night. Mother and I stayed below and braced ourselves near the centre of the ship so we would not be thrown. Mother held my hand tight but showed no fear. I heard Father call to ready the axes to cut away the masts. At 12 we thought the tempest would abate, but it raged until 5am.

JUNE 2, 1810

Saw the land about Point Balasore and anchored. Father told me not to be so excited; we still have to take on a pilot and go upriver before we see Calcutta. I can't help it. Next morning the pilot got the ship underway, and we ran to the eastward into the middle channel. Passed several Indiamen lying at some distance from us in what Father calls Saugor Road. Father said that on this passage our distance run per log was 5800 miles. In going upriver to Calcutta, the first town was Kedgeree, a native village on the left bank. Two or three Europeans only reside here, Father said. We went ashore in boats made of bark sewn together, and I shall never forget the sensation I experienced when I first saw those dreadful-looking men entirely naked with the exception of a bit of cloth below the waist. The next day sighted Culpee on the right bank, a place similar to Kedgeree, and then finally Calcutta. The river opposite Calcutta was nearly a mile wide. In July, Father said, the river was so full that the freshes began, and they were sometimes very strong—so much so that vessels could not go against the tide even with favourable winds. The tide ran seven or eight miles an hour, down all the time, there being no flood or even still water. The air smelled of rotting clay and burning, the sky brindle. Father told me not to be so excited. He said I get too excited.

JULY 17, 1810

Father admires the 800-ton English ships owned by the East India Company. Our ship is less than 200 tons. After he said this, he then said, "We let out at the bung to stop the spoil." He wouldn't tell me what this meant. Mother said it was like pumping out the bilge. I asked her what that meant, and she asked me, "Why do we pump out the bilge?" And I said, "So we don't sink to the bottom." She thought she had answered me and went back to cooking. When she turned around and saw me still standing in the same place, she said, "Don't feel sorry for yourself. Go make yourself useful."

Father makes all his purchases of goods through his banian: sugar, ginger, raw cotton.

"Calcutta" from *Meyer's Universum (*1839)

JULY 13, 1810

The streets are wide and straight in Calcutta, and men keep them wet all day long with buckets of water. Our house is brick, and we live on the second floor. Father's banian also lives in such a house, and his palanquin bearers rest outside when he is inside. We go to the English church, whose services are at 9am on Sunday. In the evening we walk on the esplanade that leads up to the fort. The trees are not large enough to make a shade, as they were planted a short time ago. People do not usually walk until near sunset, and the walk is covered with brick dust. People of the first rank are not seen there, according to my mother, but Father says he does not care. Many people live here in great style. Many men have their own palanquins—boxes on long poles—and wear white robes tied around their waists with no shirt at all. Six bearers form a set for a palanquin, and Father tells me they are all raised from a place called Baal. Some men also have carriages, but only the rich have Arab horses, which cost 3000 rupees.

Mother won't let me talk to a girl because she is Armenian. Her mother binds up her chin. I am also not allowed to talk to any of the dancing girls, who cannot talk to me anyway because we don't speak the same language. But they are allowed to drink spirits and live the way they want to. They attach gold and silver bells to rings they wear around their ankles. They also wear rings on their wrists and jewels on their ears and sometimes their noses. Mother says their motions are supposed to captivate men, and she tells me not to look, but I look anyway. They sing and wear no shoes, and their clothing, though brightly coloured and flowing like water around their bodies, barely covers their skin.

There are holidays all the time, and I never know when one will come along. Flags were carried through the street yesterday, and I ran outside to see a row of large elephants, each one carrying eight persons. Many more followed the elephants carrying temples and bright decorations, and their faces were filled with joy.

AUGUST 1, 1810

Father brought me with him to meet Captain John Dole of the ship Golconda from Newburyport, whom he had met before. A palanquin brought us there. It was my first time in one, and I was not sure that four men could

carry Father and me, but he said it was no problem, and they did not seem burdened. We were met at the house by a Hindoo in full dress, who made a low bow. We went in and up a long flight of stairs, and the man left us standing in a large hall full of Hindoo servants in flowing robes and turbans of the purest white. I didn't see Captain Dole at first, but there he was on a lounge being fanned by one of the servants. We were soon outside and in a garee, a kind of carriage, and Father told me we were going to a linseed bazaar. I couldn't hear what Father and Captain Dole were saying. We turned off the main road and down a narrow lane. On one side there was a drain with putrid water and dead rats. Then we came to a huge storehouse full of linseed oil. The sun poured terribly on us for a long time as the linseed was weighed and Father and the men talked. I was faint, and at last one of the sircars sent a cooley after some fruit. He soon returned with mangoes, bananas, and something I thought was a melon. I could not eat the melon, but then I was shown to drink from one end. Green coconut milk.

AUGUST 9, 1810

Father, Captain Dole, and I went in his carriage to the Old China Bazaar. On the way, Captain Dole pointed out the burning ghaut where the Hindoo dead are burned, the dead house where the sick are brought to die, a Hindoo temple, the house of a Hindoo nabob, and the mint of the East India Company. We had to get out and walk because the English army was at the bazaar that day, and no sooner had we gone a few steps than I saw a man whose hand was the size of the bottom of a chair. He kept uttering "buckshish" to Father and me, but Captain Dole told us to ignore him. Father threw a rupee at him anyway, and the man followed us, saying "deucerer" in my ear and waving his giant hand in the heat. We reached the bazaar only to come upon the crew of an American ship, just paid, who were having a knockdown. One man was horribly bruised with blood streaming down his face. He fell and did not hold out his hands. His head bounced when it hit the ground, and blood ran out into the dirt.

AUGUST 20, 1810

Father brought me to a festival at the edge of town called Churruck Poojah where we saw ladies in small temples held up high on sticks. At first

he told me he would not bring me because it was not fit for a boy. Mother was against it. But I knew he would bring me as long as I did not tell Mother. He did not ask me not to tell Mother, but I knew I was not to. As we drew near, the air was thick of cooking like cheesecloth soaked in hot butter. Thick crowds. There were dancing girls, almost naked, with gold and silver bells on their ankles. Father said the rich could eat as much as they wanted to. They kept filling their mouths. Music and smoke and singing filled the air of the streets and fields, and there was a sea of the poor, their skin covered with a few rags.

We came upon a large tank or pond overspread at fifteen or twenty feet high by a large net sprinkled with roses. There were several temples on boats floating there as well as boats with dancing girls performing on the tank. Here there were so many people collected to see the show I felt I would be swallowed up. Father had to lift me up so I could see.

The most amazing sight was the torment some of the poor voluntarily suffered. They were encouraged by the priests, according to Father. They displayed great pride and exultation. Some cut two gashes in each side of their bodies, about two inches long, through which on each side they passed several strings twenty feet long. The ends of these were supported by two persons while the performer ran backward and forward along the strings. Others passed a rattan through their tongues, constantly moving it up and down and running through the streets. They were all attended by frantic music. A gentleman attached to the Police Office told us that last year one of the natives substituted for the iron bar a large snake and held its head in his hand. While passing through the streets probably much exhausted, the snake suddenly cleared its head from the grasp, entwined himself around the neck of the miserable man, and drew out his tongue. Some I saw with strings in their sides looked no more than my age. Father said they were wrought up with opium, which was why they were so exalted and not in agony.

The most amazing and highest feat was the hook swinging. An upright post was raised about twenty-five feet from the ground, on top of which a crosspiece was placed on a swivel. Hooks were suspended from one end, and from the other end a rope reached to the ground, by which the crosspiece was moved round. There were two hooks passed one on each side about midway on the back, twice through the flesh, by which these miserable creatures were suspended twenty feet from the ground. And they whirled round

so rapidly as to bring their bodies in a perfectly horizontal position, bearing entirely by the flesh so hooked up. This continued fifteen or twenty minutes, yet no sign of suffering was shown. On the contrary, they expressed great exultation and exhorted to move around still more rapidly. Three of these machines were set up near to each other and were constantly filled for several hours. The swinging man close to us flew out and up until he was on the horizon and his chest faced away from the centre. His eyes grew wide, and blood ran down his back. Then the man's flesh broke, and he flew through the air and hit the ground. Father turned me away before he hit the ground, but I heard him hit. It was like a sack of rice hitting the deck. On the way back to town, I saw one man had the marks of hook swinging six previous times. Father said they do this because they are Hindoos, but I could see that explanation did not satisfy him any more than it did me.

SEPTEMBER 30, 1810

We left Calcutta drifting down with the tide for four days to six miles below Fultah. Moderate weather. The pilot left us. On June 1 crossed the Equator. On July 13 saw the land about middle points of Natal, according to Father. The 18th spoke again the ship India, a packet which we saw on our outward passage now returning from the Isle of Bourbon. Strong winds around the Cape of Good Hope. August 21 passed Ascension Island. September 7 boarded by French Privateer. They tried to get Father to declare the cargo English, but he would not. They let us go. September 18 sounded on George's Bank, spoke several vessels outward bound. September 21 anchored Portland. September 30 at Outermark.

MARCH 4, 1812

In the country trade stopping at Bombay, Colombo, Tranquebar, Nagapattinam, Madras, and ports on the Malabar Coast. On arriving at Madras, the government boat came alongside. Father said first we would go to Fort St. George and Black Town. There was no harbour, so we had to anchor in the open road, exposed to the weather. There were 55 vessels anchored there. Loading and unloading all day. They wanted rice and pepper, and we brought Madeira, which Father said we were not supposed to have but did. We were to pick up Madras, Pulicat, handkerchiefs, blue guineas, carboys,

nicancies, and punjum.

We could not land our boats on the beach at Madras. After the Collector took his two and a half percent, they took our goods and us ashore in a government boat. The boats had their own caulkers, and the boats were made, Father told me, with no nails at all. They were sewed together, and we would soon see why, Father said. The surf was very high—higher than any surf I had seen from inside a boat or anything at Boom Beach in the worst gale. We had eight boatmen with us along with Father, Mother, and the casks. We rose up so high on the wave that I feared we would crash bow first and pitchpole. We landed flat so hard that my teeth banged together, and I thought they would fall out. All eight men in the boat jumped out at once and held the boat fast with ropes as the surf crashed over us and we were wet right through. One of the men lifted me straight out of the boat in his bare arms and carried me onto the beach. Another man carried Mother, who looked like a goose caught by the feathers being taken to the pot. Father took himself up the beach. When I looked back, I saw the men turn the boat on its side and dump all the casks into the surf. I did not think that could be right, but Father later told me that was how it was done. They rolled the casks forward through the surf and up the beach. And they flipped the boat back on its keel and shoved back out toward our ship.

MARCH 16, 1812

Madras. We walked up to the Custom House in Black Town, where the natives, Portuguese, and Armenians lived. The streets were narrow and dirty, and everything smelled of cooking fires and rot. The small buildings were made of mats. They were six or eight feet high, and a whole family seemed to live inside and look out at us. Their faces were very dark, and they had coarse dark hair, which grew long. Father told me many of the richer ones worked as dubashes. I looked for all three classes. The Gentoos did not shave their upper lip, and they wore a mark on the forehead—a single line. The Malabar shaved the upper lip and daubed over the forehead with something like blue paint. The Moor had no mark. And the Brahmin, the highest, would not touch the others without washing themselves. The lower classes wore nothing but cloth around their waists and small turbans on their heads. The next class up wore turbans, robes covering their bodies, and shoes. We saw no women in the streets at all. People ate yellow rice from large leaves.

Same as in Calcutta, we saw Brahmins being carried in palanquins with two men in front and two behind. Many men came up to Father asking for fanams and "master's favour." Father said everyone here was a beggar if they were in the lower class. There was a man juggling four then five then six coloured sacks in the air. We came around a corner, and there was a man with just a thin cloth turned sideways on his body so that his manhood, as Mother called it, swung slapping against his leg like a leather sack of coins as he danced wildly. His eyes rolled around in his head, and his arms and legs flew in all directions. His tongue hung out of his mouth, and he yelled words I could not understand. Mother tried to cover my face, but I peeked around because behind him there was a crowd of people and something else was about to happen. There was a camel surrounded by many people, and there was music, but I could not see where it came from. A man stepped out with a knife and slid it across the throat of the camel. The camel's tongue stuck out of its mouth, and its eyes grew large. Blood sprayed out over the people. Father led us away fast, and I did not see the camel fall to the ground. There were crows everywhere above. I could hear them above the music, and they swooped down looking for food but found none.

In the fort all the buildings in the middle of the square were tall and made of brick. It seemed like it would be a fine place to live, but Father said it would not be at all. There was an English church, which he said was the one good thing, and there was a large statue of Marquis Cornwallis. Father said that half the people in the world were born with saddles on their backs and the other half were born to ride those people to death. Mother asked why he came up with such awful sayings, and he said he did not. It was a saying from Montesquieu.

JUNE 9, 1812

There was a heavy gale of wind this morning, and we were scarcely able to keep our seats. By having one hand to steady the dish and another to hold the water, I was able to make one pudding. Mother in her zeal let the pan of dried apples go after being washed. A sea just struck the ship, which made her tremble and made me call out in fear. We were nearing the Cape about ten degrees more, and we should be steering north. We had a tremendous sea running in the latter part of the day—the highest I ever saw above the mast—and could carry but little sail with the ship pitching very heavy.

AUGUST 13, 1812

We saw giant pagodas. Father said they were 170 feet to the top. The largest was thirty feet square at the base, and then after fourteen feet there was a second story built on. Many of the natives gathered around us, but when we tried to enter they would not let us until we took off our shoes. Father did not want to take off his shoes. Our palanquins carried us to Negapatam, but once there we met the only English-speaking person and found him disagreeable. He did not offer us a seat in his own house. We left him and searched for lodging with one of the Dutch. One man offered us to stay with him in his apartments, but once we saw his premises we saw there was no prospect of repose there, and we set off back toward Nagore. Halfway back our palanquins began to complain loudly—they had not eaten in 18 hours. In the pitch dark, they set us down at a choultry—a hut made of reeds for the poor—and vanished. There are no public houses on the road. The people who travel the roads are too poor for public houses. We spent the night sleeping in our palanquin. In the morning, the bearers returned and took us back to Nagore.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1812

Heavy gale of wind blew us east all week, against the direction we wanted to go. Mother was sick and vomiting after the first day. Her illness was not because of the baby, Father said, as it was not due for another two months. But Father worried without saying so because of the other babies who did not live. Father brought a goat this time, tied to the outside of the cabin, in case it was needed to nurse the baby. Father said to pray for calm seas and light westerlies.

OCTOBER 1, 1812

Another week of heavy gales. Mother could not swallow water by the end. She throws up blood now.

OCTOBER 5, 1812

Mother died, and it fell to smolt October 2. Father did not come out

until after dinner. When he did come out, he fared poorly, and I told him he had a brindle complexion and should be bed fast. He said for me not to concern myself about him, and he said we had no choice but to bury mother that day. Mr. Bunker helped sew her, which Father was loathe to do himself. Mr. Bunker wrapped her in canvas and sewed the seam right across her face. Father said one prayer. "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear wife here departed, we therefore commit her body to the sea . . . through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." Father and Mr. Bunker hove her into the sea, and her body sank fast because of the weight sewn into the canvas. I write "her body" because it was no longer her. Afterwards, Father went to his bunk, and I went to mine. I know that father does not place much stock in the Almighty—a habit he passed to me. Sometime in the night I woke to find him sitting next to me with a lamp. I hid my face so he wouldn't see how upset I was. He placed his hand on my shoulder and told me that she would want us to have courage and to go on without her. I knew he was right. There was nothing else to say.

DECEMBER 2, 1813

We took a severe gale from the North, were driven to sea again, and arrived in Vera Cruz nine days after. It is healthy here, as the climate is warm, the season is far advanced, and all is green and growing. The Perote and the Arazatio, with their snow-capped summits looking far above the clouds, appeared like watch towers upon the heavens. I never saw such mountains before, and I wished Mother could see them, although I thought better of mentioning this to Father. The people are with few exceptions of the Indian cast and hardy; they can live on a plantain a day. The city is built on a low sand plain. It is enclosed by a wall twelve feet high with five gates, and its streets are rather narrow, run at right angles. It is compactly built with buildings of brick or stone from two to four stories high, which are flat on the top and covered on the outside with whitish cement. There is a very handsome marketplace that is very well supplied with poultry, fish, vegetables, and fruits of a most excellent quality, but everything at an exorbitant price.

JANUARY 12, 1813

While spreading our clothes to dry, we saw above 40 Indians coming from the N.W. with bows and poison arrows. They came around us and seemed to be struck with our appearance, Mr. Bunker having 2 pairs of pistols and Father a double-barreled fowling piece, a pair of pistols, and a broadsword. Soon after giving them some rum mixed with water and some bread, we saw a company of Creoles and Indians coming back from the country. They proved to be the Commandant's and people from Sin Jamaica. The Commandant said it was unsafe for us to remain on shore on account of the Indians and advised us to get our things again on board. Father said he trusted the mercy of the waves more than the ferocious savages. After much fatigue, we succeeded in getting most of our things in the boat with the Indians around us stealing whatever they could pick away. We prepared our guns by cutting bow ports and holding ourselves in readiness, suspecting an attack from the Indians the following night. They did not trouble us.

MARCH 20, 1813

I have been ill on the island these last months and not able to write. Grandma says I will be bedfast for months yet, and she plans to send me to Portland to stay with Aunt Gwen so I can see a doctor. I tell her that I don't need a doctor and that I want to be here on the island helping her with the house and the store. She tells me I am no help to her bedfast, and I believe what she says is true. I will go, but not because I want to.

MAY 14, 1813

I have been more ill these past months living at Aunt Gwen's than I was on the island, so Grandma was right to send me away. I would have been no use to her. And I have been so ill that Grandma would have come to grief to see me so bleek.

JUNE 30, 1813

Since I last wrote, I have made myself ready many times to say goodbye to this world. Father stayed with me through the month of June, but then

he had to go abroad. Twice the minister visited my bedside, and I prepared myself. In each case I was called back, and now I am able to sit up and read and write. Aunt Gwen is a saint, and as long as I live I will owe her my life. I know Grandma has been frightful for my state all these months. Aunt Gwen has not dared to tell her my true condition, but Grandma has a strong head and knows that I write when I can and that if I cannot write something is wrong. She wrote she was happy to get my last letter. I am yet on dry land, I dare say, and I feel as if nothing could do me in now. Aunt Gwen has a house full of books, and she has ordered me more books besides. I declare myself to be a fortunate soul.

AUGUST 29, 1813

Father was in a terrible fall the day before he was supposed to set sail for the West Indies. He was in the rigging, doing a boy's job, which is like him, and his back hurt so badly that he could not get out of bed for a week. The owners of our ship, the Schooner Paris, were two brothers from Portland, and they said they would delay departure two weeks, after which they would have to find another captain. My uncle John and my cousin Billy were meant to accompany Father, as was I, but I cannot go now. Father tells me I may never go again because the illness has left my lungs permanently weakened. I do not believe him.

SEPTEMBER 16, 1813

Father left with my uncle and cousin. They all came to Aunt Gwen's house to say goodbye, and all said they would see me again soon. They were headed around the Cape again. They will be gone a long time.

NOVEMBER 30, 1813

I had a letter from Grandma sent to me through Aunt Gwen. Grandma wanted her to give me the letter directly, and I soon saw why. Father's ship went down in October in the India Ocean, and no one was found. It was coming winter when this news arrived, and I wished I were back on the island already to comfort Grandma. There was much to do at the store and to prepare the old house for the winter. For some weeks I thought of Father on

an island somewhere, but I knew this was not true.

APRIL 10, 1814

I am back on the island now. Many ships were in the harbour to purchase goods from the store, including a number in the coast trade and a few ships over 200 tons heading east: Brig Actor, Captain Elias Hunt; Schooner Poly, Captain Solomon Balch; Schooner Calais, Captain Christopher Pettingill; Brig Pilgrim, Captain Ebenezer Wheelright; Schooner Confidence, Captain Thomas Dodge; Sloop Friendship, Captain Josiah Toppan; Schooner Argonaut, Captain Micajah Lunt. At 8am cleared the Brig Actor and the Schooner Argonaut of their loads: 17,000 feet boards, 3,450 clapboards, 65 M' shingles, 7 blls pork, 750 Hoops, 50 blls Tar, 50 blls Flour, 50 shooks Hdds fish, bread molasses & a quantity of beef, some strawberries, onions & cabbages from the shore, powder, 48 HHds, 13 boxes Soap, 34 blls, No 1 Beef, 10 blls, No 2 Ditto, 31 half Ditto, 39 Bxs Raisins, and 20 D. candles. Offloaded onto the Schooner Confidence 75 barrels of water, 10 barrels of flower, 5 barrels of salt beef, 1 salt pork, 1 sugar, 130 hogshead of salt, salt clams, and mackerel.

The Schooner Chance anchored at 6pm, and Captain John Soule reported that the Schooner Dover broke up last week on the Horse Shoals, no survivors.