

# Legacy of the Baltimore Privateers

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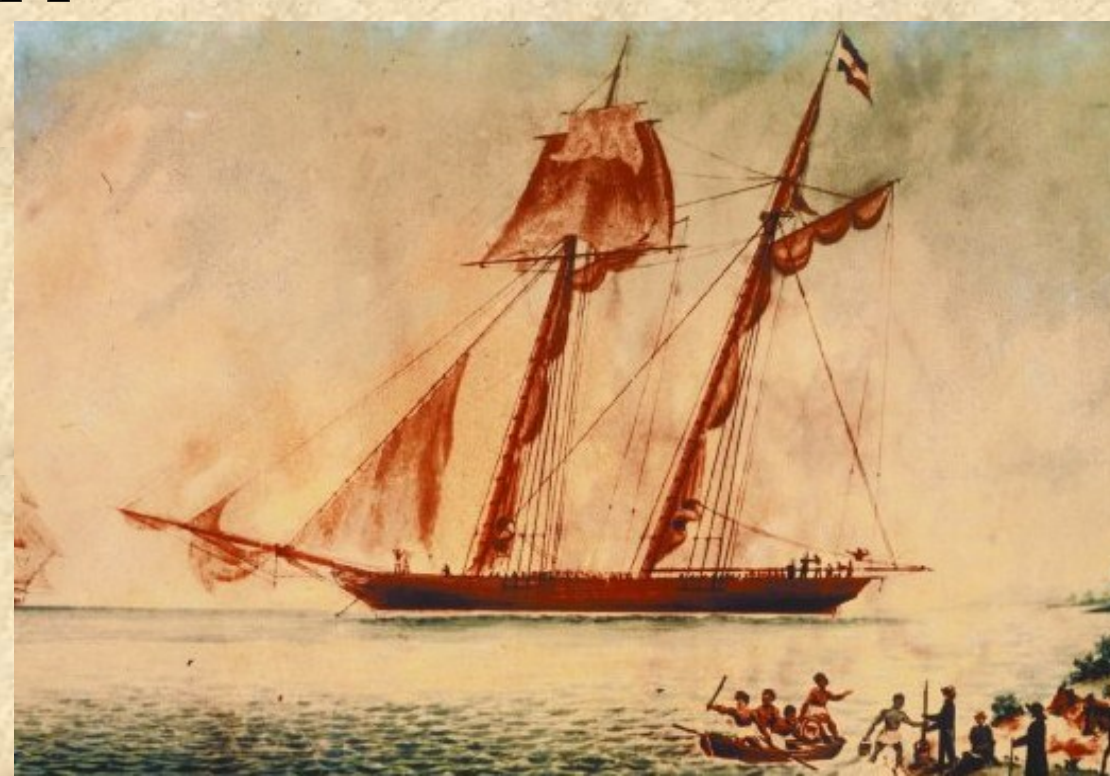
*Rambler* in the Pearl River, 1815

After the war, most Baltimore pilot schooners and captains returned to peacetime activity. Many of the ships were sold to foreign buyers, others went into the merchant trade. Between 1817 and 1820, some captains from Baltimore, including Thomas Boyle, accepted

privateer commissions from Venezuela and Colombia during their revolutions against Spain. Other ships went into the West Indies trade, exporting flour and cotton and returning with coffee and sugar. But as traders, the pilot schooner was at a disadvantage. Built primarily for speed and maneuverability, they lacked the large cargo capacity needed to make them profitable. By the 1830's, a variation of the design appeared with broader, heavier hulls and less lofty rigs. It was in this period that the term 'Baltimore Clipper' came into common usage, and some of these ships became associated with less honorable trades that required speed and stealth such as running slaves from the coast of Africa or smuggling opium from China.

In 1833, Baltimore merchant Isaac McKim, commissioned a ship he named *Ann McKim*.

At 143' long, 31' beam and 493 tons, she served in the China and South American trades, and was faster than any European



The slaver *La Amistad* on the coast of Africa, 1839



*Ann McKim*, 1833

ship of the time. *Ann McKim* is often called the first American clipper ship. In reality, she was a larger, ship-rigged version of her 1812 predecessors and had little in common with famous clippers of the 1850's like the *Flying Cloud*.

Baltimore pilot schooners had an average service life of only five to ten years. *Nonsuch* was an amazing exception. Built in 1809, she was among the first group of Baltimore privateers at sea in 1812. After the war, she served with the Navy's West Indies squadron for ten years. Sold to a Danish firm in 1824, she was renamed *Vigilant* and served as an inter-island mail packet in the Virgin Islands for 55 years. Her long career ended in September 1928, when she was lost in a hurricane.



*Vigilant* in Christiansted Harbor, 1901

The impact of privateering in the War of 1812 is often debated but the facts are clear: by the war's end, about 500 American privateers had captured or destroyed 2,500 British ships and caused over \$40 million in damages to the British economy. The citizens of Baltimore led the way - financing and manning 122 privateers, capturing 500 British vessels, and successfully defending their homeport against the greatest military power in the world. The years 1812-1815 would prove to be the zenith of privateering world-wide. Minor instances occurred afterward, but privateers would never again play a major role in national conflicts. The major European powers signed the 'Declaration of Paris' in 1856, which effectively outlawed the practice on an international basis. The United States accepted the agreement in 1857; and other than a small number of letters of marque issued by the Confederate States of America during the Civil War, the practice of privateering faded into history.