# 9

# The Meaning of Small Things and Global Processes

This chapter will present, using evidence gathered from newspaper advertisements and courtesy literature, an argument for how the media perpetuated and ensured the supply of new and novel products in nineteenth century San Francisco. This also provides context in order to discuss the relationship between material culture and consumer identity in light of both the crew of the *Frolic* and the cargo it carried. Finally, this chapter argues that the range of consumer goods associated with the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century US – China trade is symptomatic of the increasing complexity of consumer markets capable of facilitating the establishment and maintenance of a wide array of consumer identities necessary under the many new social, economic and ideological relationships constructed under capitalism (see Chapter 1).

## The Role of the Media in Consumer Identity

While everyday social interaction undoubtedly played a role in influencing taste and consumer identity, tastes and their portrayal in the mass media played a corresponding and equally essential role (Chapter3). In Gold Rush San Francisco this was partly accomplished through newspapers and courtesy literature. Companies and merchants used the media to both influence tastes and consumer identity and inform the population about the 'proper' material culture through which to establish and exercise their identity. However, while the media was influenced, it also mirrored, which was a mutually reinforcing cycle perpetuating particular consumer identities themselves. In doing so the media enabled and sustained ever-greater complexity in markets. However, it is constant incompleteness and the desire for self-improvement

that generated constant changes in tastes and etiquette. These changes were signalled by the media through advertisements, exposés and the like, contributing to their effectiveness as signals of changing tastes. The urgency imparted by nearly all of the advertisements studied for this project serves to illuminate the role of material culture, such as that found in *Frolic*'s cargo, both in facilitating the practice of, and signalling the changes in, the vanguard of fashion.

In *"Queensware By the Crate" Ceramic Products as Advertised in the Saint Louis Marketplace*, Mazrim and Walthall (2002) have shown that newspaper advertisements are useful in indicating what types of ceramics were available to consumers, as well as what was fashionable during a particular time (see Chapter 4). Robert Mazrim believes that between 1845-1855 there was a shift in advertisement focus demonstrating how glass was becoming more fashionable than ceramics (Bob Mazrim, pers. comm., 25 November 2008). This shift is supported in the *Daily Alta California*, where advertisements for ceramics were very rare, while glass appeared more frequently. Only two advertisements for ceramics were identified in this newspaper around the time of *Frolic*'s last voyage. In the first of these, George T. Upham, who shared an office with S.H. Williams & Co. on California Street, advertised for sale "200 boxes of crockery, each one set complete for family use" (*Daily Alta California* 29 July 1850). It is unclear what type of crockery this advertisement is referring to, but it was being sold as a set, and, thus, was partly in line with what was considered fashionable for the time. The second advertisement reads:

> TO THE LADIES. RICH GILT CHINA TEA AND DINING SETS: White China Tea and Dining Sets; Rich Gilt Vases of all kinds and sizes. Very cheap at JOSEPH GENNELLAN (*Daily Alta California* 1 August 1850).

In this advertisement white China most likely refers to plain white granite ware with gold gilding (see Chapter 4 and 8). Plain white granite ware such as that being advertised above, came into fashion in the Americas during the 1850s, and stayed in fashion until the 1870s, when there was a revival in multi-colour transfer printed wares (see Chapter 4). It is interesting that what was being advertised in the newspapers was fashionable dinnerwares, because, according to Pastron (1990b:13), it was expected that most consumer goods imported into San Francisco would have been basic necessities (see Chapter 6).

The ceramics associated with *Frolic*'s crew seem to follow ceramic trends in mainstream nineteenth century American consumer society. After the 1820s the

mass-production of whiteware, as well as ironstone, meant that a full range of transfer printed decorated ceramics in a variety of forms was available to American consumers (see Chapter 8) (Brooks 2005:34; Mazrim 2008b). Ironstone, in particular, was a cheaper imitation of porcelain, and those who could not afford high quality Chinese export porcelain had an attractive alternative (Fisher 1970:15; Miller 1991:9-10). Additionally, there was at least one plain white French porcelain plate associated with the crew. Plain white French porcelain was another new fashion for this decade (Robert Mazrim, pers. comm., 25 November 2008), and because of this it seems that the *Frolic*'s officers were attempting to keep up to date.

The ceramics associated with *Frolic*'s crew also provide an excellent comparison for ceramics associated with crews from other China trading shipwrecks. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 6, the ceramics associated with *Rapid*'s crew included several sherds of Chinese export porcelain teawares and Staffordshire produced dinnerwares, glassware, as well as a salt-glazed stoneware jug. Because *Rapid* wrecked while inbound to China, it can be assumed that the Chinese porcelain found on this shipwreck was associated with the crew. As also discussed in Chapter 6, Chinese export porcelain tablewares and teawares decorated in the Canton and Nanking styles were still quite popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and it was only after the arrival of a cheaper mass-produced product after the first quarter of the nineteenth century that another product replaced porcelain in popularity, with the exception of the finest teawares (see Chapter 4). The ceramics associated with *Frolic*'s officers reflect this change in popularity, as no Chinese porcelain decorated in the Canton and Nanking styles has been attributed to the crew.

In addition to this consumer choice reflecting the popularity and availability of such English-produced ceramics in consumer society over Chinese export porcelain (see Chapters 4, 6 and 8), it also shows that the officers were operating inside the market. By the mid-nineteenth century ceramic sets, including tablewares, teawares and toiletwares, were readily available at a low cost to consumers (Mazrim 2008b). Sets could have consisted of expensive and inexpensive dishes, just as flatware for an individual could have been made from silver or some other, cheaper metal. Expense was not the issue, rather the crucial factor was that the dishes matched and could be distributed as individual place settings for every individual. It is in this way that Leone (2005:158) believes that sets of dishes defined an individual, and "therefore whether or not a household moved into or out of the code of the market economy".

It should be noted, though, that to the archaeologists this set was only semi-matching because: 1) the decorative geometric pattern varied in detail between different ceramic pieces; 2) some of the ceramic pieces were ironstone and some were whiteware; and 3) the underglazed transfer colour ranged between three different shades of blue. To the archaeologists, this semi-matching is significant because it reinforces the fact that variations in design details and colour between ceramics were not unusual, because potters often copied one another's designs with some variation between (Coysh and Henrywood 1982:10-11). Additionally, ironstone was manufactured in all of the same forms as whiteware (see Chapter 6), indicating that different ceramic pieces came from different manufacturers. Despite this, this semi-matching set of tableware is defined as a set because, as Leone (1999) establishes, sets did not have to match exactly in decoration; they only had to be similar. For those who purchased the set, though, this would not have been significant because people bought sets according to decoration, not ware type.

The ceramic consumer choices of *Frolic*'s officers are also interesting because the ceramics must have been purchased before the ship's final voyage. These objects were most likely purchased in England, where they were produced, or in the United States, where they were readily available to American consumers, and then brought to Canton as personal possessions, because this study has found no reference for the sale of English-produced ceramics in Canton.

Although the *Daily Alta California*, as a relatively young newspaper, contained very few advertisements for ceramics, its role in signalling the vanguard of continually changing fashions can be observed through the focus of its advertisements on glass, which was just then becoming popular. These advertisements not only included bottled goods, such as pickle, sauces, sweet oil, vinegar, and molasses (Robert Mazrim, pers. comm. 25 November 2008; e.g. *Daily Alta California* 16 August 1850), but they also included a variety of pressed and cut glassware. For example, Woodworth & Morris, located on Clay Street Wharf, advertised "GLASS WARE—30 casks glass pitchers, tumblers, shell dishes, alabaster, turquoise [sic], and fancy candlesticks and lamps…" (*Daily Alta California* 30 September 1850). Backus & Harrison, located on Montgomery Street opposite the Customs House, advertised for sale "an invoice of glassware" including "decanter liquor stands; castors; tumblers; goblets; ale and wine glasses, etc" (*Daily Alta California* 29 July 1850).

The existence and access to new trends in personal adornment, including items such as clothing, parasols, fans, and jewellery, were further demonstrated in contemporary

newspapers. Many of these advertisements stressed conformity with elite tastes using terminology such as 'genteel' or 'latest New York styles.' For example, James E. Negus, advertised:

> FASHIONABLE CLOTHING TO Order.—JAMES E. NEGUS, having taken the store in the Alta California Building, laid in a fine stock of broadcloths, cassimeres, vestings, etc., is prepared to make up for customers, fashionable clothing, according to the latest styles, and upon moderate terms. The great difficulty gentlemen have heretofore experienced in procuring genteel and elegantly fitting garments from the states, has induced him to offer his services. He flatters himself that he can give perfect satisfaction. Regalias of all sorts, costumes and theatrical wardrobes made to order (*Daily Alta California* 5 August 1850).

Other advertisements for items associated with personal adornment imparted urgency in much the same way as the advertisements for glassware, facilitating the practice of, and signalling the changes in, high fashion. Advertisements that imparted such urgency for purchasing new and novel products, also inculcated feelings of incompleteness and the desire for self-improvement through purchasing such products:

> FASHIONABLE CLOTHING—Just received per steamer an invoice of very superior clothing, latest New York style, for sale at PROBST, SMITH & CO. S. Lower California St. (*Daily Alta California* 18 August 1850).

This advertisement indicates the arrival of goods via steamer, and by the turn of the century, ocean-going steam ships were quickly replacing sailing ships since they could deliver consumer goods quickly and independently of the prevailing wind and weather. Similarly:

> LADIES Cloaks and Mantillas of the latest styles received per steamer New Orleans. Silk mantillas lined and quilted, of beautiful patterns (*Daily Alta California* 1 October 1850).

Other advertisements, appealed to the reader through the lure of new merchant houses offering a large variety of different types of fashionable goods. Again, these advertisements used urgency and the appeal of new and novel products to inculcate feelings of incompleteness in oneself, perpetuating consumers to consume more and more things:

> HATS! HATS! HATS!—Just opened, and for sale at wholesale and retail, a fine assortment of Messrs. W. H. Beebee & Co.'s hats, caps, and ladies' riding caps, of the latest New York styles; also a handsome assortment of gents' furnishing goods, viz; shirts, collars, undershirts and drawers, of silk and merino, hosiery, cravats, gloves and traveling bags, etc. etc., with a large variety of fancy goods, viz: umbrellas, canes, ladies' and gents' riding whips, carpet bags, traveling and dressing cases, sugar cases, combs, brushes, perfumery, &c. &c., all of which are offered for sale in lots to suit purchasers , by THOS. P. EVERITT, Iron store, rear of Messrs. Probst, Smith & Co., Lower California (*Daily Alta California* 5 August 1850).

Whereas newspapers signalled the existence of and accessibility to new material culture with which to practice etiquette, courtesy literature guided individuals in more detail on the intricacies of proper practice (see Chapter 4). Magazines, especially, informed people of the material culture needed to effectively establish and maintain a particular consumer identity, as well as provided a mirror for the proper social etiquette required by genteel society. Etiquette books, on the other hand, were more detailed in communicating and reinforcing the same genteel practices. These guides can be seen as shaping, while at the same time mirroring, proper ways of doing to a greater extent than seen in magazines. For example,

> Fashion and *gentility* are very distinct things - for which reason, people, *really* of the highest rank, are too proud to become *martyrs* to any prevailing mode; and the man of true taste will limit his compliance with the caprices of fashion to not appearing *equally conspicuous* for its utter neglect (Day 1843:22).

*The Gentleman and Lady's Book of Politeness and Propriety of Deportment Dedicated to the Youth of Both Sexes* (Celnart 1833:19) reads:

> Propriety requires that we should always be clothed in a cleanly and becoming manner, even in private, in leaving our bed, or in the presence of no one. It requires that our clothing be in keeping with our sex, fortune, profession, age, and form, as well as with the season, the different hours of the day, and our different occupations.

Courtesy literature of the day particularly targeted women. Women could keep up on fashion as it changed through the seasons by magazines such as *Godey's Ladies* or *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (see Chapter 4). At least one of these could be purchased in San Francisco, as the *Daily Alta California* advertised on 6 August 1850:

> Harper's New Monthly – We received by the mail the first number of a monthly magazine, published by the Harpers of New York. It is an octavo of one hundred and forty-five pages, elegantly printed, and for the sum of $3 per annum. The contents are capital, mostly selected from the most popular of the foreign periodicals, so that its readers can have the best portions of them condensed into one. We hope the Harpers will continue its publication, to their profit and the pleasure of the public. It would sell well here.

Each issue of *Harper's* magazine contained within it an exposé of the latest ladies' fashions. For example, an article describing the fashions for July 1850 illustrates the role of such advertisements in influencing the very same instruments of etiquette that the *Frolic* and its cargo were hoping to supply, at profit. This article included a carriage costume, reproduced in Figure 61, that consisted of a:

> Dress of bright apple-green silk; the skirt with three deep flounces pinked at the edges. The corsage high and plain. Mantelet of very pale lilac silk, trimmed with two rows of lace de laine of the same colour [sic] and each row of lace surmounted by passementerie. The lace extends merely round the back part of the mantelet, and the fronts are trimmed with passamenterie only. Bonnet of white crinoline, with rows of lilac ribbon set on in bouillonnèes. The bonnet is lined with white crape, and the under-trimming consists of bouquets of lilac and white flowers. Straw-coloured [sic] kid gloves. White silk parasol. (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* July 1850:287).

Thus, this article not only indicates what type of dress is suitable to pair with a silk parasol, similar to that found on the *Frolic* shipwreck, but, as a carriage dress, it also indicates that parasols were suitable for daytime, in particular for making afternoon outings and riding in carriages. According to advertisements in *Godey's Ladies,* parasols made of silk and ivory handles were considered fashionable for this period (Kunciov 1971:166).

This notion of a promenade dress is further illustrated in Figure 62. This image depicts a woman walking through a church yard in a promenade dress with a parasol in hand. Though this image was illustrated in 1848, just two years before *Frolic* wrecked, it demonstrates the continuity of some fashionable accessory items like parasols. This image also communicates femininity and gentlemanly courtesy.

**Figure 61.** Illustration of a carriage dress fashionable for summer 1850. Note the parasol that the lady is holding (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine,* July 1850:287).

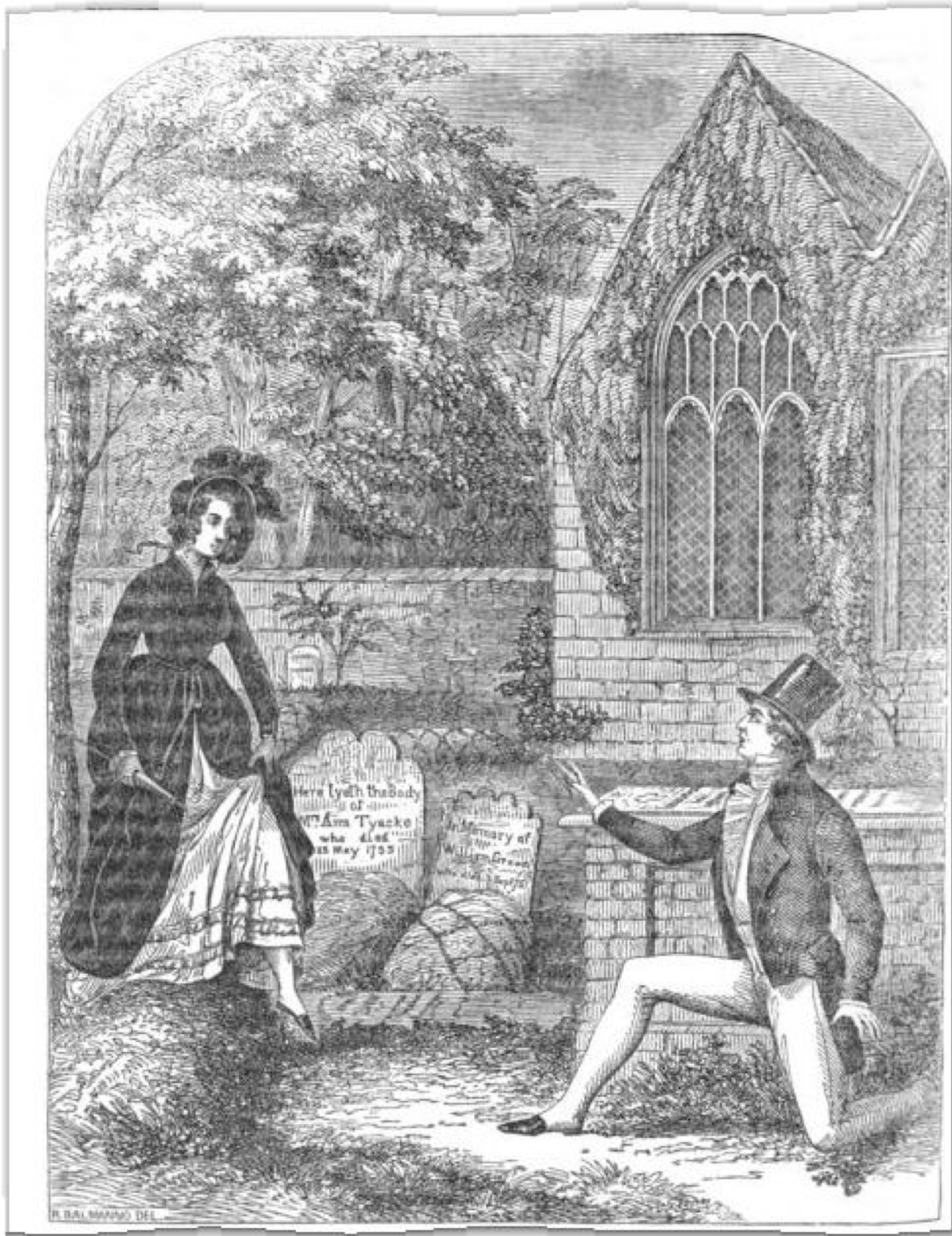


**Figure 62.** Lady walking through a church yard holding a parasol (*Graham's* American *Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art and Fashion,* 1848:82).

*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* also contains a description of a promenade dress, shown in Figure 62, which was for walking in public gardens:

> The skirts are less full than those of last year—but to compensate for it, they are trimmed with graduated flounces up to the waist—as many as five are worn, and they are pinked and stamped at the edges. The bodies are tight, and open in front; a cord connects the two dies of the corsage, and buttons, either of silk, coloured [sic] stones, or steel, are placed on the centre of this cord. The sleeves are wider at the bottom than at the top, and are trimmed with two small flounces; from beneath them a large lace sleeve falls over the hand, leaving the lower part of the arm uncovered. This form of sleeve is very becoming to the hand (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* August 1850:431).

During the 1850s flouncing on dresses became increasingly popular, with at least twenty to twenty-five yards of cloth used on an average dress. This number increased as the century progressed (Kunciov 1971:21). This description of a promenade dress is interesting because after reading the appeal of the sleeve in this description of a promenade dress and looking at the accompanying illustration, the eyes of the reader are naturally drawn to the hand, which is holding a silk fan (see Figure 63).

**Figure 63.** Illustration of a promenade dress fashionable for late summer 1850. Note the fan held in the lady's hand (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* August 1850:431).

Another image that appeared in *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art and Fashion* (1848:78), reproduced in Figure 64, depicts a woman holding a fan in a similar fashion. Though there is no accompanying description, the image is rather formal, with both ladies wearing fancy dresses and a tea set in the

background. The fan, on the other hand, appears to be adorned with silk. Silk fans such as these resemble that carried as part of *Frolic*'s cargo and they were the mechanisms through which people practiced technologies of self (see Chapter 7 and 3). Additionally, it is in this way that such advertisements played a role in influencing and attempted to stimulate demand in the very types of material culture that the *Frolic*'s cargo was intended to supply.

**Figure 64.** A lady holding a silk fan. Note the tea set in the background (*Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art and Fashion* 1848:78).

Another type of consumer good depicted in Figure 64 is furniture. Furniture carried as part of *Frolic*'s cargo was intended to meet the demands and tastes of Gold Rush San Francisco consumers. Chinese-produced furniture items were readily available in San Francisco during 1850. For example, Salmon & Ellis offered for sale an assortment of "camphor trunks and Chinese furniture, writing desks and ladies dressing boxes…" (*Daily Alta California* 30 September 1850). Another merchant house, Hussey, Bond & Hale, located in the *Niantic* warehouse on the Clay Street Wharf, advertised for sale on 5 August 1850:

> FURNITURE – just received: sofas, bedsteads, Chinese extension chairs, looking glasses, portable desks, tabourets, card tables, etc. Bed comforters, for sale cheap… (*Daily Alta California* 5 August 1850).

The advertisement above employs the mechanism of urgency as a way of signalling current fashion and the desirability of the goods it intends to sell, all the while appealing to individuals who, through possessive individualism, never feel complete. It is the continuous consumption of such material goods with which people attempt to fill this void. The same is seen in the following advertisement:

> JUST RECEIVED—An invoice of furniture, consisting of sofas, sofa beds, bureaus, tables, wardrobes, sofa and cane seat chairs, rocking do, officer do, ottomans, bedsteads…(*Daily Alta California* 2 October 1850).

That such a range of goods could be carried on one ship, in this case the *Frolic*, tells us that the demand for such consumer goods needed to establish and maintain identity was, to say the least, diverse. With the exception of the Chinese porcelain, it does not seem that *Frolic*'s cargo was particularly different from other ships' cargoes from China because a range of many similar Chinese-produced consumer goods were advertised in the *Daily Alta California* (3 August 1850). For example:

> THIS DAY, (Monday) the 5th August, at 10 o'clock, at the warehouse of E. Mickle & Co. ...a very extensive and splendid assortment of China Goods, ex "Hugh Walker," consisting of superior lacquered furniture, do Japanese do, very handsome; lacquered ware of all descriptions; ivory baskets and vases, carved; chess men of all descriptions, feather dusters, Chinese folding couches, oil paintings, in frames; engravings, do; silver ware, card cases, baskets, etc. splendid embroidered shawls, of all colours [sic] and patterns; emb'd hdkfs and scarfs, gunny bags, Chinese paintings, a fine assortment; black Levantine hdkfs.

Another advertisement lists the cargo of the American-China trading ship *Flavius*:

> NEW GOODS–The subscribers off for sale the cargo of ship Flavius, from China, consisting of–tiles, marble tiles, China preserves, lemon syrup, lime juice, lacquered boxes, black and coloured [sic] satins, crimson pongee handkerchiefs, sewing silk, spittoons, tea poys, backgammon boards, tea caddies, nutmegs, landscape paintings, rattan chairs, pillows, baskets, leather trunks, camphor chests, bookcases, couches with cushions, secretaries [sic], sets nutwood and camphor wood drawers, card tables, wardrobes, extension tables, zinc, China matting, ale, spelter, candies. Also superior quality Manila sugar, superior quality Pinfa sugar, Manila cordage, assorted sizes, green and black tea, sperm oil, pickles, arrowroot (*Daily Alta California* 3 August 1850).

These advertisements, along with those for furniture, clothing, personal adornment, and glassware, all provide evidence of companies and/or individual merchants using the mass media to signal the existence and availability of particular consumer goods, as well as their proper place and utility in the practice of etiquette. By both influencing and mirroring consumer tastes, the media played an essential role in the relationship between material culture and consumer identity. In doing so, media, such as newspapers, etiquette guides and magazines, helped to facilitate and guide the increasing complexity of capitalism in Gold Rush San Francisco.

# Material Culture and Consumer Identity

Consumption is approximated through consumer identity; the consumer goods that people consume serve as mechanisms through which people practice different ways of seeing, walking, reading, talking, eating and behaving. These are all components of an individual's identity (see Chapter 3), albeit ones that are also closely linked to issues of status, class and respectability. While these activities are involved in how people establish and maintain identity in their own eyes, as well as in the eyes of others, material culture is the mechanism by which these activities are often exercised. Individuals are taught certain responsibilities, which, in turn become internalised as part of one's *habitus*, and then practiced through material culture (dishes, toothbrushes, clocks, clothing). It is in this way that there is an approximate relationship between the consumption of material goods and consumer identity, but it is only the material culture that is archaeologically observable.

One way in which people asserted a consumer identity was through the purchase of certain types of ceramics. For example, as mentioned previously, the *Frolic* artifacts included one ceramic dinner service, including a sided platter, a sugar pot, a plate and a bowl associated with *Frolic*'s officers. In regards to consumer choice, this set shows that the officers were operating inside the code of the market economy and keeping relatively up to date with fashion, and that the officers were attempting formality informed by the social norms of etiquette expected of officers and actively practiced by them in order to differentiate themselves from the crew.

Etiquette is a form of what Foucault (1988) calls technologies of self (see Chapter 3). It is something that is intangible, yet archaeologists find evidence of it in the material remains of the mechanisms through which etiquette was exercised, in this case a dinner service used by the *Frolic*'s officers. The approximate relationship between the dinner service used by the officers and etiquette observed by the officers affords us a level of insight into consumer identity aboard the *Frolic*. According to Charles William Day in *Etiquette; Or, a Guide to the Usages of Society with a Glance at Bad Habits*, etiquette is,

> …the barrier which society draws around itself as a protection against offences the 'law' cannot touch - it is a shield against the intrusion of the impertinent, the improper, and the vulgar - a guard against those obtuse persons who, having neither talent nor delicacy, would be continually thrusting themselves into the society of men to whom their presence might (from the difference of feeling and habit) be offensive and even insupportable (Day 1843:2).

Paul Shackel (2000:156) states, "Although Americans of the early American Republic viewed etiquette as a set of unofficial rules that reinforced class distinctions, Victorian citizens saw etiquette as akin to an 'art.' The art of behaviour needed to be mastered and appreciated in order to participate in society." Dining habits were one way in which individuals defined their uniqueness (Shackel 1993). In this way, Leone (2005:155) argues, the increasing complexity of such habits was an example of possessive individualism. There was an increase in both the forms of tableware that formed part of a matching set, along with a corresponding number of courses, as well as the rules of etiquette, that went along with dining activities.

Weatherill finds that meals "were important social events at which people sat down together, sat and talked; they were served in accepted ways and people were sensitive to their atmosphere" (Weatherill 1994:215). The middle class were the most prone to practicing etiquette through material culture (see Chapter 3). The middle ranks

included “the lesser gentry, professions, merchants, shopkeepers, farmers, yeomen and craftsmen” (Weatherill 1994:210; see also Goodwin 1999; Fitts 1999). Cembrola (1984:89) justifies that ships’ officers were also among the middle classes and expected to use ceramics, along with the proper dining rituals that would reflect their socio-economic calibre.

Etiquette was enforced and maintained through the surveillance and social judgement. Leone (2005:57) asserts, “Individualism, or a person’s capacity to self inspect, signalled [sic] readiness to learn other rules, to observe portions, be punctual, accept being observed by others, and be subject to working for wages, carrying debt, and being responsive to market pressures.” In this sense, etiquette can be seen as the both the prerequisite for, and observable marking of, membership a particular social group.

Prent (2003:89) reasons, “Ritualised [sic] dining can be seen as a way of selective bonding, of creating a sense of unity between participants and, at the same time, defining the exclusiveness of the group in relation to other segments of society.” Officers and seamen were usually of significantly different socio-economic status than each other (Cembrola 1984:89). The material culture associated with the consumer identity of the *Frolic*’s crew is distinct from that of *Frolic*’s officers (see Chapter 8). Instead of eating with attractively decorated ceramics, the crew’s tableware consisted of pewter plates. Those on the lower end of the socio-economic strata likely would not consider ceramics as something important to bring to sea, though they may have owned them at home (see Brighton 2001). Instead, pewter plates may reflect practicality in a choice of durability over fashion (see Chapter 8). The officers, on the other hand, were expected to use ceramics along with proper dining rituals that would reflect their socio-economic calibre and rank (Cembrola 1984:89). In short, the consumer identity of *Frolic*’s crew, as represented by pewter plates, symbolises their lower socio-economic class as compared to the officers, representing a hierarchy. Along the same lines, the officers’ tastes in ceramics symbolise a consumer identity in line with their distinction and superior rank with regards to the crew.

According to Paul Shackel (2000:155), etiquette was “a necessary tool which allowed the new industrial class to maintain control of a new and unstable population.” For example, Day (1843:2) writes,

> Many unthinking persons consider the observance of Etiquette to be nonsensical and unfriendly, as consisting of unmeaning forms,

> practiced only by the *silly* and the idle; an opinion which arises from their not having reflected on the *reasons* that have led to the establishment of certain rules indispensable to the well-being of society, and without which, indeed, it would inevitably fall to pieces, and be destroyed.

It is in this way, by reinforcing the mask for social inequalities inherent in a capitalistic society, etiquette caters to the popular conceptions that support belief in the liberty and freedom of the self.

In an environment such as a ship at sea, social stability was an even more essential condition to the successful operation of the ship (Dellino-Musgrave 2006:116). A ship such as *Frolic* represents a small microcosm of a broader social network in which the officers were of the highest status, with Captain Faucon at the very top of the ladder. The successful operation of the ship required that each individual knew and played the part of their status role in this micro society. Although some of these roles were specific to shipboard life, some parallels with eating and drinking rituals in a broader social network can be drawn to examine how status roles on board the ship may have functioned. Officers not only possessed the knowledge of how to use tableware and teaware properly; these rituals also reinforced the social status hierarchy that ensured the successful operation of the ship and the obedience and subservience of those of lower status.

These social distinctions were not only observed between officers and crew, but also between the officers themselves. Although this is not evident directly through the ceramics, dining etiquette in households provide some insight into how the officers interacted within the governing norms of applicable etiquette. Social status dictated how people were to enter and sit around the table, as seating at the dinner table followed strict guidelines according to rank. Trusler (1791:4) explains,

> In all public companies precedence is attended to, and particularly at table. Women have here always taken [the] place of men, and both men and women have sat above each other, according to the rank they bear in life. Where company is equal in point of rank, married ladies take place of single ones, and older ones of younger ones.

Thus, people were seated in specific seats that were “agreeable to their rank and situation in life” (Trusler 1791:3-4). This rigour was enforced by other social members watching and judging. “Nothing is considered as a greater mark of ill-breeding,” continues Trusler (1791:6), “than for a person to interrupt this order, or seat himself higher than he ought.” So whereas, on the one hand, proper observance of etiquette was the key to entering particular social circles, poor taste in such

observance served as a policing mechanism within these social groups. As Augusta C. Twiggs (1849:310) proclaims,

> Taste may…be improved or debased, elevated to the highest appreciations, the noblest conceptions, or lowered to the most sordid views, the most grovelling [sic] level, and this is left to man himself—to rise or fall, to sink or soar, is left to his own choice, and is within his own power…let us seek Taste, let us acquaint ourselves with her, coax her, court her, make her our own and we are safe. But we must be sure it is no impostor, no false being who assumes the name, for there are such, and they are to be shunned.

One final way in which we see the approximate relationship between material culture and consumer identity is if we consider those objects associated with time and work discipline (see Chapter 3) (Leone 2005; Shackel 1993). Time and work discipline reinforced the internalisation of order and regularity and I argue were essential to shipboard life and the successful operation of a ship. Time and work discipline produced a naturalizing ideology legitimizing social exclusion on board ships. This was partly achieved through scientific observations, involving a wide range of human activity, including observing, fixing and counting. The use of scientific instruments – technologies of precision and self-mastery – "produced a habit that reproduced ideology within the user" (Leone 2005:165). Additionally, discovering and mastering these rules produced a segmented, pragmatic and routinised group of people (Leone 2005:167). "Reason and experience were themselves dependent upon seeing the world in rationalized units. Such units took space and chronology, or time, as major dimensions and subdivided much of the observable world into what were taken to be natural, preexisting units, like the individual himself" (Leone 2005:171).

For instance, pocket watches such as those associated with the officers represent one way in which the crew were labour oriented. Labour on board a ship was divided according to time. Officers were in charge of dividing time and making sure that each watch fulfilled its duty at the correct time. Telling time was integral to keeping watch for a certain period of time. Being able to have the correct time was also integral to fixing longitude. This was equivalent to dividing the observable world into segmented units that seemed natural and preexisting. Keeping time for the rotation of watches on deck, using a chronometer in order to calculate longitude, as well as the using of other scientific instruments, helped to legitimise control and power among the officers (see Chapter 3). In other words, the officers were in charge of keeping watch, as well as being the users of navigational instruments, such as sextants, navigational dividers and rulers. This reinforced their control and power

aboard the ship because they understood the natural law and the world through direct observation. Using navigational instruments involved constant measuring, fixing and plotting throughout a journey in order to safely navigate the vessel along its course of sail. The mastery of using navigation instruments reproduced the ideology of individualism, in that fixing and plotting was a way of measuring and segmenting the world in rationalised units. Mastering these created a segmented, pragmatic and routinised group of people capable of transoceanic voyages of trade.

The *Frolic*'s cargo of Chinese porcelain provides another avenue to view the approximate relationship between material culture and consumer identity. The Chinese porcelain that *Frolic* carried as cargo was distinctly different than Chinese porcelain from any other shipwreck found to date. It is possible to make a few generalisations about Chinese export porcelain cargo bound for any Western port because blue-and-white Chinese export porcelain was produced for the Western market in general and not for the American market specifically. Thus, a discussion of shipwrecks carrying Chinese export porcelain as cargo can provide an avenue for understanding such Chinese porcelain in the American market, specifically, as well as illustrate the differences between the Western and Eastern markets generally. It also provides a few subsequent lines of inquiry to further explore how the American-China trade may have changed between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

As the American Revolution blue-and-white Chinese export porcelain decorated distinctly in Western styles was being imported into Western markets. For instance, The Chinese export porcelain associated with *Sydney Cove* (1797) consisted mostly of blue-and-white Chinese export porcelain decorated for the Western market in the Canton style reflecting that of which is most predominantly found archaeologically on Australian terrestrial household sites of the time. Similarly, the shipwreck *Ontario*'s cargo included blue-and-white Chinese export porcelain plates and bowls decorated in Canton and Nanking styles. The Blue China Wreck carried bowls, plates, platters and ginger jars also decorated in Western designs like Canton. High quality Chinese porcelain for the Western market was being produced during the mid-nineteenth century, as evidenced in the Chinese porcelain from Hoff's store (Terry and Pastron 1990:75-81). The Chinese export porcelain cargo of *Frolic*, as discussed in Chapter 7, was distinctly different from Chinese export porcelain produced for the Western markets. Instead, Chinese porcelain like that found on *Frolic* is generally associated with Chinese-American sites. Moreover, the *Frolic* Chinese porcelain consisted of five different decorative types of bowls, rather than a

variety of forms like Chinese export porcelain produced for the Western market. This shows that by the 1850s the American consumer market was complex enough to pander to different consumers in the market.

Leone (2005:159) believes that large amounts of dishes that do not look alike, or correspond to sets, represent a resistance to the market. He found in excavations of a boarding house for African-American labourers that the occupants were "not matching their wares according to the Victorian style that others were employing" (Leone 2005:159-161). However, *Frolic*'s cargo of Chinese porcelain is a unique example of how consumer goods that were not fashionable in American consumer society were still being supplied to the consumer market through the shipping trade. It is in this way that Leone (2005) is perhaps too selective in his assertions of who falls into and outside of the market economy. Instead, and as *Frolic*'s Chinese porcelain cargo and Praetzellis and Praetzellis' (2001) discussion of Chinese labourers in California below will show, many groups whose consumer identities were catered to by the market fell outside the dominant market forces that reinforced tastes and etiquette. The rejection of, or simple indifference to, certain modes of etiquette and ideology does not equate to a place within or outside of the consumer market. As *Frolic*'s cargo indicates, large amounts of low quality Chinese porcelain catered to labourers' tastes, and thus these labourers were very much within the market, yet remained removed from mainstream consumer society and its attendant etiquette. In this way, Chinese labourers were not outside the market, *per se*, but instead they simply did not, or could not, embrace etiquette as a means of gaining access to increasingly restrictive social networks. Part of this was related to an indifference to the ideology that defined social advancement in terms of an elite cultural model. Another part was related to an indifference towards emulation of tastes and its portrayals in the mass media, as is considered below.

Another way in which *Frolic*'s cargo of Chinese porcelain does not fall within characteristics demanded of elite style was their low quality compared to English and French ceramics. Ceramics produced at English factories, such as Wedgewood, Worcester, Staffordshire and Liverpool, and French manufacturers, such as Sévres and Limoges, had a greater appeal than Chinese porcelain partly because they had precise transfer printings in the Western style (Mudge 1962:125). Mudge believes that by the 1850s, the quality of Chinese porcelain production was declining, and the wares of Ching-tê Chên were becoming inferior to those that had been produced during the late eighteenth century. Mudge (1962:125) comments that this may indicate a "breakdown in inspiration of the potters," as painting became less creative

and more mechanical and poorer mixes of clay were used more often. In addition to a decline in quality, English ceramic manufacturers produced standardised matched sets of ceramics at a cheaper price than Chinese porcelains, resulting in English-produced wares increasing in popularity (Mudge 1962:125-126; Palmer 1976:26). After orders of porcelain from America declined and those from Europe ceased, "there was no longer the constant demand for Chinese wares in foreign patterns" (Mudge 1962:185). This may partly explain why *Frolic*'s cargo consisted of low quality wares rather than high quality wares traditionally produced and sold as part of a set. Thus, Augustine Heard & Co. may have just purchased what was available in bulk at Canton during at the time. In this way, *Frolic*'s cargo is representative of the complex chain of individual choices (agency) and perceptions (see Chapter 2).

Even between the five different major decorative types of Chinese porcelain in *Frolic*'s cargo there were variations in quality. Smith (2006:54) has suggested that the differences between the seemingly lower quality and higher quality Chinese porcelain in *Frolic*'s cargo might reflect the fact that their intention for a different consumer market. Based on the inventory records for the Kwong Tai Wa Company (see Chapters 6 and 7) (Sando and Felton 1993:160), its seems that this may be a valid point. Those who had a little extra money to do so purchased the higher quality ceramics, specifically Peach & Fungus, Rock & Orchid and Bamboo, while the lower quality ceramics, Fu and Snail, were purchased by labourers in the mining fields. However, Figure 64 suggests an alternative to this. This image depicts a group of Chinese miners, five of whom are eating out of a single communal bowl. The bowl resembles the major decorative style, Fu, which was a large family bowl. At least four of the miners are holding small rice bowls, similar to the major decorative style Bamboo. They are using chopsticks, instead of cutlery. Thus, it seems that the different types of bowls reflect utility of function, rather than their appeal to different consumer markets predicated on purchasing power. Figure 65 also indicates that the variance in bowls is related to a different type of cuisine brought from the miners' homeland (e.g. Leone 2005:159-161), and the social practices of eating.

**Figure 65.** Celestial Empire in California: Miners/Gamblers (c.1850s) lithograph by Britton & Rey (from the collection of Chinese in California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

*Frolic*'s Chinese porcelain gives us a snapshot of how Chinese labourers could maintain their Chinese identity. Chinese immigrants came to Gold Rush San Francisco as labourers, and in the mines they worked "as cooks, laundrymen, and other jobs too menial for American and European adventurers" (Black 1963:59-61). Exposure to wider consumer society may or may not have been a conscious choice. Praetzellis and Praetzellis (2001) found that a Chinese agent who ran a boarding house in the Sierra Nevada range supplied his Chinese boarders with porcelain similar in origin and design to *Frolic*'s Chinese porcelain cargo, in addition to Chinese gaming pieces, opium paraphernalia and traditional Chinese medicine containers. In this way Chinese labourers did not necessarily choose what they consumed, yet they were still able to maintain their Chinese identity through consumption practices. It should be noted, however, through the acceptance and use of Chinese goods by Chinese labourers, these goods were creatively recontextualised so that the consumption of these goods was not necessarily a negative process. The consumption of Chinese goods by Chinese labourers also should not be interpreted any different than the consumption of Western material goods by *Frolic*'s crew, as using consumer goods produced in ones homeland while overseas not only relieves

the stresses of being away from home, but it is a way of selective bonding between social groups.

Praetzellis and Praetzellis (2001) have also suggested that the deliberate non-use of Chinese porcelain similar to *Frolic*'s porcelain cargo by Chinese-Americans could have helped establish and legitimise a Victorian identity among higher-class Chinese-American individuals. The Chinese agent, who was essentially a businessman, provides an example of an individual with membership in the highest class in Chinese-American society. Excavations have revealed that these agents owned a variety of Staffordshire-produced ceramics that were fashionable in elite Victorian society (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001:648). While ownership of objects conforming to the tastes expected of a person of particular identity was important in establishing and maintaining such an identity, simple possession was not enough. In addition to owning the material culture through which etiquette was practiced, knowledge of the proper modes of behaviour as exercised through these mechanisms was equally essential. Day (1843:4) expounds upon this point:

> …in a mercantile country like our own, people are continually rising in the world. Shopkeepers become merchants, and mechanics manufacturers; with the possession of wealth, they acquire a taste for the luxuries of life, expensive furniture, gorgeous plate, and also numberless superfluities, with the use of which they are only imperfectly acquainted. But, although their capacities for enjoyment increase, it rarely happens that the polish of their manners keeps pace with the rapidity of their advancement: hence such persons are often painfully reminded that wealth alone is insufficient to protect them from the mortifications which a limited acquaintance with society entails upon the ambitious.

Through the proper practice of etiquette and possession of the material culture needed to do so creditably in the eyes of others, the Chinese agent was able to establish a new Chinese-American identity and progress socially through conscious choice and effort. Praetzellis and Praetzellis (2001:649) highlight a similar mode of pursuit in their discussion of the banquets that Chinese merchants would hold for influential people in the 1850s. At just such a banquet Praetzellis and Praetzellis (2001:649) relate the story of a newspaper correspondent who was looking forward to eating with chopsticks, but who instead found that the dining table was set like an ordinary American table, with cloth, forks, knives and glasses.

While such examples of social climbing are useful in illustrating the abilities of the capitalist markets of the time to cater to particular consumer identities, tastes and

etiquette, the *Frolic*'s shipwreck cargo and Praetzellis and Praetzellis' (2001) study also illustrate the ability of the market to cater to a variety of consumer tastes. Praetzellis and Praetzellis (2001) have also shown that by supplying exclusively Chinese goods to the Chinese community, he prevented the advancement of the Chinese labourers into American genteel society, while at the same time "manipulating genteel material culture for the purpose of impression management" asserting and contrasting his consumer identity as a Chinese-American in relation to the labourers he supplied (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001:649).

# The Complexity of Capitalism and Consumption as Manifested on a Local Scale

By the mid-nineteenth century the American consumer market was sufficiently complex that a number of social groups had access to the variety of commodities necessary to establish and maintain distinct consumer identities. Whether it was ceramics, glassware, clothing, parasols, fans or furniture, material culture was used as a mechanism through which people establish and maintain their consumer identity. Acquisition and use of this material culture is guided in part through mass communication via the media (newspapers and courtesy literature). It is also guided through the communication engendered by day-to-day interaction between individuals and other members of their social group.

Another example of archaeologically observed material culture catering to different classes of people is the cutlery shipped as part of *Frolic*'s cargo. This included several different sizes of spoons and forks that came from at least two, possibly three, different silversmiths who were known to have produced a variety of high quality silverware (see Crossman 1972, 1991). These were of a similar decorative design: the plain fiddle pattern (see Chapter 7). In addition to this, the forks and spoons were made of two different types of metal: silver and paktong (see Layton 1997, 2002). Silver cutlery would have been more expensive both to manufacture and purchase, while paktong cutlery, which was a cheaper metal, would have been affordable to many more consumers. What this means is that: 1) there was a range in the quality of consumer goods being imported into San Francisco; and 2) the availability of a lower quality cutlery shows the potential for social ascension by the lower classes desirous of conforming to proper etiquette. In this way, expense was

not the issue; rather, the important aspect was that the silverware matched and that every individual had a fork and spoon for themselves. The lower quality silverware was intended to emulate the higher quality goods. The fact that there was a market for low quality goods implies that there was a market for those with the will, but not necessarily the monetary means, to improve their standing *vis a vis* their fellows through the use of proper etiquette and its mechanisms. Additionally, the availability of different qualities of silverware also reflects American consumers' changing attitudes. Cutlery was no longer considered a luxury, as it was during the previous century. Instead by the middle of the nineteenth century cutlery was used by nearly everyone in society, and was considered a possession of decency, and maybe even a necessity to some.

With that said, however, there is not necessarily homogeneity between social groups. The examples of *Frolic*'s crew and Chinese miners in California presents us with two examples of social groups that, whether through conscious choice or circumstance, fall outside of the norms of etiquette and consumption patterns of the wider consumer identity. These disenfranchised groups had to be supplied with the material goods necessary to serve as mechanisms for the establishment and practice of proper etiquette as defined in their social group. The system of capitalism during the mid-nineteenth century entailed a great degree of complexity, and it is only through this complexity that multiple consumer identities as we knew them then, and to some extent as we know them today, became possible.

One final example of the complexity of capitalism and consumption can be seen in *Frolic*'s cargo of Edinburgh ale. Busch has shown that bottle reuse was a common practice during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because bottles were expensive and bottle manufacturers could not keep up with demand (Busch 2000:175-188). Augustine Heard & Co. purchased empty bottles in Canton for filling with Edinburgh ale (see Chapter 6). Most alcoholic liquids were purchased in bulk, such as in barrels or casks, and then bottled before being sold to everyday consumers (Busch 2000:177). Additionally, according to Edward Staski (1993:134), the glass industry in nineteenth century China was non-existent, and Chinese people reused bottles quite often, sometimes for purposes other than what they were intended. This suggests that there was some sort of bottle collection system at Canton. Bottles may have been collected from ships whose crews consumed bottled alcoholic beverages during their voyage. A system which created and filled glass bottles with alcohol that was subsequently consumed over the course of the voyage to Canton and then discarded, gathered, refilled, and taken to the west coast of America for consumption

cannot be termed anything but complex. It is complexity such as this that allowed the consumer market in Gold Rush San Francisco to flourish.

# Conclusion and Future Directions

This study has argued that the range in consumer goods associated with the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century US – China trade is symptomatic of the increasing complexity of consumer markets capable of facilitating the establishment and maintenance of a wide array of consumer identities necessary under the many new social, economic and ideological relationships constructed under capitalism (see Chapter 1). As mentioned above, while everyday social interaction undoubtedly plays a role in influencing the tastes and consumer identity of their readers and the general public, the portrayals of taste in mass media play a corresponding and equally essential role. In Gold Rush San Francisco this was partly accomplished through newspapers, etiquette guides and magazines. The media influenced both tastes and consumer identity through informing the population as to 'proper' mechanisms through which to exercise and establish a particular consumer identity. Additionally, while the media influenced popular culture, it also mirrored it, perpetuating particular consumer identities. In doing so, the media enabled and sustained ever-greater complexity in the market. However, the enduring incompleteness and the desire for self-improvement of individuals remained equally central in driving the constant changes in tastes and etiquette (see Chapter 3).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the American consumer market was sufficiently complex that disparate groups had access to the variety of commodities necessary to establish and maintain a constellation of consumer identities. Whether through ceramics, glassware, clothing, parasols, fans or furniture, material culture was used as a mechanism through which people established and maintained their consumer identities. Acquisition and use of this material culture was guided through mass media outlets like newspapers, etiquette books and magazines, as well as through daily social interaction.

Consumption is approximated through what individuals choose to consume, and choosing what to consume people construct an identity. This is because consumer goods serve as mechanisms through which people practice the technologies of self, inherent in constructing and maintaining identity (Foucault 1988; Leone 1988, 2005) (see Chapter 3). Different ways of seeing, walking, reading, talking, eating and

behaving are all components of an individual's identity. While these technologies of the self allow people to establish and maintain identity in their own eyes as well as those of others, material culture serves as the mechanism through which they are often exercised. Individuals are taught certain responsibilities and practices necessary to their identity, which become internalised and practiced through mechanisms (dishes, toothbrushes, clocks, clothing). It is these mechanisms that are observable archaeologically as material culture, and in this way there exists an approximate relationship between consumption and consumer identity.

That said, however, there is not necessarily such homogeneity between social groups. The examples of *Frolic*'s crew and of Chinese miners in California present us with two examples of social groups that, whether through conscious choice or circumstance, fell outside of the norms of etiquette and consumption patterns of consumer identity. These disenfranchised groups too had to be supplied with the material goods necessary for establishing and practicing proper etiquette as defined in their particular social groups.

Shipwrecks like *Frolic*, *Rapid*, *Ontario* and the Blue China Wreck represent events, and these events have greater meaning when they are incorporated into larger issues like capitalism and consumerism. *Frolic* is one of the few US – China trading shipwrecks to have been archaeologically investigated, with *Rapid* being the only other one. *Rapid* was inbound to Canton at the time of its wreck, and although artifacts have been found associated with its crew and ingoing cargo of specie, this really does not tell us much about the range of type, quality and quantity of consumer goods being shipped from Canton to the US during this time. Other US – China trading shipwrecks that have been found include the *Ontario* wreck and the Blue China Wreck, both of which have been salvaged for profit, making their complete assemblages inaccessible. One of the main future directions for this study would be to locate another US – China trading shipwreck to provide more comparative information.

Some efforts have been made to locate another US – China trading shipwreck. For instance, I was involved in an archaeological survey with Victor Mastone, Director of the Massachusetts Board of Underwater Archaeological Resources, in conducting a remote sensing survey in Nantucket Sound to locate the US – China trader *Semiramis*. Wrecked in the area in 1804, *Semiramis* is significant because it represents an early phase of the US – China trade spectrum, and would make an excellent comparison to *Frolic* in discussing how the nature of the trade may have

changed over time. It is also significant in that it was an inward bound vessel with a cargo of teas, sugars, silks, and nankins valued at over $300,000 (*Salem Register* 19 March1804). If its remains are found it will not only tell us about the range of types, quantity and quality of cargo being imported into New York at this time, but artifacts associated with the crew may also offer new insight into consumer identity of its crew and officers and shipboard life.

There is at least one other maritime archaeological institutions that is in the process of conducting archaeological surveys along the eastern seaboard of the United States to located other wrecked US – China trading vessels. The University of Rhode Island is currently searching for the trader *Ann and Hope*, which was wrecked off the coast of Block Island, Rhode Island, in 1806 (Rod Mather, pers. comm., 14 March 2009). Because this shipwreck occurred about the same time as *Semiramis*, it too would be a great contribution to our knowledge about the early US – China trade and American consumer society.