



## **Lewis Coolidge and the Voyage of the Amethyst, 1806-1811 (Studies in Maritime History)**

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This is a firsthand account of a nineteenth-century sealing expedition that recalls the spirit of Herman Melville. Lewis Coolidge (1783-1871) was a nephew of Billy Dawes, the man who accompanied Paul Revere on his legendary midnight ride. An adventurous spirit seems to have run in the family: in 1806, Coolidge set out on a five-year voyage around the globe aboard the China trader Amethyst. The crew's mission was to catch and skin fur seals to trade in China for tea, porcelain, silk, and other highly prized commodities while avoiding entanglements with European traders and ports unfriendly to the young American republic. Edited by Evabeth Miller Kienast and Coolidge's descendant John Phillip Felt, Coolidge's private diary of this voyage sheds light on the nineteenth-century sealing trade and offers a thoughtful vantage on maritime culture of the era as experienced by a highly literate Bostonian on the adventure of a lifetime. The Amethyst sailed from Boston in September 1806 to Gough Island in the Antarctic, where a few men were dispatched to seal hunt as the ship continued around the horn to the Pacific Ocean. Coolidge was left in charge of a sealing party in the Cerros Islands off the coast of Spanish-controlled California while the ship returned to Gough. Almost a year later, the Amethyst finally retrieved Coolidge and his crew from the barren Cerros Islands, where they not only had to catch and skin seals but had to sustain themselves on whatever they could find. After more sealing off California, the Amethyst sailed next to the Hawaiian Islands and then on to China to trade the accumulated skins. The ship then sailed to the Palau Islands, where the crew obtained a cargo of sea cucumbers, a delicacy in China. The crew returned to China to sell this cargo and the ship itself, and then Coolidge and the others embarked for home on other vessels. With a keen eye, sharp wit, and a literary style reminiscent of Herman Melville, Coolidge ably chronicles all aspects of his odyssey in the diary published here for the first time. Coolidge's well-annotated historical account is supplemented by eighteen illustrations, Felt's brief survey of the 'Old China trade' enterprise, and his account of Coolidge's life following the voyage. Collectively these elements paint a vivid portrait of an adventurous era on the high seas and of a young man eager to find his way in the world.

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