



by Ethel Nepveux

During the war, the *Economist* was a workhorse for the Confederacy and her owners, the Trenholm firms, John Fraser & Co. of Charleston, South Carolina, and Fraser, Trenholm & Co. of Liverpool, England, and British Nassau and Bermuda. The story of the ship comes from bits and pieces of scattered information. She first appears in Savannah, Georgia, where the Confederate network (conspiracy) used her in their efforts to obtain war materials of every kind from England.

President Davis sent Captain James Bulloch to England to buy an entire navy. Davis also sent Caleb Huse to purchase armaments and send them back home. Both checked in to the Fraser, Trenholm office in Liverpool which gave them office space and the Trenholm manager Charles Prioleau furnished credit for their contracts and purchases. Neither the men nor their government had money or credit.

George Trenholm (last Secretary of the Treasury of the Confederacy) bought and Prioleau loaded a ship, the *Bermuda*, to test the Federal blockade that had been set up to keep the South from getting supplies from abroad. They sent the ship to Savannah, Georgia, in September 1861. The trip was so successful that the Confederates bought a ship, the *Fingal*. Huse bought the cargo and Captain Bulloch took her himself to Savannah where he had been born and was familiar with the harbor. The ship carried the largest store of armaments that had ever crossed the ocean. Bulloch left all his monetary affairs in the hands of Fraser, Trenholm & Co. and also left all his papers (drawing specifications, contracts, and other important documents) in their hands.¹ Huse planned signals for the ship to use to communicate with the Confederates on shore and in November the ship entered safely with her valuable cargo that included 70 rifled guns.² Because of the ship's arrival the Federals attacked and captured the entire area around Tybee Island that guarded the city and the ship could not leave. She had taken on an entire load of cotton for the Navy Department in England to use as "white gold" to buy supplies and ships and pay for debts that were piling up.

¹ ORN I, 2, p. 99.

² Huse, Caleb, *The Supplies for the Confederate Army*, p. 32.

In Charleston the Confederates confiscated the *Nashville*, one of the fastest ships running from New York to Charleston, possibly hoping to use her as a warship. After the new owners found that her deck was too weak to hold the weight of heavy ordnance they used her to run the blockade. On October 21 she ran out of Charleston for England where the Confederates hoped to outfit her as a privateer or make alterations so she could serve as a warship.³ Before leaving England after eight months, her captain, Robert Pegram, detached Lt. Charles M. Fauntleroy, his second-in-command, to take charge of the Trenholm owned *Economist* which was to be used for Confederate business.⁴ The *Economist* had been built in Scotland in 1860.⁵ Pegram expressed entire confidence in Lieutenant Fauntleroy as an officer of ability and discretion and placed him "in a more responsible position, connected with the interests of the Confederacy, than that which he had occupied".⁶ Captain Fauntleroy had been in command of a schooner in the United States Coast Survey Fleet that had been ordered to sea to be available for purposes of war.⁷ When he was offered the leading of an expedition to reinforce Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, he resigned from the United States Navy.⁸

The Confederate network and the *Economist* entered the picture in the *Fingal's* affairs after Bulloch waited months for an opportunity to leave Savannah with a load of cotton. Somehow the *Economist* arrived at Savannah, obtained the cotton and carried 428 bales to England - the first cotton to arrive in England on government account. The profits were credited to Bulloch and other Navy agents. The cargo was consigned to Fraser, Trenholm & Co.⁹

The Trenholm firm was deeply involved with the entire situation. Their chief clerk, Edward Willis, had gone to England after Secession and bought and sent arms for a company of men who used them to prevent the *Star of the West* from provisioning Ft. Sumter. Willis became General Beauregard's chief quartermaster when Beauregard returned to take over the defense of Charleston,¹⁰ and later became the chief quartermaster for the Military Division of the West.¹¹ Letters in the Willis file in the South Carolina Historical Society show Willis' involvement with the events that happened in Savannah and may explain how the *Economist* just happened to arrive to take the cotton from the *Fingal*. The blockade runner, *The Major E. Willis*, was named for Willis.

John Tuomey (later a Confederate agent in Nassau who directed purchases of clothing for the army in Charleston) wrote from Savannah to Willis in Charleston about his trying to save goods that the Confederates had stored on Sapelo Island near Savannah. The goods may have come from England on ships. It is uncertain whether Tuomey wanted the boxes saved from the enemy or from other Confederates. Tuomey was getting his orders from Theodore Wagner, second in command of the Trenholm companies. Tuomey planned to leave Savannah by railroad whenever Wagner gave the order. It appears that communications between Savannah and Charleston went by

³ Wise, Stephen R., *Lifeline of the Confederacy Blockade Running During the Civil War*, Columbia, SC, 1988), pp. 29, 56.

⁴ Spencer, Warren F., *The Confederate Navy in Europe*, (Alabama, 1983), pp. 31, 180-83, 191-92, 198, 209-10.

⁵ Wise, *Lifeline*, p. 297.

⁶ ORN I, 1, p. 746.

⁷ *New York Herald*, April 8, 1861; *United States Naval Register* from Jan. 1, 1861-Dec. 31, 1862, p. 112, in *Confederate Veteran*, V. 27, p. 397.

⁸ OR I, 53, p. 128.

⁹ ORN I, 2, p. 106.

¹⁰ Orvin, Maxwell Clayton, *In South Carolina Waters*, p. 23.

¹¹ "Blockade", HBar CDRom of *Official Records of the Rebellion*, pg. 39334.

railroad, the telegraph along the railroad, and by ships like the *Economist*. Captain Fauntleroy made several trips into the Confederacy and appears to have been the captain of the *Economist* through 1862.¹²

One captain of the *Economist* was a man named Jones (probably Captain J. L.), also described as a pilot. Another of the ship's captains was Nicholas John Burdage.¹³ On January 27, 1862, W. L. Yancey, the first Confederate ambassador to England, reported that the *Economist* would sail in the morning commanded by Lieutenant Fauntleroy. This was contained in a report where Yancey included the *Economist* among other steamers that were chartered by the Confederate Government implying that the ship was one of them¹⁴. US Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, wrote on January 29 that the iron screw steamer *Economist* had gone down to 15 miles below London and taken in several scow loads of powder and put to sea. It was reported that she would go to Nassau where her cargo would be transshipped for southern ports in small steamers and sailing craft, regular lines of which were established and sailing under the British flag. He was certain that she was owned by the Confederates and had a cargo valued at \$500,000 that was destined for the insurgent states. He wrote that the *Economist* was 900 tons, built in 1860 and classed at Lloyd's as A 1 for twelve years. She was called a very good vessel.¹⁵ By February 15 the U.S. Consul in Liverpool, Freeman Morse, wrote to U.S. Secretary William Seward that the *Economist* had left two weeks earlier with a cargo of great importance to the rebels and ought not to be allowed to reach Nassau.¹⁶

By February 19 the United States consulate in Brussels was writing about the *Economist II* which he said was a new English steamer on her first voyage. He wrote that Caleb Huse had purchased several batteries complete, numbering in all 80 cannon to be shipped from Hamburg by the *Economist II* which was to proceed from there to London to take in blankets and to fill up with powder, clearing for Nassau, hoping to run the blockade from there.¹⁷ On Feb. 25 he wrote that the *Economist II* had one of the most important cargoes yet dispatched. This appears to be the same ship as the *Economist*.

In March, 1862, Confederate Secretary of War Judah Benjamin wrote to New Orleans that he had received from the *Gladiator* (a Confederate ship that the Trenholm company had just bought) and the *Economist* 190,000 pounds of gun powder and that he had contracts out for several thousand tons of saltpeter and should very soon receive one or two cargoes.¹⁸ U.S. Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, listed the *Economist* among the vessels that had been reported as having arms, munitions of war and having sailed from Europe with the intention of violating the blockade or throwing their cargoes into the Southern states by transshipments.¹⁹ Earlier, on March 2, Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory wrote to Lt. James North in London that the *Economist* was to leave in a few days and by her he would forward instructions and send some officers for North's vessel (possibly the *CSS Florida*) who would be ignorant

¹² Spencer, *Confederate Navy*, p. 31.

¹³ *American Neptune*, April, 1861, p. 88.

¹⁴ ORN II, 3, p. 322.

¹⁵ ORN I, 12, p. 555.

¹⁶ ORN I, 7, p. 90.

¹⁷ ORN I, 12, p. 626.

¹⁸ ORN II, I, p. 690.

¹⁹ ORN I, 1, p. 400.

of their mission.²⁰ By March 5, the US consul at Bermuda wrote that the British screw steamer *Economist* had arrived with a full cargo, the first lieutenant of the *Nashville*, and two pilots belonging to the Southern States.²¹ On March 6 the *Economist*, Lt. Fauntleroy, was at Bermuda expecting to sail.²²

In a letter dated March 12 the U.S. consul at Liverpool wrote that the *Economist* and the *Southwick* had on board near 40,000 Enfield rifles with a large quantity of powder, rifled cannon, army clothing and other things.²³ On March 14 the ship arrived in Charleston from Bermuda.²⁴ Six days later Gideon Welles wrote to the Senior Officer of the blockading ships at Hampton Roads, Virginia, that he was sending the invoices of the *Economist* (which probably kept him informed about what cargoes the ship was carrying). On the 23rd Welles wrote to Captain Louis Goldsborough, commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron at Hampton Roads, that the *Economist* had arrived in Bermuda, and that "*the suspicious character of the steamer has been frequently brought to the attention of the blockading squadron and the indications are that she will attempt to run into one of the blockaded ports. Vigilance should be exercised*".²⁵ Indeed, the *Economist* was evidently well known to most of the important Federal officials supervising the blockade. On March 24, John Bourne, the Confederate agent in Bermuda, sent Fraser, Trenholm & Co. in Liverpool a list of disbursements of the *Economist*.²⁶ Three days later Bourne wrote to John Fraser & Co. that he had paid for 50 tons of coal for the *Economist* before the coal was delivered.²⁷ The ship cleared Charleston for Nassau on April 1.²⁸

North was in charge of the building of the *Alabama* during Bulloch's absence, and although still under construction the vessel was in the process of receiving its complement of officers. Some had probably come over to England on the *Economist*'s voyage with the Navy Department's cotton. Another Trenholm ship, the *Annie Childs*, took Bulloch back to England from Richmond and also officers for the *Alabama*.

Huse wrote that he had a large quantity of supplies ready for shipment and was being deterred by agents of the United States. British authorities hinted that he might clear them for Australia and he did that. He made the shipment on the *Economist* and said that Lt. Fauntleroy was detached from the *Nashville* with a British captain to be the nominal command. The *Economist* could go no faster than eight knots an hour but Fauntleroy delivered Huse's cargo in excellent condition to Charleston.²⁹ On April 1, Huse wrote to Josiah Gorgas, head of the Confederate Ordnance Bureau, that the *Economist* with Lieutenant Fauntleroy had been at Bermuda on March 6, and as they had information from New York dated March 20 with no notice of the ships' being captured, he hoped that the ship had arrived at a Confederate port.

Huse was planning to post officers on his blockade runners from the Confederate cruiser *Sumter* that was still lying up at Gibraltar.³⁰ Up to this point the *Sumter* under

²⁰ ORN I, 2, p. 169.

²¹ ORN I, 2, p. 167.

²² ORN II, 2, p. 179.

²³ ORN I, 7, p. 218.

²⁴ Wise, *Lifeline*, p. 251.

²⁵ ORN I, 7, p. 166.

²⁶ Vandiver, Frank, editor of *Blockade Running Through Bermuda*, p. 9.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁸ Wise, *Lifeline*, p. 255.

²⁹ Huse, *Confederate Supply*, p. 43.

³⁰ ORN II, 3, p. 179.

command of Admiral Rafael Semmes had virtually scared all Yankee commerce off the ocean. Now, however, the ship was worn out and was in port at Gibraltar badly in need of a complete overhaul. Melchoir Klingender went to Gibraltar and bought the ship for the Trenholm firm. He had her repaired, renamed her *Gibraltar* and sent her to Wilmington with canon described as “monster guns.” One of these huge artillery pieces ended up in Charleston in front of the John Fraser office.

U.S. Admiral Farragut received a notice from London that the *Economist* was destined for a Southern port. George Minor, Confederate Commissioner of Ordnance and Hydrography, wrote to Secretary Mallory that two steamers at Mobile were ready to be armed with ten heavy guns, but the flag officer there reported he had no powder for the vessels’ guns and did not know where to get it. Minor requested that he be furnished with 14,000 pounds of cannon powder from a portion of that received by the *Economist*.³¹

On April 5, Heyliger wrote that the captain of the *Economist* thought she was a government vessel, but all the correspondence in relation to her must be addressed to Mr. Lafitte, the agent of Fraser & Co.³² On April 9 the *Economist* had arrived safely in Bermuda and Bourne sent in her a letter from John Fraser & Co. in Charleston to Fraser, Trenholm & Co., in Liverpool.³³ In April Secretary Benjamin wrote to Louis Heyliger, the Confederate agent in Nassau, that the *Economist* had arrived with a full cargo and that he wanted to buy the ship from John Fraser & Co. for £15,000 and would take £12,000 for the *Gladiator* which had taken war materials to Nassau and had been hemmed in by Federal ships. U.S. Secretary Welles wrote on April 10 to his flag officers that the *Economist* and another ship had near 40,000 Enfield rifles³⁴ and he also wrote about the ships at Hamburg and mentioned that the consul in London had included the *Economist* in dispatches of March 14, 21, and 22.

Sometime during the Spring Charles Prioleau, the Trenholm firm’s Liverpool manager, had placed the *Economist*, *Gladiator*, *Bermuda*, and *Bahama* at Huse’s disposal in Hamburg, Germany, from where he shipped 100,000 Austrian rifles and ten complete batteries of field artillery that he had bought from the Vienna Arsenal.³⁵

In June Bourne wrote to John Fraser & Co. that the *Economist* had purchased coal from him and that on June 14 he was expecting a shipment of coal from Cardiff which had been ordered by the *Economist*.³⁶ The ship reportedly escaped from Charleston when the blockading fleet was engaged south of the city. Although the ship got away, Federal forces now possessed the entire coast from Port Royal to as far south as Mosquito Inlet south of St. Augustine.³⁷ Another account, however, claimed that the report was entirely false and that the blockading ships had not left their stations. One of the officers on a blockading ship accused the British Consul Bunch in Charleston of visiting the blockading ships in the harbor and inferred that the *Economist* ran the blockade in and out one or two days later supposedly with help from the pro-Southern consul.³⁸

³¹ ORN I, 18, p. 835.

³² OR IV, 1, p. 1017.

³³ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁴ ORN I, 7, p. 218.

³⁵ Wise, Stephen, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, p. 65.

³⁶ Vandiver, *Blockade Running*, pp. 20, 21.

³⁷ ORN I, 13, p. 135; Merrill, James, *The Rebel Shore*, p. 54.

³⁸ ORN I, 13, pp. 139, 140.

The *Economist* and some other ships were to leave in company of a convoy of one or more gunboats, and try to get to a Mexican port near the Rio Grande. The *Economist* was to carry some 300 tons of dried or preserved beef for the army. The United States consul at London said that the beef could not be intended for daily rations but had to be intended for some unusual occasion such as long and rapid marches of men.³⁹ On July 19 Bulloch proposed to convoy the *Economist* and 45,000 stand of arms to Charleston.⁴⁰ He appeared to want to use the new Confederate cruiser, *Alabama*, for this.

In September, 1862, United States Consul Dudley in Liverpool, who had built up a highly efficient spy network in England to watch Confederate activities, wrote that the *Economist* was carrying plates of the best iron - about 2/3 of them with holes drilled and ready to be fastened on. Most likely, Dudley was concerned that the plates were destined for Confederate ironclad warships. Earlier, on August 27, Dudley reported that Fraser, Trenholm & Co. had pretended to sell the ship to foreign owners who changed her name to *Bonita* and sold her back to Melchior Klingender. Klingender was one of the Fraser Trenholm operatives who also pretended to own the *Gibraltar*. In case of capture it was hoped that under its new name the ship would stand a better chance of being released.⁴¹

Klingender, like so many other Trenholm executives, was an interesting man in his own right. Ostensibly, he was a Liverpool businessman who also acted as the Trenholm firms' advertising agent. He is also generally supposed to have been the paymaster for the crews of the *Alabama*. Klingender, however, was much more than a glorified clerk. In 1864 Charles Prioleau organized a Grand Bazaar in Liverpool to earn money for the Southern Prisoners' Relief Fund. This was one of the most glamorous events ever held in Liverpool, and titled British ladies were patronesses. Mrs. Klingender was one of the ladies holding a stall, which is indicative of the Klingenders high ranking in the social scale.

On October 13 Confederate agent Heyliger wrote that the *Bonita* had arrived in Nassau from Liverpool with a cargo of iron plates, and was to be followed by three sailing vessels bringing a total of 1,000 tons iron plates and 1,000 tons boiler iron.⁴²

On November 2, U.S. Consul Samuel Whiting wrote from Nassau that cotton had been transshipped to the British propeller *Bonita* "which sails for neutral England".⁴³

Assistant United States Secretary of the Navy, Admiral Gustavus Fox, wrote that the blockaders had driven the *Economist* off twice while she carried iron plate. He felt the escape of the *Economist* bothered Secretary Seward very much.⁴⁴ Fox was obsessed with taking Charleston and Admiral Samuel DuPont, commander of the South Atlantic Blockading squadron, wanted to boost the prestige of the Federal Navy over the Army. He said "*The thorn in my flesh is Charleston...in no part of the Confederacy has there been more industry, energy, and intelligent zeal and science displayed... it resembles more a porcupine's hide turned inside out than anything else*".⁴⁵ Fox said that the fall of Charleston would be the fall of Satan's kingdom.

³⁹ ORN I, 7, p. 554.

⁴⁰ ORN II, 3, p. 461.

⁴¹ ORN I, 13, p. 332.

⁴² ORN, I, 13, p. 332; ORN II, 3, p. 552.

⁴³ ORN I, 1, p. 562.

⁴⁴ Fox, Gustavus, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, pp. 167, 127.

⁴⁵ *Civil War Naval Chronology* II, p. 98.

On November 13, 1862, Admiral DuPont wrote to the commander of the *Mercedida* off Charleston, warning that during the waning moon and its dark period some vessels, the *Economist* in particular, with its cargo of iron plates, would attempt to run in.⁴⁶ Six days later DuPont wrote to Fox that they had driven the *Economist* off twice and that the last time the *Blunt* put a shot through her that was distinctly heard by the *Flag*. DuPont hoped she had gone back to Nassau as a lame duck.⁴⁷ On November 29, 1862, the Trenholm firm's *Antonica* carried cotton to Nassau, transferred it to the *Bonita* and left with arms and war supplies.⁴⁸

Samuel Whiting, the U. S. States consul at Nassau, on November 23, 1862, described the *Bonita* as: "iron propeller; black, white ring around smoke pipe 6 feet from the top, barkentine rig, very fast".⁴⁹ Tracy Todd, an official of the Edmonston-Alston House in Charleston, which displays a painting of the ship, added to Whiting's brief description. Todd wrote that the ship could be powered by both stream and wind and "her powerful engines could drive the single-screw propeller for increased speed while moving into open seas".⁵⁰

On December 2, 1862, Heyliger was sending communications by the *Bonita*.⁵¹

By early 1862 George Trenholm was one of two men on a committee to supervise the building of iron-plated vessels or rams for the South Carolina Ordnance Department. He was a member of the state Marine Battery Commission that directed the construction of the first two ironclads, the *Palmetto State* and the *Chicora*. On April 6, 1863, Admiral Fox sent an armada to Charleston that he believed was absolutely invincible and the ironclads were ready to play an important part in the city's defense. The iron plates carried by the *Economist* may have been for the construction of these, or similar, Confederate ironclads.

As with its origin, the fate of the *Economist* is likewise murky. According to historian Stephen Wise, the ship survived the war.⁵² Possibly, toward the end of the war she no longer ran the blockade but was used as a transport ship for delivery of goods from England to the British islands and returning with cotton. However, she is never mentioned in the letters of Charles Prioleau and after 1862, the ship disappears from sight.⁵³

The *Bonita* and Captain Fauntleroy may have both been involved in a large plan to send a squadron of privateers to sea. Captain Thomas B. Power of Texas applied for a letter of Marque and Reprisal for a ship by that name October 29, 1862.⁵⁴ Power had been an owner of the *Retribution*, a ship that after his ownership did great damage near Canada and was involved in many lawsuits.⁵⁵ The 1,100 ton *Bonita* was to have an armament of eight guns and a ship's company of 150 men.

Captain Fauntleroy went west to help in the efforts to keep the vital Mississippi River open to the Confederates. He worked with Lieutenant-General Kirby Smith, Major-General John Magruder (with whom Fauntleroy had served at the beginning of

⁴⁶ ORN I, 13, p. 445.

⁴⁷ ORN I, 7, p. 167.

⁴⁸ ORN, I, 1, pp. 556, 562.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Middleton Place Foundation Notebook, Fall, 1996, "Running the Blockade with the *Economist*", by Tracey Todd.

⁵¹ ORN I, 3, p. 626.

⁵² Wise, Steve, *Lifeline*, p. 297.

⁵³ Letterbooks of Charles Prioleau, in Merseyside Archives.

⁵⁴ ORN II, 1, pp. 319-429; Robinson, William Morrison, Jr., *The Confederate Privateers*, (1928), p. 246; ORN I, 1, p. 411.

⁵⁵ Marquis, Greg, *In Armageddon's Shadow, The Civil war and Canada's Maritime Province*, (1998), p. 136.

the war) and Treasury Agent, Peter Gray, to use blockade runners to help feed, clothe, and arm the forces. The army men sent Fauntleroy to the mouth of the Rio Grande to investigate a British war vessel that Colonel Gray had reported arriving. Fauntleroy was to inspect the vessel thoroughly, evaluate her fitness as a war vessel, get her commissioned as a cruiser, and leave the Rio Grande as her commander. If the ship proved unsuitable for a cruiser, and if cotton could be obtained, he was to purchase her guns and have them available for the vessels of war being constructed in England.⁵⁶ Judge Peter Gray had been sent to head up an independent cotton agency responsible only to George Trenholm and would have been aware of shipping problems, especially if the British war vessel had happened to have been a Trenholm ship under British colors.

Fauntleroy suddenly received orders to report to Commissioner John Slidell in Paris and arrived in January 1864.⁵⁷ He became commander of the ill-fated *Rappahannock*, which never got to sea.

Both the *Economist* and Captain Fauntleroy served the Confederacy well.



Ethel Seabrook Nepveux of Charleston is the great granddaughter of George Trenholm, the Southern financial genius who held the position of Secretary of the Treasury at the end of the war. His son, Alfred G. Trenholm, said Fred, was the grandfather of Ethel Nepveux. He served in the company of the "Mounted Rifles" that his uncle, William L. Trenholm, raised and commanded.

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⁵⁶ ORN, I, 1, 53, p. 886.

⁵⁷ Forrest, Douglas French, *Odyssey in Gray, A Diary of Confederate Service 1863-1865*, (Richmond, Virginia, 1979).