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John Jacob Astor, 1763–1848

Beginning in a small way as a retailer of musical instruments, John Jacob Astor became one of America's foremost merchants, combining foreign trade and the fur trade. His business reached from the leading markets of the Old World and the Orient to Indian villages and camps of lone trappers in the great American wilderness.

From the beginning of his career, Astor invested in real estate, particularly in New York City. The great internal development of the United States, resulting from the swift expansion of population into the Mississippi Valley and the rapid growth of the cotton trade, created inviting opportunities for profitable investment. More than most New York merchants, Astor appreciated the impact that the growth of the city's hinterland would have on real estate values on Manhattan Island. By the time of his death in 1848, Astor, who had been known as one of America's outstanding foreign merchants, was also the greatest landlord in New York and the wealthiest person in the United States.

Some contemporaries did not look on Astor's great wealth, particularly his New York real estate purchases, with much enthusiasm. On Astor's death, James Gordon Bennett, the leading journalist of his time, wrote in the April 5, 1848, edition of his *New York Herald*:

> We give in our columns, an authentic copy of one of the greatest curiosities of the age—the will of John Jacob Astor, disposing of the property amounting to about twenty million dollars, among his various descendants of the first, second, third and fourth degrees. . . . If we had been an associate of John Jacob Astor, . . . the first idea we should have put into his head would have been that *one-half of his immense property—ten million, at least—belonged to the people of the city of New York*. During the last fifty years of the life of John Jacob Astor, his property has been augmented and increased in value by the aggregate intelligence, industry, enterprise and commerce of New York, fully to the amount of one-half of its value. The farms and lots of ground which he bought forty, twenty, ten and five years ago, have all increased in value entirely by the industry of the citizens of New York. Of course, it is as plain as that two and two make four, that the half of his immense estate, in its actual value, has accrued to him by the industry of the community.

Astor was a man of regularity and decision. It is said that, in spite of the multiplicity of his interests and personal attention he gave to details, he "did not bestow at his countinghouse more than half the time most merchants feel compelled to give their concerns." He went to his office early in the morning, transacted the necessary business, and left at two in the afternoon. His efficiency in conducting business gave him time for other interests. After business was over in the early afternoon

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Much of the material for this case has been taken from Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *John Jacob Astor, Business Man* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931). An earlier version of the case appeared in N. S. B. Gras and Henrietta M. Larson, *Casebook in American Business History* (New York, 1939), pp. 76–97. This version, based on a revision by Professor Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., was revised and abridged by Patricia Denault under the direction of Professor Thomas K. McCraw. HBS cases are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.

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he had dinner, followed by exactly three games of checkers and a glass of beer. Then came a ride around Manhattan on his horse, Astor keeping lookout for promising pieces of land for sale. In the evening he frequently went to the theater or had musicales at home.

This stolid man of business had many cultural interests. Astor wrote the English language with many eccentricities of grammar and spelling, but he enjoyed reading literature and history; and he gave aid to several persons following a literary career and became a close friend of a few, including Washington Irving, who wrote *Astoria* about Astor's western enterprise. It was no doubt Astor's interest in literature and history and his friendship with writers that led him to endow the Astor Library in New York City (now the New York Public Library).

Astor had a passion for profits and an abhorrence of waste or loss. One writer tells of an incident that occurred when Astor was under observation of a Parisian doctor. Once when Astor and the doctor were out for a ride, Astor acted as if he were "suffering from some secret pain or trouble." When the doctor urged him to tell what was wrong, Astor replied, "Look ye! Baron! How frightful this is! I have here in the hands of my banker, at Paris, about 2,000,000 francs, and cannot manage, without great effort, to get more than 2½ percent *per annum* on it. Now, this very day I have received a letter from my son in New York, informing me that there the best acceptances are at from 1½ to 2 percent *per month*. Is it not enough to enrage a man?"

Many contemporary stories point to Astor's seeming niggardliness. It was characteristic of him to pretend that times were hard and profits low. On one occasion he subscribed to the artist John James Audubon's series of prints, *Birds of America*, the price of which was $1,000. But, so the story runs, when Audubon asked him to pay, he would not because "money is very scarce; I have nothing in the bank; I have invested all my funds." On the naturalist's sixth visit to Astor, he found the father and son together. Again pleading the scarcity of funds, Astor turned to his son, who had not followed the conversation, and asked if they had any money in the bank. On the son's enumeration of $220,000 in one bank, $120,000 in another, and so on, Astor interrupted him with orders to write a check for $1,000.

Nevertheless, according to Astor's biographer, Kenneth W. Porter, "It must not be gathered that Astor's success came only from bludgeoning his competitors." "It had been through sheer perseverance, foresight, and a process of profiting by the mistakes of himself and others that Astor had become the wielder of this tremendous capital. . . ."

Astor's Early Business Career, 1784–1788

In 1784, John Jacob Astor, then aged 20, landed in the United States with seven flutes and five guineas (a guinea is one pound plus one shilling). Born in the German Rhine country, the youngest son of a none-too-prosperous butcher, John Jacob had attended school until he was 14 and then had helped in his father's shop. At the age of 16 he set out for London, where an older brother was a maker of musical instruments. Young Astor remained in London for four years, working for his brother and a musical instrument firm, learning English, and saving money. On the long passage across the ocean—so it is told—he learned much about the American fur trade from some passengers who were in that business.

Shortly after landing in Baltimore, Astor traveled to New York, where he had another brother who was a butcher. Putting his flutes out to be sold on commission, the young immigrant worked at a number of occupations. He began by peddling bakery products, but it was not long before he found employment with a furrier, Robert Bowne. Before the year was out, Astor was back in London

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marketing furs for Bowne and also on his own account, and investing the proceeds in merchandise to sell in New York on his return to the United States.

In 1785 Astor married Sarah Todd, the daughter of a sea captain. She had excellent connections in New York, a dowry of $300, and a great talent for business. In 1786, Astor opened a musical instrument shop of his own in a room in his mother-in-law's house. Sarah Astor probably tended the shop while John Jacob minded his fur business, but she also helped with the furs. One contemporary remarked that Sarah Astor knew more about the market value of furs than did her husband, and that "when they became very affluent, she used to make him pay her $500 an hour for using her judgment and knowledge of furs to promote his commercial plans."

Fur Trading

By 1788 Astor's fur business had attained primacy over the trade in musical instruments. Astor was making regular fur-buying excursions into the back country of New York. Going out with Indian goods, at first with a pack on his back and later on a horse, he returned with furs. He made annual fur-buying trips to Montreal, which was the center of the North American fur trade. In Montreal he established connections with a merchant who shipped furs for him to London, to be reshipped to Rotterdam and New York (since British mercantile policy did not allow direct shipment from Montreal to New York). Only four years after his arrival in America, Astor had sufficient funds or credit to purchase furs in Montreal worth $3,000.

Early in the 1790s Astor seems to have ceased his personal buying of furs in the backwoods. By then he had agents and correspondents such as Peter Smith of Utica, who collected peltries for him on commission. A few years later he was sending young men out to represent him. A letter to Smith, introducing a young Frenchman whom Astor was sending upstate to buy furs, shows something of how he tried out a young agent:

> Acting Causiously I Gave him abut 500$ & a Cridet of 500 or 1000 more an Albany now it appears he is gone your way & without making use of the Cridet at Albany So that he has but abaut 500$ with him with which you know he Can not purshas much furr. I would there for be glad if in Case he shauld Lay aut his Little money if you would eighter pay him for my account from five to ten hundred Dollars—or pass his Bill on me for that amount this hawever youil observe is to be done only in Case that you have no reason to belive that he maks any bade use of the money.

New York City was the center of Astor's operations. There he prepared the furs for shipping and managed their sale. He also had a considerable importing business. To his import of pianos and music supplies were soon added Indian goods for use in the purchase of furs and manufactured goods for his merchant-correspondents in the backwoods. By 1800, Astor's chief European imports were arms, ammunition, and blankets, purchased primarily through London merchants.

Though Astor was at times hard pressed, he was making a success of his business. By 1800 he is said to have been worth "something like $250,000," a huge sum for the time. In that year he established a residence apart from his business, and there is evidence to suggest that he was gaining social status.

In 1807 Astor began to conceive a grand plan that would assure him a cheaper supply of furs and at the same time bring American control over furs trapped and traded on American soil. At the time two Canadian companies, the North West and the Michilimackinac, dominated the fur trade of the American West. They had signed a noninterference agreement, assigning areas of influence and

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providing for mutual assistance against outsiders. This arrangement, by assuring the continued exploitation of the Mississippi and Missouri valleys by the Canadians, meant that Astor and other Americans would have to buy pelts in Montreal as they had done in the past.

Astor devised two strategies for breaking the dominance of the Canadian companies. He would move into the recently opened area of the Pacific Northwest, where the Canadians had only begun to penetrate. And he would use his growing supply of capital to organize systematically the American fur trade in the interior of the continent, which in 1803 had come into the possession of the United States with the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France. In this way he would divert the trade from Montreal to New York, assure himself an ample supply of furs, and profit from the production as well as marketing of furs.

The instrument to carry out these strategies was the American Fur Company, which was incorporated in 1808 in New York State with a capital of $1 million. The preamble of the charter read as follows:[1]

> Whereas John Jacob Astor has presented his petition to the legislature, representing, among other things, that he is desirous of forming a trading company, for the purpose of carrying on an extensive trade with the natuve Indian inhabitants of America, but that an undertaking of such magnitude would require a greater capital than any individual or unincorporated association could well furnish, and who would be less able to support a fair competition with foreigners who are at present almost in the exclusive possession of the fur trade; and has prayed that he and such other persons as may be associated with him, may be incorporated, the better to enable them to carry into effect this design: *And whereas*, such an establishment may be of great public utility, by serving to conciliate and secure the good will and affections of the Indian tribes toward the government and people of the United States, and may conduce to the peace and safety of our citizens inhabiting the territories bordering on the native Indian tribes.

The American Fur Company was in reality John Jacob Astor. As Washington Irving, the official historian for this part of Astor's life, wrote, "Capital was furnished by himself—he, in fact, constituted the company, for though he had a board of directors, they were really nominal; the whole business was conducted on his plans, and with his resources. . . ."

The first part of Astor's plan, that of moving into the Pacific Northwest, involved a deal with the Russians. The Russian American Fur Company had been the first to exploit that area. In the late eighteenth century the Russians claimed the territory, and the company set up trading posts as far south as San Francisco Bay. Soon it was sending seal and sea otter pelts to China, where they brought astonishingly high prices. The British had learned of the region only after Captain Cook's explorations were followed up by those of George Vancouver and others in the early 1790s. Americans who were opening the China trade also discovered the value in the Orient of Pacific Northwest furs. After acquiring the Louisiana Territory, President Thomas Jefferson had sent an exploratory expedition under two army officers, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, to find a possible route across the continent to the Pacific Northwest. The reports of the expedition, which returned to St. Louis in September 1806, indicated the feasibility of the overland route and emphasized the abundance of furs of exceptional quality. Meriwether Lewis particularly praised the pelt of the sea otter as "the richest and most delicious fur in the world that least I cannot form an idea of any more so. It is deep silky in the extreem and strong." The news of the success of the Lewis and Clark expedition was probably as important as was the formation of the Michilimackinack Company

[1] *Private Laws of the State of New York, Passed at the Thirty-First Session of the Legislature,* pp. 160–161, as quoted in Porter, Astor, Vol. 1, pp. 413–414.

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in that same year in stimulating Astor's strategy. Astor's plans called for setting up a network of posts along the route taken by Lewis and Clark, which provided Americans with a more direct access to the new regions than was available to the Canadians.

Astor's first move after the formation of the American Fur Company was to begin negotiations with the Russian consul general in the United States. That diplomat enthusiastically supported a proposal that Astor supply the Russian posts. In return, Astor's company would procure furs from the Russians and be permitted to set up a trading post of its own, doing business as the Pacific Fur Company.

One of the objectives of the Pacific Fur Company was the establishment of a trading post on the Columbia River, to be known as Astoria. Astor was to manage the business and furnish the necessary funds, up to $400,000; he was to bear all the loss for five years, though any profit would be apportioned according to the shares. Astor through the American Fur Company took 50 of the 100 shares.

Astoria proved an unfortunate undertaking. The ship sent out to establish the post was badly captained and, after unloading some of the partners and goods at the mouth of the Columbia River, was destroyed by Indians. The War of 1812 interfered with the operations of the post by cutting off communications, but it was the operation of the Canadian North West Company that finally broke the enterprise. That company effectively used the threat of bringing in British naval forces to persuade the Pacific Fur Company partners who were then on the coast to sell the company's property to the Canadians. Thus ended the career of both the Pacific Fur Company and Astoria—and Astor's hopes of creating a great fur empire on the Pacific Coast.

The second part of Astor's plan as devised in 1807 was to organize systematically the fur trade in the vast interior valleys of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Here he moved initially against the newer and weaker of his Canadian rivals, the Michilimackinac Company. He was confident of success, informing President Jefferson that once the American Fur Company got under way the Canadian enterprise would withdraw. The Canadians initially refused Astor's offer to buy them out, but soon decided to come to terms. They must have realized that, as British subjects carrying on nearly all their trading on American soil, they would be at the mercy of American legislation. Astor and the Michilimackinac Company formed the South West Company with headquarters at Mackinac Island at the juncture of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron.

The coming of the War of 1812 disarranged Astor's fur interests in the interior of the continent almost as badly as it did those on the Pacific Coast. Astor was primarily concerned with protecting his property, particularly the furs at Mackinac Island, from seizure by the British, but his importation of goods from Europe to be used in the Indian trade and the shipment of furs to European markets was almost stopped by the war. The result was scarcity on the one hand and a glutted fur market on the other. Between March 1813 and late 1814, no ships arrived at New York with goods for Astor.

After the war Astor's fur trade grew along the lines that he had planned at the time of the organization of the American Fur Company in 1808. Astor had two policies with respect to his rivals in the fur trade. First, individual traders and small, weak companies would be speedily and ruthlessly crushed by the force of his financial and political power. The most efficient of the vanquished might be employed by Astor or allowed to trade on shares. But if a company put up a stubborn fight, rather than waste time and money, Astor usually bought out or admitted the concern to the American Fur Company on fairly generous terms.

Second, it was always the object of Astor and the American Fur Company to stand well with the government. Astor's friendship with President James Monroe was close, and the governor of

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Michigan Territory did much to help keep out competition and otherwise to assist in the interior. Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri was at the same time attorney for the American Fur Company and leader of the opposition that destroyed the government "factory" system of trading posts that bartered with the Indians and therefore competed with Astor.

Astor profited from the fur trade in several ways. As a partner in the American Fur Company he participated in its profits. As a partner in John Jacob Astor & Son he purchased goods to be used in the fur trade and sold furs for the American Fur Company in the large markets, for which he received a commission and expenses. As an individual he furnished capital to the fur company, on which he received interest. From 1817 to 1823, when the competitive war with the Canadians was on, Astor's profits from the American Fur Company were not great. But for over a decade beginning in 1823 the company made good profits. It is estimated that from the operations of the fur company in the years 1817-1834 Astor "cleared in dividends, interest, commissions, etc., not less than a million dollars, and probably nearer two million."

Astor's Overseas Trade

In 1799 and 1800, Astor began to advertise such eastern goods as tea, India silks, nankeens (Chinese cotton cloth), and black India lute-strings. In 1800 he became the principal owner of a vessel to carry his furs to China and to return with Chinese goods. By 1805, he had begun to have ships built especially for his China trade, and in 1809 he had five ships engaged in trade with the Orient. As his biographer points out: "The China goods would be advertised in the New York press, some sold over the counter of his store, a part disposed of by some well-known auction firm, another part, perhaps, shipped to some other eastern city for sale, to Canada, or even to Europe."

During his first decade of participation in the China trade, Astor's commercial policy was simple, straightforward, and unoriginal. His ships, the *Severn* until 1805 and then the *Beaver* and the *Magdalen* in the following years, would normally leave for Canton in May and return immediately, making the round-trip within less than a year. The following account of a cargo bound for China illustrates the nature of Astor's early shipping ventures. The cargo went aboard the *Severn* and left New York for Canton in May 1804:

> . . . First, there were 51 "Keges" of "Specia" [gold and silver money], valued at $140,000; next in value were 7 casks of furs, containing 2,570 rabbit skins, 1,322 otter skins, 166 beaver skins, and some seal and fox skins, invoiced at $8,000; 53 casks of ginseng containing 117½ piculs [a picul was 133 1/3 pounds] were valued at $6,000 but of these only 38 bore Astor's unmistakable mark (IIA). Eighteen bales of cotton, estimated at $1,000, formed another feature of the cargo. To the above must be added some additional kegs and boxes of specie to the value of $11,000, none of which, however, bore Astor's personal mark. The entire value of the outward cargo, then, was $166,100, of which something over $153,000 is known to have been on Astor's account.

During 1807-8, the embargo on American trade, which was intended to protect American interests from becoming involved in the Napoleonic wars in Europe, checked Astor's foreign dealings. After the embargo was lifted in 1809, Astor's China trade continued to grow, but the War of 1812 was a more serious interruption. Before the war Astor had sent at least one ship a year to the Orient, even managing to break the embargo once under the pretext of returning a phony "Chinese mandarin" (government official) to his homeland where, supposedly, "the affairs of his family and particularly the funeral obsequies of his grandfather require his solemn attention" aboard the *Beaver*. Despite complaints from other merchants who saw this ruse for what it was, the *Beaver* returned with a large

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and diverse cargo of Chinese goods. During the war years (1812-14), in contrast, Astor was able to commence not a single voyage. During the first year of the war, however, he had the good fortune to receive two cargoes of tea and goods from China despite the British cruisers. Since Chinese goods were scarce during the war, they brought very attractive prices.

Any intention Astor might have had of sending additional ships would probably have been thwarted by the very effective British blockade and the embargo laid down by Congress from December 1813 to April 1814. It was not surprising, then, that Astor should write in February 1814 that he intended to "withdraw from almost every kind of business & I mean to remain so."

Although the war brought difficulties to Astor, it also opened up new business. With idle funds on hand he was in a position to take advantage of other opportunities. He bought Dutch guilders in Amsterdam and sterling bills on London to hold for a rise, but his biggest operations were in government loans. When the U.S. government loan of 1813 failed to sell through popular subscription, Astor subscribed for $2,056,000 at 88 with a commission of one-quarter of one percent. Since the expected peace and rise in price of the bonds failed to come soon, Astor began to dispose of his portion through his own countinghouse and agents in Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. The bonds held up well for several months but then fell, reaching 75 during the year. Astor, therefore, ceased selling and began buying government bonds of both 1813 and 1814. When the bonds were low, he ordered a Boston broker to borrow funds at 2% a month to invest in governments. Astor clearly profited from this operation, for he wrote, "My losses at Sea are made up in the peace by the rise on my Stocks of which I have something more than 800m$ [$800k]."

Astor came out of the war in a very good condition. His losses from interrupted trade had been large, but gains from his government securities were to be considerable. He had avoided greater loss by keeping himself "practically withdrawn from business," "doing nothing . . . ever since the unhappy war," avoiding commercial ventures involving any considerable element of risk, and abstaining from speculation as much as was possible under the abnormal conditions then prevalent. In May 1814, he wrote, "it will be well for men who wish to live in comfort to be out of debt, I am more so than I have been for many years, of notes I have scarse any out, I owe some on acct. of Stock [United States bonds] & to the custom-house."

Astor was not one to choose the speculative risks of war times; he preferred peace, for it "puts every thing on safe ground & I can always make money if I will be prudent."

The Height of Astor's China and Fur Trade, 1815–1834

At the end of the war Astor, with his capital unimpaired and his vigor at its height, was ready for his last and crowning years in business. Two general policies dominated his business in the decade after the war: the building up of a very complicated foreign trade and a continued drive toward dominance in the fur trade. The two were interrelated, and both reflected the fruition of his earlier strategies. With a large capital, a fleet of nine vessels mostly purchased at the low prices prevailing during the war, a firm position in the American fur trade and in the New York–Europe and New York–Canton trade, and with a beginning in the Pacific trade, Astor was in a position to trade heavily when peace and order were again established.

The prospects of a large-scale business made Astor look about for a partner. His choice was Albert Gallatin, a Swiss-American distinguished for his political service to his adopted country (he had been Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury). On offering Gallatin a partnership, Astor explained that he had a capital of about $800,000 engaged in trade from which he expected net profits of from

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$50,000 to $100,000 a year. Gallatin refused the offer. His eighteen-year-old son could not visualize his father as a partner of Astor, who "ate his ice cream and peas with a knife!" The younger Gallatin went on, "Really Mr. Astor is dreadful. Father has to be civil to him, as in 1812-13 he rendered great service to the country." Perhaps Gallatin was too much aware of Astor's commercial tricks—he had been Secretary at the time of the *Beaver* affair with the bogus Chinese mandarin. Probably Gallatin was not interested in entering business. At any rate, the fact that he was offered the position of minister to France gave him an excellent pretext for refusing Astor's offer. Astor thereupon decided to make his son, William B., his assistant partner.

Astor greatly extended his foreign trade after the war. Canton and New York were no longer the only ports concerned, for various European ports as well as the Pacific Coast of America came to be closely associated with the Orient. Sometimes three fleets of vessels belonging to Astor were operating simultaneously, one between New York and Europe, another between New York and China, and a third in the Pacific Ocean.

In this complicated trade, in which a ship might be gone several years on a trading voyage, it was necessary to have efficient, resourceful ship captains. Astor wanted his directions followed, but also expected his captains and agents to be aware of conditions affecting the market and to act in his best interests as information came to hand. Excerpts from a letter to one of his captains in 1813 illustrate this point:

Dear Sir:

I hand you invoices & bill of lading over my part of the Hannibals Cargo, which is consigned to you, & which, as you will see, amounts to about $60,000. you have also note of freight to be paid on tobacco & Coffee amounting to $27,143 77/100, which is to be paid in spanish dollars or at the current rate of exchange at the port of discharge. . . . With the Cargo you will see, that the best is done, & I would like to have the proceeds vested, if possible it could be done in Season & that it can be shipp'd with safety in articles as per enclosed list—the danish Lambs wool & furs or Hare & Coney wool are at present very good articles, as they are in demand, and pay no duty—they are therefore very desirable—and if these articles say the looking glass plates & danish Lambs wool could be had by detaining the ship, I think it would be worth while to do so . . . it would of course, when the Cargo could be assorted accordingly, be of great importance, then you & Mr. Cambrelling will think, how that is best to be done—perhaps the ship could under foreign colour go to some port direct & get a Cargo . . . it may be best to abide by the first plan for the ship, if peace, to go to Canton or come here, but if no peace then you must exercise your judgment [Astor, writing during the War of 1812, is trying to evade the British].

. . . If you get to Amsterdam you might as well think to contract for some of the new loan, say $3 or 400,000. I will keep this sum on hand for some time to come—the last sales there were at 92 as exchange is at 5 to 7½ above par it would bring it to 97 to 99½, which would do well in time of war & not bad in time of Peace—the money must of course be paid in Amsterdam as other wise I should lose the exchange, but if they pay the money here, I would not sell less than 95. . . . If you make Sale, you may probably get me the Commission to be agent here, for receiving the Interest on the Stock, which in time might lead to something more important. . . . I do not wish to leave any of my property on the Continent unsold, but wish to have the business finally finnish'd . . .—I suppose the fine [otters] would sell in Canton at 6 to 6½, perhaps 7$—the common at about $5, from which you may judge, whether best to sell in Europe or ship them to Canton, if a Vessel does go, if not, they must of course be sold, for the most that can be had. . . .

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A significant product added to Astor's trade in the Pacific at this time was the sandalwood of the Hawaiian Islands, which was much in demand for incense-burning in Chinese temples. Sandalwood was a royal monopoly and was cut on shares for the Hawaiian king by his chiefs, the work being done by commoners for little or no compensation. An ingenious captain and an unscrupulous chief could sometimes get together on the trade to their mutual profit, in that way by-passing the king. Indeed, Astor recommended this as more expeditious, though "clandestine."

In exchange for wood, the king and the chiefs bought quantities of goods. Astor's large capital enabled him to sell superior goods at a low price, so that his captains had a distinct advantage over their rivals. Those low prices were conditioned on receiving payment in wood at once, and thus Astor's ships spent a minimum of time at the Islands, allowing the ships to arrive at Canton early in the season, secure the best prices in the market, and get back to New York before the market for China goods there was flooded.

The complicated nature of the foreign trade of Astor, in contrast to the voyage of the *Severn* a few years earlier, and the place of the Pacific in that trade can best be indicated by an excerpt quoted from Astor's biographer:

> Let us imagine, then, that in some particular year after the end of the War of 1812 Astor finds himself in possession of a considerable quantity of assorted furs. Some of these are sold in the fur market of New York; a few are shipped to other ports in the United States. Those in which we are particularly interested are, however, sent as freight to various ports in England and on the Continent, of which London, Hamburg, and Le Havre are typical examples.
>
> In return for these furs, from London come drygoods and hardware, such as blankets, cutlery and muskets. From Hamburg, perhaps, are received iron, lead, and gin. Le Havre gives drygoods of a somewhat finer quality than those furnished by London. At New York some of these goods are, perhaps, offered in the open market. Some of the blankets, cutlery, muskets, lead, iron, gin, and other suitable articles are sent into the interior to be sold to the Indians for furs. But those which we are especially concerned in following are loaded on a vessel, intended for the Pacific Ocean. This vessel, perhaps, touches first at one of the Hawaiian Islands, where a miscellaneous assortment of goods from her cargo is sold on short credit because of the low prices made possible by Astor's large capital. Rum is popular, as are the fine textiles from Le Havre. Leaving the natives to collect the sandalwood for which the goods are exchanged, the vessel sails next for Norfolk Sound to trade with the Russians for seal skins and the fur of the sea otter. At Norfolk Sound, also, rum is popular, but there is a demand for general merchandise of all kinds. Perhaps some muskets and ammunition will be sold to the natives, if this can be done without arousing the suspicions of the Russians. Then the vessel may drop down to the vicinity of the Columbia River and sell guns, powder, shot, knives, rum, and all sorts of metalwork to the natives. On the coast of California general merchandise again meets a ready market among the inhabitants, though before 1818 one must be on the lookout for the Spanish authorities. Having pretty well disposed of the cargo they took on board in New York, the captain and supercargo decide to return to the Islands. Here they take on the sandalwood which has been cut for them . . . and with this and the furs from Norfolk Sound, Columbia River, and California—perhaps some silver and pearl-shell from the last-named place—they sail to Canton.
>
> Here sandalwood and furs are bartered for teas, silks, nankeens, chinaware, sugar, spices, etc.—a cargo sure to meet with a ready sale at New York. But there are markets nearer to Canton than any city of the United States. Back to the Hawaiian Islands they head. The wives of the chiefs are impressed by the beautiful Chinese silks. What matter that their storehouses are already piled with goods sufficient to last a generation? There is plenty of sandalwood on

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the mountains, plenty of commoners to cut and carry it to the seashore free of charge. Soon a part of the Canton cargo has been sold and the ship's sails are again set for the coast of the Americas. This time the cargo is not so suitable for the Indian trade, but the Russians at New Archangel and the Spaniards of California are ready to purchase teas, silks, and nankeens in exchange for seal skins, sea-otter furs, silver, and pearl-shell. Moreover, farther to the south are Ecuador, Peru, and Chile, which have recently cast off the Spanish yoke and thrown open their ports to the trade of the whole world. So ho for Guayaquil [a seaport in Ecuador], for Callao [a seaport in Peru], for Coquimbo [a seaport in Chile], where the rest of the cargo taken on board at Canton may be sold for red copper and white specie [silver]! Then back to the Islands to stow away odorous sandalwood beside the bales of glossy skins of the seal and the otter, the copper ingots, and the kegs of specie.

Once again at Canton, a China cargo is taken on board, but this time the vessel at last clears for her home port from which she sailed three or four years ago. At New York . . . some of the goods are sold at auction, some over the counter of Astor's own shop, some are shipped as freight to other ports in the United States and to the West Indies. Some, perhaps in company with furs from the Great Lakes and the Missouri, are shipped to Hamburg and Le Havre. We, however, shall devote our attention to those which are loaded on brigs and schooners, sometimes belonging to John Jacob Astor or to the Astor firm. The vessels clear for the Mediterranean, and sail away through the Straits of Gibraltar and on to the eastern end of the great inland sea. Here at Smyrna part of the China cargo is exchanged for Turkey opium. The brig then turns back on her course to Gibraltar, where the remainder of her China cargo is exchanged for quicksilver, specie, and lead, and the vessel clears once more for her home port.

At New York the vessels are unloaded. Some of the opium and quicksilver may be advertised for sale in the New York newspapers, but a large proportion of the products of this Mediterranean cruise—opium, quicksilver, lead, and specie—is loaded on board an Astor vessel. Beneath the hatches are also stowed away bales of the choicest furs from the interior of North America, red-fox skins, beaver, and land-otter furs, much inferior in value to the sea otters and seals of the North West Coast, but still of a type to meet with a ready sale in the Canton fur market. There are also a number of kegs containing ginseng and perhaps a little cotton and cochineal [red dye]. This time the vessel proceeds directly to Canton, sells her cargo for the usual teas, nankeens, silks, chinaware, and cassia [a spice similar to cinnamon], and returns at once to New York, having been gone for less than a year. There her cargo is dispensed in much the same way as the cargo of the ship which we followed on her return from the Pacific. . . .

This program itself required careful planning based on long and hazardous experience, wise selection of subordinates, and a large capital which had been amassed from literally nothing by means of hard labor and the same foresight and willingness to venture on a small scale which [Astor] was now exhibiting in a large field. Otherwise Astor would not have emerged from the ruck of China merchants.

On several occasions, when a business seemed still to be profitable, Astor withdrew from it. In 1823 he began to back away from the China trade, and by 1825 his withdrawal was practically complete. In the very next year there was a heavy fall in the tea market. Had he foreseen the results of overexpansion in the China trade? His withdrawal from the Pacific trade came only a short time later; in fact, the Pacific trade could hardly exist alone. The exhaustion of sandalwood, following a period of reckless cutting of the wood to meet the king's heavy debts, caused a collapse of that trade in Hawaii and struck a mortal blow to the business.

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The history of Astor's involvement with the American Fur Company during the two decades following the end of the War of 1812 is instructive. It was Astor's policy to secure the most efficient men for his organization. When he revived the American Fur Company in 1815 he brought in two veterans of the fur company, Ramsay Crooks and Robert Stuart. Both were given positions of great responsibility. Crooks became Astor's general assistant with particular responsibility for the Western Department which had its headquarters in St. Louis and Stuart headed the Northern Department with its base at Mackinac Island. Both became partners in the American Fur Company, with Crooks receiving 5 and then 20 of the 100 shares outstanding, and Stuart getting 5. As others came into the partnership, they normally took either 2½ or 5 shares. In addition the partners received salaries up to $2,000 a year.

For the subordinate positions the most successful traders were chosen, men who knew the business, who had influence with the Indians, and who were unscrupulous as traders. Some of the agents of the company were notorious for their lawlessness and their ruthless methods. Life on the frontier was rough and rugged and held particular attraction for the hardbitten type of man.

By the force of its strength the American Fur Company drove toward monopoly. Its first victory was in the region of the Great Lakes, which in 1822 became the Northern Department with Stuart as its head. In the same year the Western Department was organized with headquarters at St. Louis. In 1827 the last serious rival at St. Louis, Bernard Pratte & Company, became a partner in the Western Department, sharing equally with the American Fur Company in the profits or losses on the Mississippi below Prairie du Chien (Wisconsin) and on the Missouri and its tributaries. Also, in that same year the Columbia Fur Company, veteran and ruthless traders operating in both the Northern and Western departments, became partners in the American Fur Company in establishing the Upper Missouri Outfit (to be managed by the leading partner in the Columbia Fur Company).

When opposition to the American Fur Company had been driven off in a given area, the territory was organized as a part of a department and responsibility was definitely allocated. As heads of departments, Stuart, Crooks, and to some extent the St. Louis partners were responsible to Astor. The head of each outfit, or subdivision, was responsible to those in charge of the department, the clerks at trading posts were under the trader who managed the outfit, and the *engagés*, who went out for furs, were the humble servitors of the trading post clerk.

In 1834 Astor withdrew from the American Fur Company. He had for some time talked of retiring. Though he complained of the state of the fur business, the fact that he had passed three score and ten and was in ill health probably accounted sufficiently for his retirement. His interest in the Western Department was sold to Pratte, Chouteau & Co., of St. Louis, and the Northern Department was taken over by a group headed by Ramsay Crooks. By 1835, after a short period of liquidation, Astor had ended his connection with the fur trade and with commerce, the business in which he had been engaged for 50 years. It is worth noting that within seven years the Northern Department, under Ramsay Crooks, was in bankruptcy.

Astor's Investments, Principally Real Estate

In his fur trade and foreign trade Astor was a business person of the old order. In his interest in railroads, banks, insurance companies, hotels, theaters, and real estate he was making a transition to the new order by investing in the many specialized ventures that were growing out of the tumultuous economic changes of the time.

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Astor seems to have followed closely the rise of new investment opportunities. From his purchase of a share in the Tontine Coffee House in 1792 in New York until late in his life he is known to have invested in a number of insurance companies. From 1816 to 1838 he was sufficiently interested in insurance at various times to hold directorships in one or more of four companies, but he was never as heavily involved in this field as in his other types of investments.

Like most moneyed persons of his time, Astor was interested in banking. As early as 1791 he held shares in New York's first bank. He took part in organizing the Second Bank of the United States and became one of its directors, representing the government, as well as president of the New York branch. From 1819 to 1826 he took little part in American banking because he spent most of his time in Europe. After 1829 he purchased stock in more than a dozen banking institutions. A large part of his investment was in banks in Albany, Utica, Oswego, and Rochester, but he also invested heavily in the banks of New York City. In his will were mentioned from 500 up to 1,604 shares in such corporations as the Bank of North America in Philadelphia and the Manhattan Company, the Merchants Bank, and the Mechanics Bank, all in New York.

About the same time that Astor retired from shipping he became interested in advancing inland transportation, at first canals but principally railroads. In 1828 he participated in financing the Mohawk & Hudson Railroad, taking 500 out of 3,000 shares and serving as a director. In the next 20 years his investments in transportation were few but not small—for instance, 70 shares of the Camden & Amboy, investment in the Philadelphia & Trenton, and a loan of $150,000 to the Delaware-Raritan Canal. For some time after the panic of 1837 he was not particularly interested in railroads, but by 1847 he was convinced that they had good promise and started to invest heavily in them shortly before his death.

Astor also invested in federal, state, and municipal bonds. In the 1830s he purchased U.S. securities in Europe below par to hold until they were to be redeemed shortly thereafter. The retirement of the U.S. debt during Andrew Jackson's administration ended Astor's investments in early federal loans. The Mexican War loans again placed federal securities on the market, and Astor bought heavily, probably for trust funds for his heirs. He invested similarly in the securities of states. In 1826 and 1828 he bought $1.1 million of Ohio six percent bonds, which rose considerably after he had acquired them. He also invested in Pennsylvania loans and took smaller amounts of loans of Louisiana, Massachusetts, Indiana, and other states.

The outstanding investment interest of Astor, however, was real estate. In this he was following the usual practice of the general merchant, who in earlier times, since there were few, if any, bonds available, had characteristically turned to land for investing surplus capital. During his whole business career Astor invested in lands. At first, this was merely a side interest; he purchased land when he thought an especially good opportunity presented itself, or he acquired it on mortgage. In the last years of his life, real estate came to be Astor's dominating interest, partly because his son and business partner, William B. Astor, was very successful in that area.

In 1806, in company with another New Yorker, he bought the Park Street Theatre for $50,000, and in 1828 he bought the City Hotel, the largest in New York. Even more important was the erection in 1834 of the Astor Hotel (originally the Park). The hotel contained 300 rooms and was valued at $750,000. Yet Astor's real estate interest lay chiefly in lands and not in improvements on them. Indeed, he rarely improved the lands that he owned and was sometimes accused of holding lots that were eyesores to their neighbors.

The real estate ventures that made Astor a rich and famous landlord were those that took place on Manhattan Island. Until 1820 the bulk of Astor's real estate was purchased with profits from his commercial business, and there is a close correlation between the rise and fall in land investments

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and changes in income from the China and fur trades. From 1820 to 1834, another source of funds for land investments became of much greater importance: the income from real estate. During that period Astor's income from land investments was sufficient to finance the $445,000 that he put into property. From 1835 until his death, Astor's income from rents alone was more than the whole amount he had invested in land.

It has been said that Astor secured his lands at unreasonably low cost through foreclosures, purchases from indigent heirs, and the acquisition of tidewater lots from New York City at a low valuation. In fact he did acquire property in all of these ways, but more often in straightforward purchases at full value. During his entire career Astor became owner of 70 pieces of property by foreclosure out of 500 mortgages held by him. Most of his foreclosures followed the depression of 1837. Frequently Astor carried mortgages beyond the agreed time, so long as the mortgagor maintained interest payments; if the mortgagor failed to pay interest, Astor foreclosed promptly.

Astor also acquired land worth well over $100,000 from George Clinton of New York, who had spent himself into insolvency through his political activities, and from Clinton's more or less distressed heirs. Astor did buy much of his land during depressed periods. In the three depression years 1837-39 he invested in Manhattan real estate an annual average of $160,000, which was four times as much as the annual average of the other two periods when he was active in real estate—1800-1809 and 1826-34. The popular idea that once having bought, Astor never sold is false. Overall, Astor spent nearly $1.8 million on property; some of this property he in turn sold for a total of nearly $1 million, no doubt at a substantial profit.

Two types of leases also figure in Astor's real estate ventures. In 1803-5 he purchased the Trinity Church leases from Aaron Burr, who was forced to sell because of debt. The parcel of somewhat over 241 lots was purchased at approximately $120,000, the lease to expire in 1866. The other was the lease of water lots from the city; that is, Astor was given the right to reclaim land under water that bordered on land owned by him. In 1806-29 he received about a dozen public grants, for which he usually agreed to pay $32.50 annually. The understanding was that Astor would fill up the lots and otherwise improve them, but he did not do so, and sometimes the lots became public nuisances.

In acquiring Manhattan real estate, Astor had a definite policy as to the location of his lands. He did not generally buy the highest priced lands in the heart of the city, but chose rather to buy far enough out so that prices were still low and yet in a location close enough to the center so that the land would soon be in greater demand.

When Astor died in 1848, his property was estimated to be worth from $20 to $30 million. He was the first American to leave a fortune valued in eight figures. (Stephen Girard of Philadelphia left about $7.5 million on his death in 1831.) The Astor family remained the richest in the country until the Vanderbilt railroad fortune was established.

All agreed that the greatest source of Astor's wealth was to be found in the increase in value of his lands in Manhattan. It was through his vision of the future of New York City that he was able to invest his profits from trade. Just before he died, Astor reportedly said, "Could I begin life again, knowing what I know, and had the money to invest, I would buy every foot of land on the Island of Manhattan."

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Appendix A

A Discussion of Accounting in the Mercantile World of the Early National Period

What follows is a discussion of how accounts were kept in the firm of the wealthy Baltimore merchant, Robert Oliver. In its essentials, Oliver's system is probably typical of that of other major merchants such as Astor.

* * * * *

Accounting

Price and market information came to the Oliver countinghouse from outside sources. Inside the office, however, lay thick Journals and Ledgers and other bookkeeping records of the firm's transactions. Meticulously kept by the double-entry system of bookkeeping, these records were indispensable to the routine management of business. They informed the Olivers how much they owed, and to whom; how much others owed them, and when the payments were due. They showed the firm where its capital was, and in what forms: how much was in goods of various kinds, in claims against debtors at home and abroad, in the countinghouse and warehouse, in stocks, cash, and in the bank; and they showed changes in form and value wrought by daily business. . . .

The accounts also constituted a record of past investments and their results. Did information on past gains and losses help Oliver decide what goods to buy and where to ship them?

The question must be answered in the negative. In the first place, a very large number of "Adventure" accounts, the type of account usually employed to record the costs and sales proceeds of shipments did not show the net outcome of a voyage. Whenever the Olivers imported or exported in a vessel they owned wholly or in part—and such shipments were very numerous—some of the costs of the voyage were recorded in other types of accounts. The value of the cargo, costs of loading it on board, and insurance on the goods, were charged to the Adventure account. But the cost of the vessel and her outfits, insurance, and expenditures for repairs were entered in an account erected in the name of the vessel. And to a Vessel Expense account were charged the wages of captain and crew, costs of stores and supplies, and such miscellaneous expenses as consular fees and fees paid harbor masters to stow the cargo. These various costs were sometimes consolidated. In general, vessel expenses were transferred from the Vessel Expense account to the Vessel account as soon as voyage costs were known. And sometimes the balance of gain or loss from the Adventure account was transferred to the Vessel account. But as a rule, Adventure and Vessel accounts were independently closed to Profit and Loss. The net result of the voyage emerged only after the latter was itself closed to the partners' Capital accounts: but it almost never emerged as a separate entry.

The number of instances is also large where even the gross profit or loss of what was essentially one venture is found partly in one account, and partly in another. When the Olivers bought flour, for example, they charged the purchase price to a Flour account. But when they exported it they sometimes valued it at a figure higher than cost. When they did so, part of the profit was in the Flour account, and the other part in the Adventure account. Sometimes the article sold for less than the value assigned to it at the time of export. In either case the actual gross gain or loss emerged only after both the Commodity and Adventure accounts had been closed to Profit and Loss, and the latter to Capital.

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The difficulty in determining the gross profit of a voyage becomes insoluble in many of the instances in which the Olivers imported a cargo and later re-exported all or most of it. The Olivers preferred selling their imports in Baltimore, but it was often necessary to go into new ventures to get clear of them. In one instance they were obliged to sell a cargo by making eight reshipments to different ports. Examples of multiple re-exports are numerous. The cost of the cargo was entered in the Adventure-of-import account. The value of reshipped parcels was entered in Adventure-of-re-export accounts. Frequently it is impossible, in the first place, to determine whether or not the re-exports were valued at cost. And in the second place it is frequently impossible to determine the prices at which they were sold abroad. For they were often re-exported along with other goods, and no record kept on the proceeds of the separate parcels.

Consider the case of the ship *Harmony*, which brought a coffee cargo from Batavia. Its cost was charged to the "Adventure to the East Indies" account. After her arrival in Baltimore in March 1798 a very small quantity of coffee was sold locally. Almost all of it was reshipped to Rotterdam in April 1798, and to Emden in October 1798. At the time of these re-exports the Olivers apparently valued the coffee at the rate they were then selling it for in Baltimore, crediting the East Indian account for these sums. Having thus disposed of the *Harmony's* inward cargo they calculated they had made a "gain on her . . . Voyage" of $23,839. But in truth it was a gain not on the voyage, but on the East Indian Adventure account. The gain from the importation cannot in logic be calculated apart from the results of the re-exports, for these were the means by which almost all the incoming cargo was sold. It is impossible to determine the amount of this gain because the coffee was sent to Emden along with other cargo, and while the net proceeds of the entire cargo is a matter of record, the proceeds of the Batavian coffee alone were unknown.

In sum, many Adventure accounts reveal the gross profit of a voyage, but in many instances the gross profit is found partly in a Commodity account and partly in an Adventure account. Often the gross profit is in two or more Adventure accounts; often it cannot be determined at all. These complexities are compounded by the Olivers' practice of using an Adventure account to record the costs and sales proceeds not of one voyage, but of two or more. Their "Adventure to Vera Cruz" account ran for three and a half years before being closed to Profit and Loss, and the resulting gain came from a very large number of shipments. In view of the uncertainties generated by the interrelationships of accounts pertaining to a single investment, one can often refer with confidence not to the profit or loss of a particular venture, but only to the gross result of a particular account. . . .

Investment Decisions

Very frequently, then, Oliver could not have consulted any single account to ascertain the net result of a particular venture. This is sufficient reason to believe that he did not base his investment decisions on bookkeeping records of past gain or loss. But this is quite a distinct matter from his desire to assemble, at the time he was considering an investment decision,. the various factors of cost that would affect the net profit of a voyage. That he wished to know the net profit a contemplated venture would yield is clearly shown by a detail calculation made for the benefit of John Craig in May 1797. He planned to send the *Harmony* to Batavia for a return cargo, a voyage he expected would require nine months, and to send out $24,000 in specie which to purchase it. Inviting Craig to take a one-third interest in the venture, he proceeded to outline "the actual profits of such a voyage." The *Harmony* would carry 500,000 pounds of either coffee or sugar, on the assumption that the return cargo would consist of 250,000 pounds of each, the costs in Batavia and expected sales price in Baltimore would leave the net profit shown in **Table A-1**. (Oliver figured on $60,000 in insurance because the cost of the sugar, coffee, vessel and outfits, and of the insurance itself, amounted approximately to that total.)

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Table A-1 Oliver's Calculation of Net Profits from a Cargo of Batavian Sugar and Coffee (May 1797)

	Costs		Sales Proceeds
$22,500 –	250,000 lbs. coffee @ 9¢ p lb. "on board" [i.e., charges included]	$55,000 –	Of coffee (@ 27¢ p lb. or 22¢ "clear of duty")
8,333 –	250,000 lbs. sugar @ 3-1/3¢ p lb. "inclug.g charges" at Batavia	32,364 –	Of sugar (@ $16 p 112 lbs., or $14.50 minus duty)
10,000 –	Cost of vessel	10,000 –	Of the vessel
8,000 –	Outfits "including Coppering"		
12,000 –	Insurance on $60,000 out & home, @ 20%		
1,200 –	Expenses at Batavia		
4,800 –	Wages of crew, @ $400 p month		
2,000 –	Wages of supercargo		
$68,633 –	[sic] Total Costs	$97,364	Total Proceeds
	NET PROFIT: $28,731		

Oliver also made alternative calculations on the assumption that the return cargo would consist entirely of sugar, or entirely of coffee. In these calculations all rates of cost and sales remained the same. A sugar cargo would cost double the sum given in the table, or $16,666, and one of coffee would cost $45,000. While sugar alone would cost less than a combined cargo, and the cost of insurance would be less, the sales proceeds would also be less, with the result that the cargo would yield only $23,662. Exactly opposite conditions would obtain in the case of a cargo solely of coffee, and the profit would amount to $33,600.

In sum, we have on the one hand a merchant who calculated the net profit of a contemplated venture, and on the other a set of records so kept that it was frequently difficult or impossible to determine the amount of it. From the point of view of the bases of Oliver's investment decisions the inconsistency is unimportant. Common sense suggests, and no evidence negates the view that gains or loss from a past investment could not be considered in the light of changed conditions. Gain or loss in the past had derived from the difference between purchase and sales prices. What mattered was not past prices and their results, but present and future prices: not past, but current market information, and sound judgment. In 1804 the Olivers wrote houses in London and Liverpool: "Experience having satisfied us that England is generally a bad Market for our exports we determin'd many years ago to make no more Shipments to that quarter. . . . It is not likely that we shall ever make any Shipments to England. . . ." At the same time, they acknowledged that "circumstances" might "induce us to change our minds." Two years later they exported cochineal to London. Experience was of far less importance than fresh news.

Source: Stuart W. Bruchey, *Robert Oliver, Merchant of Baltimore* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), pp. 135–141.

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Appendix B

Chronology of Astor's Life and Career

1763	Born in Waldorf, Germany, in the Rhineland.
1777	Confirmed in Lutheran church; left school to help father.
1779–83	Worked in London.
1784	In April came to New York. Returned to London to sell furs he had bought.
1785	Married Sarah Todd in New York.
1786	Set up small shop for sale of musical instruments and carried on fur business.
1788	Fur trade became Astor's leading business interest. Bought furs in Montreal to ship to London and Rotterdam.
1789	Made his first two purchases of New York real estate.
1794	Bought land in New York's back country.
1795	Jay's Treaty opened direct trade with Canada and required the British to give up frontier posts on United States territory.
1797	Astor's importing business included dry goods, cutlery, powder and shot.
1799	Began to advertise sale of oriental goods.
1800	Said to be worth $250,000. Owned share in vessel sent to China. Began to invest more heavily in New York City real estate.
1807–08	Foreign trade checked by international difficulties and embargo.
1808	American Fur Company organized by Astor with capital of $1,000,000.
1808–09	Astor's *Beaver* sent to China despite embargo, returning with cargo of teas, silks, and nankeens.
1810	Pacific Fur Company with capital of $400,000, organized to establish Astoria on the Northwest Coast.
1811	Post established in Astoria. The South West Company organized by Astor and partners of the Michilimackinac Company.
1812–14	Astor's business badly damaged by war.
1813	Bought $2,000,000 of a United States loan.
1813	Astoria and Pacific Fur Company gave way to British.
1816	Act passed giving Americans monopoly on fur trade in United States. Astor gained foothold in St. Louis and extended his interests in the Pacific.
1817	Astor purchased full control of the South West Company.
1819–48	Astor left work of management chiefly to son, who had become his partner in 1815.
1822	United States "factories" for trade with Indians closed.
1825	Astor discontinued using his own ships in the China trade, except for a brief period in 1827.
1828	Astor's Pacific trade brought to a close. Had monopoly of fur trade in United States.
1834	Withdrew from American Fur Company.
1834–48	Interested exclusively in investments and lending money on real estate security.
1848	Died, leaving a fortune of about $20,000,000.

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