

## Edward Bliss Emerson's Transnational Journal: Danish West Indies, Puerto Rico, New England, 1831-1834<sup>1</sup>

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*The journal and letters written by Edward Bliss Emerson in the Caribbean provide exciting, idyllic, and at times troublesome visions of that region, but also insights on the life of a sick, poor, religious and brilliant young man. Emerson's reflections on life in St. Croix remain unquoted, and although brief excerpts from the Puerto Rico portion of the journal appeared in print in 1959 and 1991, his more extensive text supplements the contemporary publications, which only praised the colonial administration. A third, and equally important location, is the implicit base for his perspective – New England in the period of Jacksonian populist democracy. The journal presents terse reminders of daily activities, mixed with extensive descriptions of landscape, exotic civic and religious observances, business and social customs, fruits, music and sports, with personal meditations on Edward's readings, his search for health, and his adaptation to a new life away from his family, with little prospect of wealth or longevity. His letters include periodic reckonings of the benefits and disadvantages that he saw to life in Puerto Rico. This diverse eyewitness account represents an important resource for researchers of Caribbean society and culture. Keywords: Travel Writing, Personal Journals, Invalids, History of the Caribbean, Caribbean Environment, Jacksonian Era, Edward Bliss Emerson*

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The journal and letters written by Edward Bliss Emerson in the Caribbean provide exciting, idyllic, and at times troublesome visions of those regions but also insights on the life of a sick, poor, religious and brilliant young man. The purpose of this essay is to provide the readers with a historical context and an overview to Edward's writings, and a guide to the subjects discussed at greater length in subsequent articles by Géigel (2014), Mayo-Santana (2014), Rabionet (2014), Ramírez de Arellano (2014a, b) and Simounet (2014). To provide context, only the more important circumstances have been explained, with reference to the historical literature and the Emerson family correspondence.

The name Emerson is associated with a philosophical outlook developed in New England in the middle third of the nineteenth century. It asserted the human capacity to transcend the material world and discern a spiritual state through introspection and self-reliance. It urged the appreciation of nature and prized liberty of conscience and original intellectual responses. These views were presented by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and other writers known as Transcendentalists (Mayo-Santana 2014). Ralph Waldo's views began to reach wide circulation with the publication of his essay "Nature" (1836), but since

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<sup>1</sup> Edward B. Emerson's Caribbean journal and letters can be accessed online at <http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/cdm/ref/collection/librosraros/id/1701>. Unless otherwise specified, his letters from that period can be found in that text. Permissions to quote from Edward Emerson's journal and letters have been granted by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and are gratefully acknowledged.

his early youth he had written extensively on the subjects of religion, philosophy, duty and nature, in correspondence with those we might judge his closest peers – his brothers.

The Emerson brothers were raised with the expectation that academic achievement and religious devotion would uphold the family's learned tradition, and earn them social standing and economic independence. William (1801-1868), the eldest, and Ralph Waldo, the second, prepared for a religious career as Unitarian ministers. Nevertheless, William became a lawyer, and Waldo left his position as pastor very early. Edward Bliss Emerson (1805-1834) and his youngest brother Charles Chauncy (1808-1836) trained as lawyers. One sibling, Robert Bulkeley (1807-1859), suffered from a physical or psychological illness that impaired his intellectual development, and he earned his keep as a farm laborer, when not interned in an institution. Although sickness was never far from the family, all brothers worked from their early youths. The scholars earned a living as teachers before, during, or shortly after their graduation from Harvard College, where Edward and Charles gained particular distinction.

Edward's health problems included symptoms that would now merit the diagnosis of pulmonary tuberculosis (Ramírez de Arellano 2014b), and a psychotic breakdown that forced his commitment to an insane asylum for five months in 1828. A recrudescence of chest troubles forced his migration from New York to the Caribbean in December of 1830. A year later, his youngest brother, also affected by what was called a bad cold and by great debility, joined him in Puerto Rico for the winter. Both men died young: Edward in San Juan in 1834 and Charles in New York in 1836. (For a detailed description of the family and its correspondence, see Bosco & Myerson, 2006).

### **The United States, the Danish West Indies and Puerto Rico – Three Societies in Transition**

The United States that Edward left in 1830 was an expanding, changing nation. Ships brought thousands of immigrants from Europe to America, and then ships and railroads took foreigners and nationals to the states and territories on the banks of the Mississippi. Andrew Jackson had been elected president in 1828 in a contest that marked the passing of the politicians who had participated in the War of Independence and the beginnings of massive popular vote. His overwhelming victory at the polls and forceful personality resulted in an unprecedented expansion of presidential power. Nevertheless, Jackson's decisions on many issues produced violent disagreements between the opposing interests of regions (north and south, coast and plains), economies (agriculture, industry, finance, and trade), classes and races. Edward Emerson's journal alludes to the controversies on the elimination of the Bank of the United States, the tariff for imported manufactures, the expulsion ("removal") of Creek Indians from Georgia, slavery, and the alleged power of individual states to declare inapplicable ("nullify") an Act of Congress that they considered unconstitutional (Parsons, 2009; Tocqueville 1835-1840/1990). Edward feared, with many in his country, that such polarization, especially regarding the institution of slavery, would bring about a civil war. The conflict exploded three decades later.

Edward sailed for St. Croix in December, 1830, in spite of the Boston family's opinion that he should return home from New York (see letters of Ralph Waldo to William, 29 November, 3 and 5 December 1830 in Rusk, 1939/1966). During the nineteenth century, St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John, now the United States Virgin Islands, were Danish colonies. St. Thomas, with free port privileges, served as a regional hub for commerce. In contrast, St. Croix and St. John resembled other Caribbean islands with plantation economies. These were based on slavery, the production of sugar, and the export of its derivatives. As Edward's journal describes, the St. Croix landscape was marked by windmills, a source of

energy for grinding the cane. This industry, at its peak in the second half of the eighteenth century, promoted business and family ties with England and its colonies in North America (Cabrera Salcedo, 2010). By 1800, the majority of planters were Englishmen. Three decades later, the price of sugar had decreased markedly and most estates in St. Croix were in debt and at risk of foreclosure by the government, for arrears in taxes (Jensen, 2012; Lewisohn, 1970). Emerson's journal provides evidence that the island also derived some profit from health tourism. English had become the common language of the islanders, and Edward found many North Americans, even Massachusetts acquaintances, who had moved to St. Croix to avoid the cold climate and to strengthen their constitution (Turnbull, 2009). Almost 50 years later, the island was still promoted in the United States as "a winter residence for invalids from Northern climates" (Lewisohn, 1970; Kalmer, 1874; Knox, 1852; See Géigel, 2014).

In the Danish West Indies, a large proportion of business and land proprietors were foreigners, and government allowed religious diversity among them. In contrast, the culture of Blacks and slaves was silenced. In particular, private feasts and "drum dances" required official authorization even after general emancipation (Boyer, 2010). Racial tensions were not absent, but the pressure for change occasionally came from the rulers. By 1831, the acting governor-general of the islands was Peter von Scholten, son of a previous holder of the post, born and raised in Denmark but with 20 years' experience in St. Thomas before he was appointed its governor in 1823. In July 1848, in response to a mostly peaceful slave revolt, von Scholten decreed the immediate abolition of slavery, to the surprise of the planters. He was forced to resign and return to Denmark shortly thereafter, although the slaves remained free (Lawaetz, 1999, Lewisohn, 1970).

In contrast to St. Croix, Puerto Rico had developed an expanding economy (Cruz Monclova, 1952; Santamaría García, 2008). Agricultural products for export were diverse, and included coffee, sugar, cattle, cotton, and tobacco (Córdoba, 1838/2001). There were also differences in the political and social climates of the two islands. Puerto Rico was ruled by a military government, headed from 1823 to 1837 by Miguel de la Torre, a veteran of the unsuccessful Spanish efforts against Venezuelan independence. The Roman Catholic, racially discriminatory state he represented allowed no dissent. The Island's economic boom was in part the result of a royal order (*Cédula de Gracias*, 1815) that offered tax exclusions and land to foreign immigrants, as long as they practiced Catholicism (Hernández Rodríguez, 1989; Rosario Rivera, 1995). Nevertheless, authorities did not enforce religious observance on foreigners, beyond respect for local practices and the prohibition of the rites of any other denomination (see Journal, 2 September 1831; Martínez Fernández, 2002, 2010). These incentives attracted hundreds of immigrant families with their money, implements, and slaves. In contrast to the situation in Cuba and St. Croix, economic conditions in Puerto Rico failed to attract settlers from the United States. Until 1898, their role in agriculture was negligible, although it was important in trade (García Muñoz, 2010). The best example is Edward's employer, Sidney Mason, whose commercial establishment was based on importation and exportation, not on the sale of crops produced at his Hacienda Santa Barbara. The great landowner in this journal (briefly mentioned on 19 June 1831) is a Puerto Rican, José Ramón Fernández. His prescient Spanish parents financed a course of studies in Spain, England and the United States, so he could properly administer his inheritance. Eventually, he became greatly influential in agriculture, commerce and (extremely conservative) politics, and is better known by his title of nobility, Marqués de la Esperanza.

Sugarcane was the base of the Caribbean economy, and affected the landscape and the daily lives of a large proportion of the population, rich and poor. Most island residents were therefore acquainted with the steps involved in the production of sugar. Some sugarcane fields would be planted with stalks from October to November, to allow them to grow 15 to

18 months before they were cut down. In other lots, the cane would grow from stalks left from the previous crop. Harvest, from January to June, was a frantic season. It was necessary to cut the cane when it had reached its maximum sugar content, and to grind it as soon as possible, so the sucrose in the stalks would not decompose (Cabrera Salcedo, 2010; Jensen, 2012; Mintz, 1960/1974). Edward's journal frequently mentions specific routines and problems of the contemporary sugar-making technology, but never outlines the entire process. His brother Charles described it at length for a Concord audience, and is abridged here:

The ripe cane is cut in the fields, with knives or cutlasses, [...] thrown into a cart & taken to the sugar mill [...], where they are compressed between iron rollers [...]. The cane-juice flows into a leaden bed & thence into a vessel called the receiver. [...] The juice or liquor runs from the receiver to the boiling house, into a large copper called a clarifier. [...] After boiling some time, a small quantity of powdered white lime is stirred into it, in order by its alkaline properties to neutralize the acid of the juice. When quite pure and about the colour of Madeira wine, the liquor is laded into the last copper called the teache.<sup>2</sup> In the teache it is still farther evaporated until it is judged ready for the "striking," i. e. for being poured into the coolers. The coolers are shallow wooden vessels which hold about a hogshead.<sup>3</sup> Here the sugar granulates or crystallizes, separating itself from the molasses. From the coolers it is carried to the curing house where it is potted – or put into hogsheads [...] In three weeks the sugar is tolerably dry and fair."

(Charles C. Emerson, "Lecture on Porto Rico", delivered at the Concord Lyceum on 9 January 1833, transcribed by Matos Rodríguez, 1993; for recent descriptions of the process, see Jensen, 2012; Pujol, 2009)

At that time, the production of sugar was guided by the experience of "master" workers, who would determine how much lime to add (so that crystallization could occur), how long to boil, and when to "strike". The planters therefore often engaged in experiments to improve the efficiency of their system and the quality of their product (see Journal for major comments on sugar production on 14, 18, 22 January; 4 February; 18 March; 7, 21, 22 April 1831; for a detailed exposition of technological improvements in Puerto Rico and St. Croix, see Cabrera Salcedo, 2010).

New technology also affected economic and social developments. Steam-powered rollers for grinding sugarcane were introduced in Puerto Rico about 1822, but some "haciendas" continued to rely on oxen, wind or water as a source of power, and even used wooden rollers until the end of the nineteenth century (Cabrera Salcedo 2010). The efficiency of the new mills increased the demand for larger harvests and for the workers to plant them. Slave importation increased in the decade of 1830, in spite of Spain's participation in international agreements to stop the trade (Díaz Soler, 2000; Morales Carrión, 1978). Colonel George Flinter, whose slant as a Spanish government apologist was detected by Edward, published very positive accounts of the slaves' condition, and the general progress of the Island under Spanish rule (see letter from Edward to Charles, 30 Nov 1831; Flinter, 1832/1976 and 1834/2002). A severe legal code regulated the conduct and punishment of all

<sup>2</sup> Teache, variant of Tache (in Spanish, Tacho) – each pan of the series through which the juice extracted from sugarcane is passed for evaporation, especially the smallest and last of these, called specifically the striking (emptying) tache.

<sup>3</sup> Hogshead – both an object (cask or barrel) and a unit of measurement (63 gallons in the United States).

Blacks, but in contrast to Danish and most United States practice, it allowed them to congregate in dances with drums. During religious holidays, the slaves did not meet to sing in church. Their sodalities performed music and dances publicly.

Edward Emerson's journal describes a variety of celebrations. In travelers' accounts, colorful festivities receive more extensive description than the drudgery of work, but, indeed, spectacle was part of the colonial state's practice of government. Island residents were allowed little involvement in the management of public affairs, but were encouraged to show support for the Crown, its policies and officials. Contemporary satirists called it "the government of the three Bs," for balls (dancing), bottles (drinking) and betting (card games) (Brau, 1904/1966). In spite of all the holidays, much work was done, and even Edward looked forward to "the 16 fiestas of this newly opened year as valuable vacations for a compting room scribbler" (6 January 1832).

He witnessed a very promising change in the Island's administration, the establishment of the Audiencia or local court of appeals. It was expected, through legal expertise, to moderate the judgments of the governor, a military man (Journal, 3 September 1831; Carlo Altieri, 2007). The truly fundamental change everyone could foresee (in fear or hope) was the impending death of King Fernando VII, who ruled personally and had twice derogated the first Spanish Constitution (in 1814 and 1823). At his death in 1833, civil war broke out in Spain, but the administration of the colonies saw little change.

Edward's three abodes - the United States, the Danish West Indies, and Puerto Rico - were undergoing transformation through similar forces: political transition, immigration, new technology and markets, and reliance on slavery. Health concerns also connected the three countries. Diseases that thrived on the dense, poorly ventilated urban environments of Europe spread to the New World as its cities grew and travelers covered longer distances in less time.

Tuberculosis was the principal reason for Edward's removal to the Tropics. In his lifetime, the causes of the disease were poorly understood and treatment relied on lifestyle and environmental changes (Ramírez de Arellano 2014b). Affluent invalids seeking a beneficial climate became travelers to places such as the Mediterranean, the southern United States, and the Caribbean. St. Croix and Cuba became well-known as health resorts to New Englanders, probably because of the close economic links (Géigel, 2014). Puerto Rico received some of these visitors, but the Island seems not to have become an attractive haven for northerners. Perhaps it could not compete with the conveniences offered by Cuba - closer, larger, with more sources of entertainment in Havana (Lowell, 2003).

A new menace for the western hemisphere was cholera, an often rapidly fatal diarrhea, spread by contact with infected feces (sometimes through contaminated food or water). It reached America in mid-1833 and Edward learned of its effects in Boston through family correspondence and surely through newspapers. The disease reached Cuba the same year, but, surprisingly, spared Puerto Rico and the Danish islands (Jenson, Szabo, and the Duke FHI Haiti Humanities Laboratory Student Research Team, 2011). The strict quarantine measures adopted by the San Juan government and indirectly imposed on St. Thomas (see Journal, 29 October 1832) may have effectively prevented spread, but the lower volume of maritime traffic (compared to Boston and Havana), the longer voyages of ships from Europe to the Caribbean (which allowed for detection and even extinction of ship-borne epidemics), and the drought conditions in southeastern Puerto Rico may have reduced the possibility of epidemic transmission (Journal, 16 April 1832).

## Journal and Letters

A fourth country – the inner self – is cautiously revealed in Edward’s journal and the letters to his family (see the essays by Rabionet, Mayo-Santana, and Simounet, 2014). Edward routinely kept what he called a “little pocket book” (Edward’s letter to his brother William, 24 August 1830, Massachusetts Historical Society Ms N-251, item 168). It is fitting that his Caribbean journal, which corresponds with the search for a new home, starts like a captain’s log, at sea, with positions, speeds and sightings of land. The journal was used as an agenda or memorandum book to jot down reminders, and as a traveler’s journal to write extensive descriptions, later sent to relatives. His papers include long lists of letters written, with an indication of date, addressee and conveyance. None of the tropical “scenes” in the pocket book can be found in his surviving correspondence, which is an indication of the large proportion that has been lost. Many of his surviving documents are singed, which suggests that others fed the fire in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s home in 1872.

The texts combine the observations of a tourist (focused on exotic civic and religious observances, food, music, and sports), with an educated commentary on the events of the moment and an appreciation of landscape and cultures. Perhaps the necessity of his separation from family and country provoked an abundance of descriptions of flight: kites, horse races, winds, and the speed of sailing ships. Periodically he explained to his brothers the benefits and disadvantages that he saw to life in Puerto Rico. The journal entries mix the factual and the confessional. The day’s occupations, an interlocutor’s assertion or the eye-witness account of a solemnity are jotted down alongside emotions, moods, and the impressions produced by a newspaper or literary work. The style is succinct, but with sufficient detail to bring life and immediacy to the descriptions. It is expressed in a careful, apparently (but deceptively) neutral voice (see the essays by Mayo-Santana and Simounet, 2014) and occasionally signed off by a brief personal, often fanciful, observation. He attends to the concerns of what current historical analysis calls “subalterns” – slaves, the sick, and other groups marginalized in society. The notes include reasoned, sober reflections, but journals, by their nature, may present the author as a different character from the person experienced by his close acquaintances. Edward’s brothers, in their letters, occasionally mentioned their distrust of Edward’s capacity to control impulses, enthusiasms, and ambition. His mind had been once unhinged, and they never forgot the shock of his derangement.<sup>4</sup>

Through his education and later travels in Europe, Edward had become fluent in Latin, Greek and French, and familiar with Italian. He traveled to the Caribbean with a “Spanish Grammar and Exercises” (letter to William, 3 June 1831), and soon after arrival in Puerto Rico began to read *Ivanhoe* in translation. Before long, he was able to read literary classics and the local historical and statistical publications on Puerto Rico, and could write in respectable Spanish to his brother William. Nevertheless, his “ear” occasionally failed, as with the case of “íberos” for “jíbaros”, and “guiraldas” for “aguinaldos.” Perhaps he erred too with Dr. “Jorro,” an unusual last name for a physician who fails to appear in the Island’s medical histories. He comments perceptively on *Don Quijote*, the most famous work in Spanish literature, but fails to note any personal resonance to the story of a voracious reader gone mad, who regains his reason shortly before death.

The elegance of his descriptions, and particularly the causes he supported – abolition of slavery, representative government, general education, freedom of worship, assembly and

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, Ralph Waldo, Boston, 22 December 1833, to Edward: “Pray rein in that sanguine genius of yours that risks & projects so magnificently & which I can well remember from Latin School & Andover upward, & make him trot tame & safe for a year or two, for nothing is so important as your health, to which the anxieties of indebtedness will never contribute” (Rusk, 1939/1966, 1, p. 403).

petition – may suggest to readers that they converse with a contemporary. Such is not the case. His views of slaves, free Blacks and the “Spaniards” of Puerto Rico are tempered by racial and geographic determinisms and his conviction of the superiority of New England’s culture (see the essays by Mayo-Santana and Simounet, 2014). Some of his criticism was superficial and unrealistic, as when he objected to house cleaning, farm work, and shopping on Sundays, in a society where laborers worked twelve hours, six days a week, and, unlike him, had no servants (Edward’s letter to Ezra Ripley 30 October 1831). He could, nevertheless, change his views as when he recognized some advantage to “the mode of passing the Sabbath in the West Indies” (Journal, 26 June 1831; letter to Ezra Ripley, 30 October 1831; to William, 29 July 1832).

Emerson’s manuscript reflects contemporaneous conditions at different locations, thus allowing better knowledge of events at each place and their comparison. For example, in St. Croix it hardly mentions the music of the slaves, which in San Juan seems to be found everywhere. The text briefly mentions the writer’s health concerns and his preoccupation with his work and his future, and more often shows his life-long interests and tastes. As a young student away from home, he was always eager to receive fresh fruit (Bosco & Myerson, 2006). In the journal, every new tropical fruit tasted earns a comment. A tireless long-distance walker in youth,<sup>5</sup> in the Caribbean he exercised almost daily, usually as very long walks or rides on horseback, and occasionally swimming or sailing. He covered the western portion of St. Croix (both coast and mountain), and San Juan and towns along the east and west of its bay. The physical pastimes of island residents (horse racing, dancing, flying kites) figure prominently in his descriptions.

Edward recorded events and festivities that were unusual for his “eye & mind of the stranger from New England,” but marked well-known cycles in Caribbean life. He noted the tropical seasons, with emphasis on the weather and the concern about hurricanes. The cycles of commerce are punctuated by the journal’s mention of ships’ speeds, two-way voyages, and commodity prices, while the agricultural seasons are reflected, but not specifically explained. Coffee processing is mentioned in December (1831), because its harvest took place from September to December (García Muñiz, 2010). The many holidays he witnessed in Puerto Rico were mostly related to the Catholic calendar and its celebration of saints, the Christmas period and Christ’s passion and resurrection. Government feasts were mostly special occasions, except such as the king’s patron saint day (May 30) and the memorial of his restoration of absolute monarchy in 1823 (October 1). Edward also marked two very personal dates, his birthday (April 17) and United States Independence (July 4).

The notes for Puerto Rico correspond to the period when Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous political analyst, toured the United States. The coincidence is worth noting, because a reader might be tempted to consider the observations of both travelers (highly intelligent, educated and critical young men) as equally valid. Tocqueville visited the United States on an official mission to examine prison conditions, but his private purpose was to analyze the operations of “democracy in America” (as he came to call his famous book). He interviewed persons in many sections of society in different parts of the country, compared their responses, and thought long and carefully about his analysis before it was published (Damrosch, 2010). In contrast, the surviving fragments of Edward’s correspondence offer no evidence of an intention to systematically analyze the society in which he lived.

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<sup>5</sup> William to Edward Emerson, 12 June 1819 (Houghton Library, b Ms Am 1280.226 (2951): “My dear pedestrian brother, what wonders have your two feet accomplished! First, a tour from Waltham to Concord and back again! Then another to Boston!! And to crown these Herculean labours, a journey thence to Concord!!!”

Edward noticed the government's fear and obstruction of private initiative, which it "considered mutinous" (21 August 1831), yet he uncritically repeated the stereotype of an idle people (25 August 1831), described the residents of Puerto Rico as ignorant, and criticized a society in which money – rather than wisdom, skill, or personal virtue – was the source of prestige (Journal, 26 June and 7 August 1831, 16 August 1833, 5 April 1834; 3 July 1831; 20 July 1832). He arrived (6 April 1831) with some notion of Spanish character, formed from his readings and his travels. He found that "men do not strive here as in New England after the perfect man. It is present pastime or gainful industry or chance which they follow as their stars" (Journal, 3 July 1831). Undoubtedly many islanders, as people everywhere, did not care for self-improvement as much as for entertainment or wealth, but the Catholics around him would have considered human perfectibility a laughable, if not heretical, idea. Curiously, although Tocqueville explored a very different society, he, too, addressed these notions in his description of the United States. Tocqueville asserted that "equality suggests to the Americans the idea of the indefinite perfectibility of man," and he considered that the distinction based on wealth is a characteristic of "democratic times" (1835-1840/1990: 240-241, 331). It is inappropriate to rebut Edward Emerson's journal notes in Puerto Rico with Tocqueville's extensive analysis for the United States, but the contrast is useful to identify generally-held ideas at the time, and to show how the journal, written in the Caribbean, reflects the culture of the author's native land (see Mayo-Santana's and Simounet's essays, 2014).

Emerson was well-informed about the history and political status of the Island, because he read Pedro Tomás de Córdova's *Memorias geográficas, históricas, económicas y estadísticas de la isla de Puerto Rico*, published in San Juan from 1831 to 1833. Their first volume presented Friar Íñigo Abbad's *Historia ... de la isla de... Puerto Rico*, published in Madrid in 1788. In spite of his readings, Emerson's surviving texts do not mention the subordinate position of Puerto Rico as a colony. He compared the island to a "docile child" in the way it followed the mother country in its religion (letter to Ezra Ripley 30 October 1831). He referred to its inhabitants as Spaniards or "Iberos," never Puerto Ricans, perhaps because the colony seemed to him an integral part of Spain. He echoed the view proclaimed by the government, in spite of its constant vigilance for local insurgency or slave revolts.

Edward heard Colonel George Flinter read from his manuscripts, and helped him obtain estimates of costs from editors in Boston, but at the same time perceived that the colonel was too eager to please authorities to be impartial in his description of Puerto Rico (Journal, 19 June, 9 August, 8 September 1831; 8-11 February 1832; Edward's letter to Charles 30 November 1831). It must be noted that Emerson assisted not only friends of the government, but also those it held under suspicion. Although to oblige Mr. Mason, he helped Francisco Goyena (1805-1857), a Puerto Rican military officer separated from the Spanish army for liberal tendencies, in trying to get a miniature portrait of general La Torre printed by an engraver in Boston (Edward's letter to William, 6 December 1832; Vidal, 2011).

Edward praised freedom of action as a feature of life in San Juan. What he meant is explained in a letter to his aunt Mary (5 April 1834). He described local government as the sort that "exempts the private man from the trouble of taking any pains about the management of public affairs; he has only to let the state alone & mind his own business." The liberty Edward enjoyed meant complete disengagement from discussion about, and action on, society's problems or objectives. As a result, Edward saw no "patriotic notion," but apathy and ignorance. He told his aunt that the environment was favorable for literary work, because it offered no distractions. The educated man could work without interruptions such as requests for papers, for lectures or for support of a cause. Maybe he wrote with irony, in view of the many other times he lamented his intellectual isolation. Perhaps he would have been amused to learn that, almost two centuries later, the generic name assigned in Puerto



Rican slang to a United States native who speaks or gives orders with little knowledge of local culture is "Mr. Ñemerson." It seems to be a twentieth century invention, but the possibilities for its etymology would have fascinated Edward.

## Death

Edward returned to Boston in July of 1832, in apparent recovery, but by November he resumed his post at Mason's office in San Juan, both as mercantile clerk and consul's assistant. In spite of declining health, he maintained his accustomed activities until a "violent cold" brought his life to an end on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1834. Sidney Mason arranged for Edward's medical care and took the precaution of calling a Catholic priest to administer the last rites to the unconscious patient. In that way, the consul secured a dignified burial in the cemetery in old San Juan, where only Catholics would be received (Martínez Fernández, 2002). The family sent a marble headstone, in English and Latin, to mark what they considered to be a temporary grave. The tablet is now at the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts, on the Emerson family plot, but Edward's remains seem to have joined the soil of Puerto Rico (Bosco & Myerson, 2006).

Edward Bliss Emerson's visit to Puerto Rico left hardly a mark on official documents. Barring new findings, there is only the burial certificate and one letter signed as consul's agent (5 October 1833, Palerm Rincón, 1982). In contrast, the Caribbean world he knew fills his private papers with its sights, odors, sounds, worries and celebrations. To the present-day researcher, his journal and letters speak of exotic and commonplace subjects, all of which contributed to the formation of the cultures of the United States, the Danish West Indies and Puerto Rico, and their interrelationships then and now.

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