

Gideon and John Wanton Cash book

1753-1759

1 vol. (0.2 linear foot)

Call no.: MS 1114

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Gideon Wanton, a two-time governor of colonial Rhode Island, and his son John were Quaker merchants from Newport. During the middle years of the eighteenth century, they carried on an active trade who took an active part in the triangular trade.

This diminutive cash account book offers a window onto the business ventures of a powerful Newport Quaker family during the mid-eighteenth century. Kept during a five-year period, 1753-1759, the book contains terse records of cash expenditures in exchange for goods and services to Gideon and John Wanton. Records of the coastwise trade in commodities such as pork, flour, and mackerel to Philadelphia and other ports accompany notices of molasses from Surinam and rum. The lack of payments relating directly to enslaved people is likely the result of the sale of the human cargo in the West Indies prior to returning to Newport.

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Background on Gideon and John Wanton

Gideon Wanton (1693-1767) and his son John (1729-1799) were members of an extended family ensconced among the colonial elite of Newport, R.I. Having made their fortunes through shipbuilding and shipping, the family parlayed their wealth into political power: Gideon was a nephew of two governors of the colony and the cousin of another, holding office in 1745-1746 and again in 1747-1748.

Although his ancestors were among the first settlers of Plymouth Colony, Gideon was a third generation Quaker in a family that also included Anglicans. By the 1750s, he was apparently actively engaged in partnership with his son John, trading in the classic triangular commodities of rum and molasses. Despite being Quakers, they evidently took part directly in enslavement: their ships *Two Brothers*, *King of Prussia*, and the sloop *Correspond* were all recorded as participating in Trans-Atlantic slave voyages.

Scope of collection

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Scattered among the transactions in the volume are records of freighting charges, cash transfers, a "parsel of riggen" for one of their ship, and the purchase of a half-share of the sloop *Correspond*, "with her mast sails rigging anchors & cables & all other appurtances thereunto" (Nov. 25, 1754). Of particular note are the records of wages paid to workers aboard the Wanton's ships-- at least one of which was specified as being in Africa (Jan 17, 1756)-- and a possible instance of the hiring out of an enslaved man: on July 13, 1756, John Dennis received £102 "on acc't of wages Due for my Boy Ned on board of Snow Two Brothers."

These accounts include signatures of members of several prominent Newport families, such as the Coggeshalls, and of noted captains such as Caleb Gardner and both William and Robert Stoddard. Also of note are a number of signatures of women signing on their own account as well as for family members.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Scott Garrett, Jan. 2020 (2020-009).

Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, Jan. 2020.

Language:

English

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Cite as: Gideon and John Wanton Cash book (MS 1114). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

Merchants--Rhode Island

Newport (R.I.)--History--18th century

Slave trade--Rhode Island

Contributors

Wanton, Gideon, 1693-1767 [main entry]

Wanton, John, 1729-1799

Genres and formats

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