



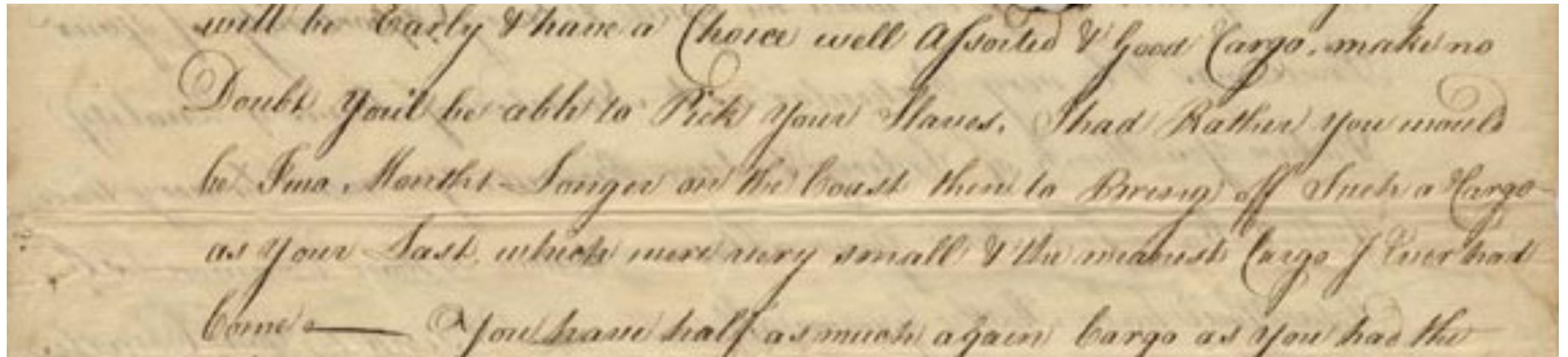
The Schooner *Phillis*

Owned by Timothy Fitch, 1725 - 1790, of Medford, Slave trader

Captained by Peter Gwin - April 1761



Fitch's comments on July 1761 Cargo



..you will be Early & have a Choice well assorted & Good Cargo, make no Doubt You'll be able to Pick Your Slaves. I had Rather you would be Two Months Longer on the Coast then to Bring off Such a Cargo as Your Last which were very small & the meanest Cargo I Ever had Come____

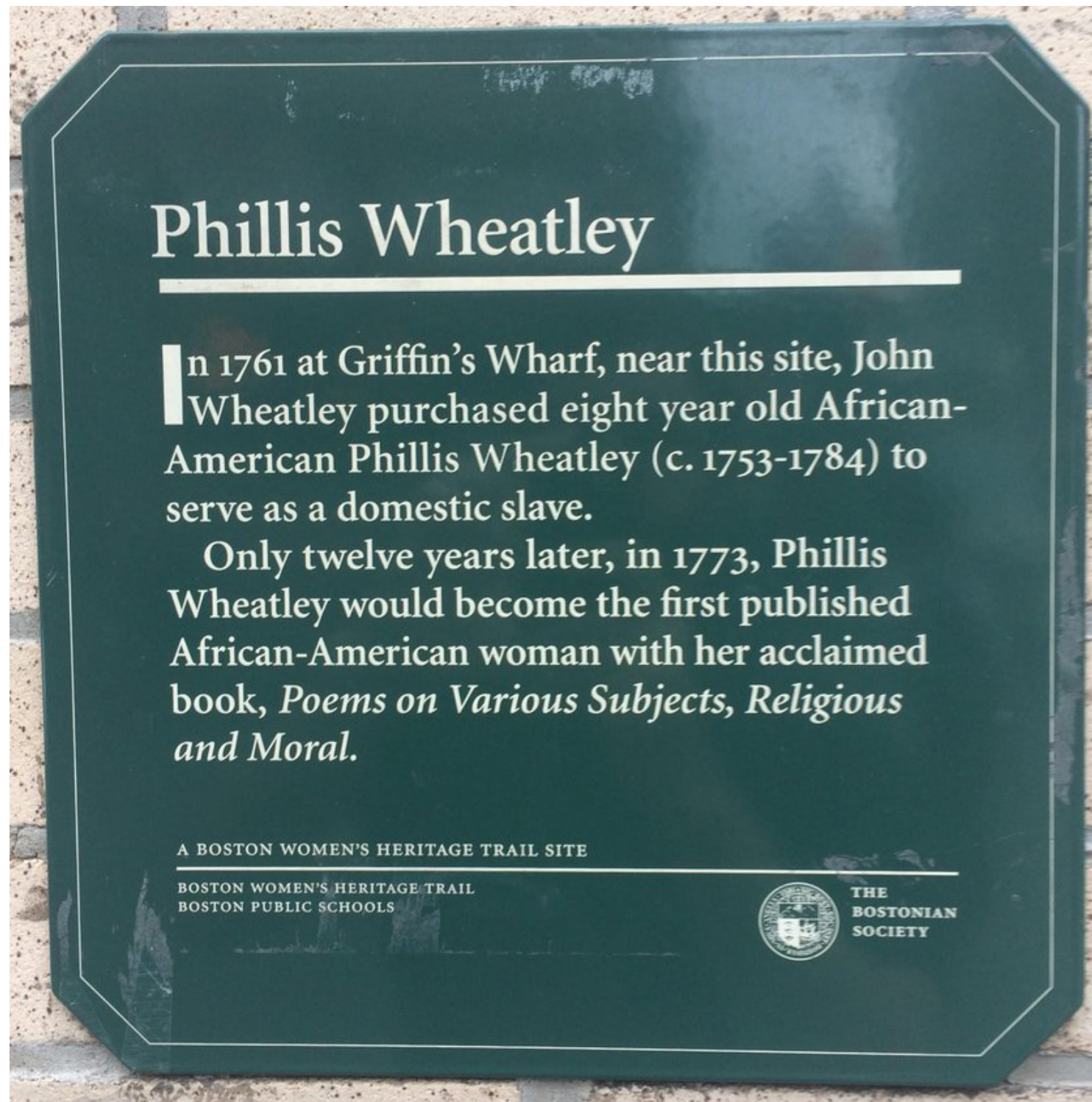
Timothy Fitch to Capt. Peter Gwin Sept. 4, 1761

Arrival in Boston

JUST Imported,
From *A F R I C A*.
A Number of prime young
S L A V E S, from the Windward Coast, and
to be Sold on board Capt. *Gwin* lying at New-Boston.

Boston Gazette, July 13, 1761

Wheatley Sale Plaque



Phillis Wheatley Peters

Poetry, Race and Revolution



Chronology

Phillis Wheatley

1754? Born in Senegambia

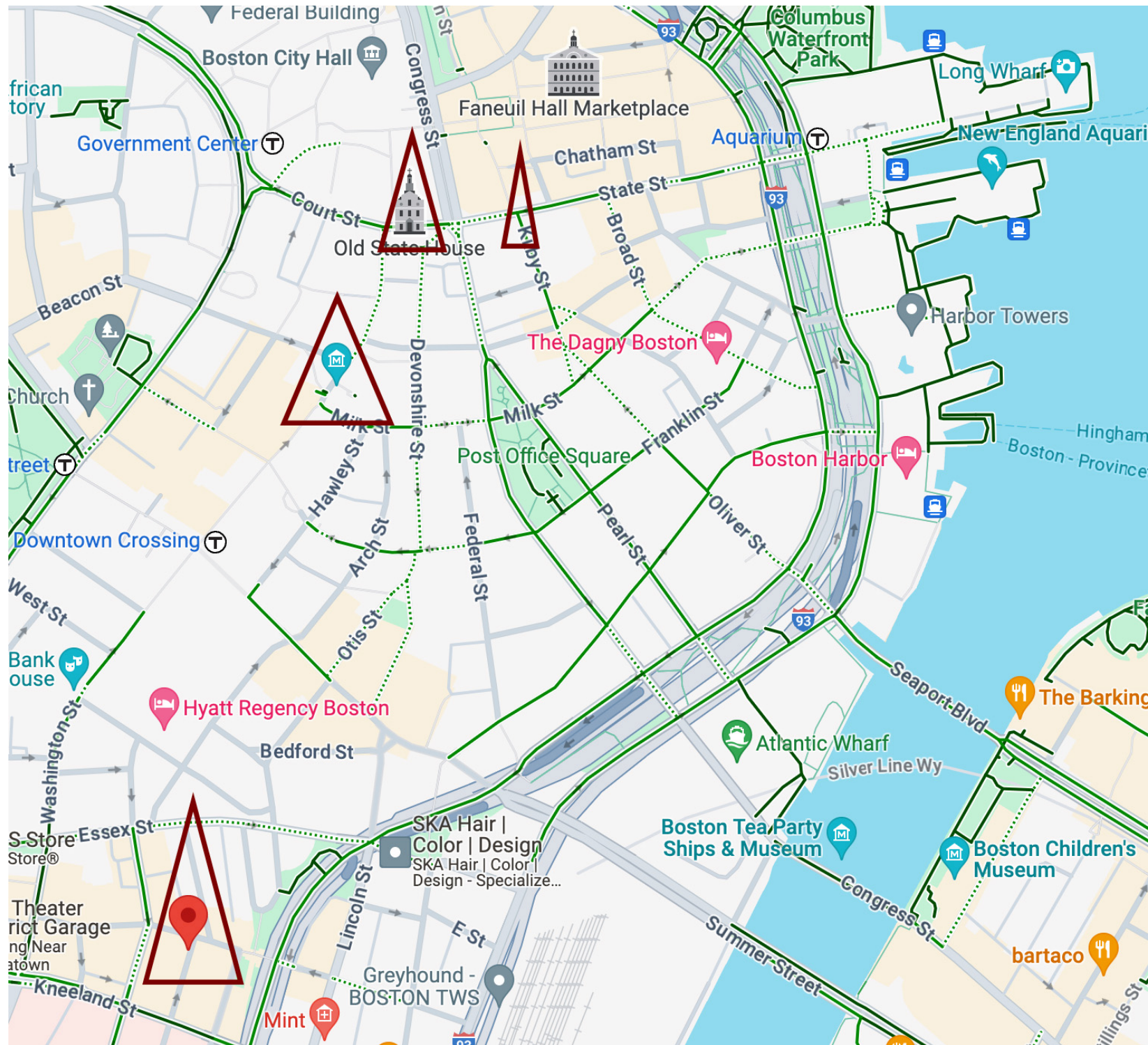
1761 July - sold in Boston

Wheatley Family and Boston

Wheatley Boston House



Wheatley in Boston Today



Wheatley Family

John Wheatley (1703 - 1778) tailor, merchant, shipowner

Susanna Wheatley (1709 - 1774) evangelical, hostess

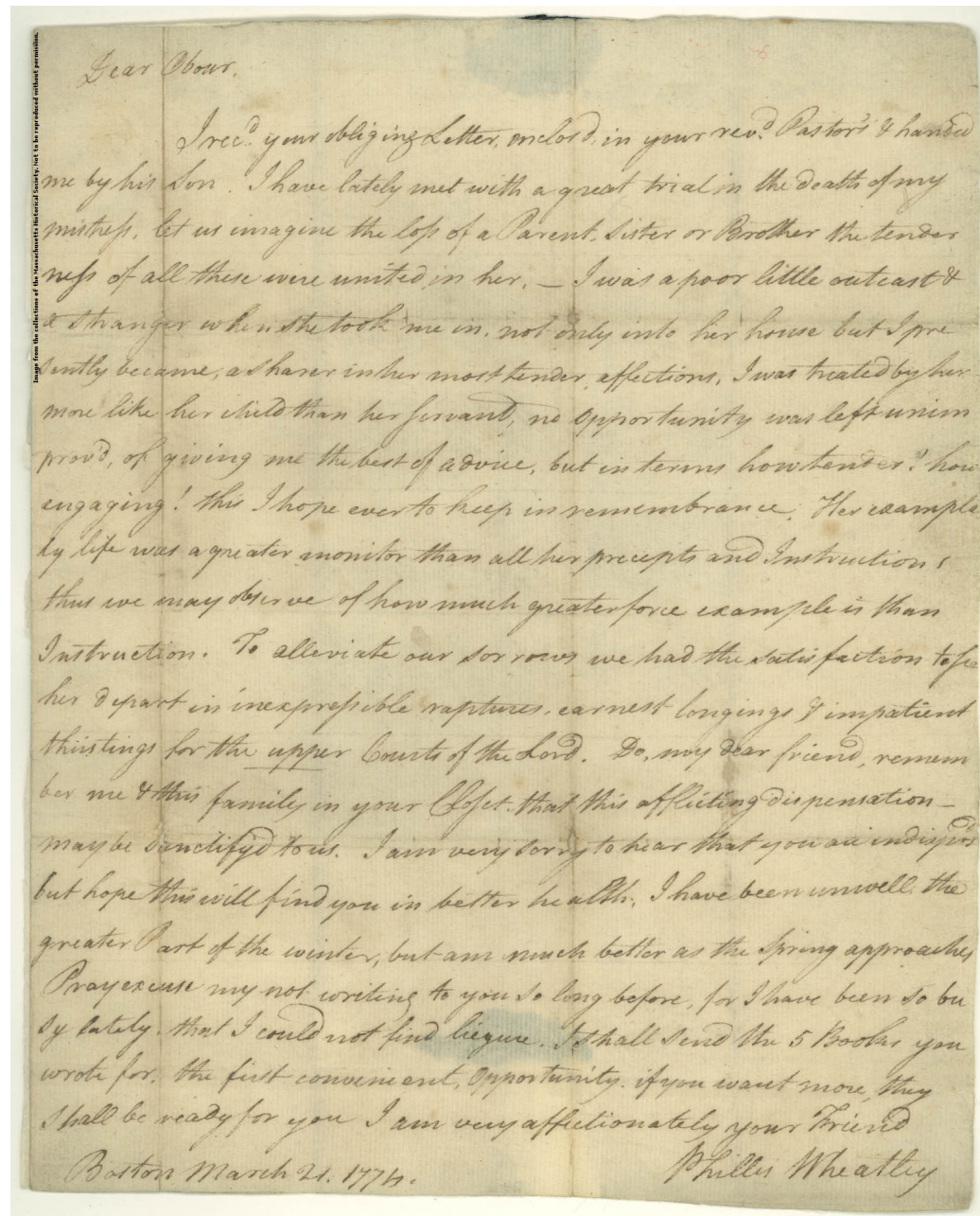
m. 1741

- ▶ Sarah (1741 - 1752)
- ▶ **Mary Wheatley** (1743 - 1778)
 - ▶ m. Rev. John Lathrop, 1-1771
 - ▶ five children, two surviving
- ▶ **Nathaniel Wheatley** (1743 - 1783) merchant
 - ▶ m. Mary Enderby, 11-1773
- ▶ John (1746 - deceased)
- ▶ Susanna (1748 - deceased)

Wheatley Neighborhood



Susanna Wheatley



.. I was a poor little outcast & stranger when she took me in, not only into her house but I presently became, a sharer in her most tender affections, I was treated by her more like her child than her servant, no opportunity was left unimprov'd, of giving me the best of advice, but in terms how tender! how engaging! this I hope ever to keep in remembrance. ...

Phillis Wheatley, Boston, March 1774

Education as a Slave

Phillis was brought from Africa to America in 1761, between 7 and 8 years old. Without any assistance from School education, she in 16 months' time from her arrival, she not only attained the English language perfectly, (to which she was an utter stranger before), but also to read any, the most difficult part of the Sacred Writings, to the great astonishment of those who heard her. As to her writing, her own curiosity led her to it;

Education as a Slave

Reading

Penmanship

Classical literature

Geography

History

Politics

English literature

Studying Latin

Chronology

Phillis Wheatley

1754? Born in Senegambia

1761 July - sold in Boston

1767 First poem published

Wheatley Family and Boston

1765 Stamp Act Riots

On Messrs Hussey and Coffin

Published in Newport Mercury, December 21, 1767

I must at 1 below 0, at nine o'clock 1 above 0, at
at the Noon 6 above 0. The lowest last Winter was 3
1745, below 0.
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To the P R I N T E R.
Please to insert the following Lines, composed by a Negro
Girl (belonging to one Mr. Wheatley of Boston) on the
following Occasion, viz. Messrs. Hussey and Coffin, as
undermentioned, belonging to Nantucket, being bound from
thence to Boston, narrowly escaped being cast away on
Cape-Cod, in one of the late Storms; upon their Arrival,
being at Mr. Wheatley's, and, while at Dinner, told of
their narrow Escape, this Negro Girl at the same Time
'tending Table, heard the Relation, from which she com-
posed the following Verses.
On Messrs. HUSSEY and COFFIN.
D I D Fear and Danger so perplex your Mind,
As made you fearful of the whistling Wind?
Was it not Boreas knit his angry Brow
Against you? or did Consideration bow?
To lend you Aid, did not his Winds combine?
To stop your Passage with a churlish Line,
Did haughty Eolus with Contempt look down
With Aspect windy, and a study'd Frown?
Regard them not;—the Great Supreme, the Wise,
Intends for something hidden from our Eyes.
Suppose the groundless Gulph had snatch'd away
Hussey and Coffin to the raging Sea;
Where wou'd they go? where wou'd be their Abode?
With the supreme and independent God,
Or made their Beds down in the Shades below,
Where neither Pleasure nor Content can flow.
To Heaven their Souls with eager Raptures soar,
Enjoy the Bliss of him they wou'd adore.
Had the soft gliding Streams of Grace been near,
Some favourite Hope their fainting Hearts to cheer,
Doubtless the Fear of Danger far had fled:
No more repeated Victory crown their Heads:
Had I the Tongue of a Seraphim, how wou'd I laud thy
Praise; thy Name as Incense to the Heavens should fly, and
the Remembrance of thy Goodness to the shoreless Ocean of
Beatitude!—Then should the Earth glow with seraphick
Ardeur.
Blest Soul, which sees the Day while Light doth shine,
To guide his Steps to trace the Mark divine.
Phillis Wheatley.
The Severity of the Weather, and the late Ap-
proach of the Winter, had occasioned the

To The Printer:

Please to insert the following Lines, composed by a Negro Girl (belonging to one Mr. Wheatley of Boston) on the following Occasion, viz. Messrs Hussey and Coffin, as undermentioned, belonging to Nantucket, being bound from thence to Boston, narrowly escaped being cast away on Cape-Cod, in one of the late Storms; upon their Arrival, being at Mr. Wheatley's, and, while at Dinner, told of their narrow Escape, this Negro Girl at the same Time 'tending Table, heard the Relation, from which she composed the following Verses.

Early Poems

1767

On Virtue

An Address to an Atheist

To the University of Cambridge, in New-England

1768

To the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1768 (Stamp Act)

On Being Brought from Africa to America

On America

1769

On the Death of the Rev. Dr. Sewall

Chronology

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Wheatley Family and Boston

1765 Stamp Act Riots

1768 *Nov* British troops arrive

British Troops Arriving



Chronology

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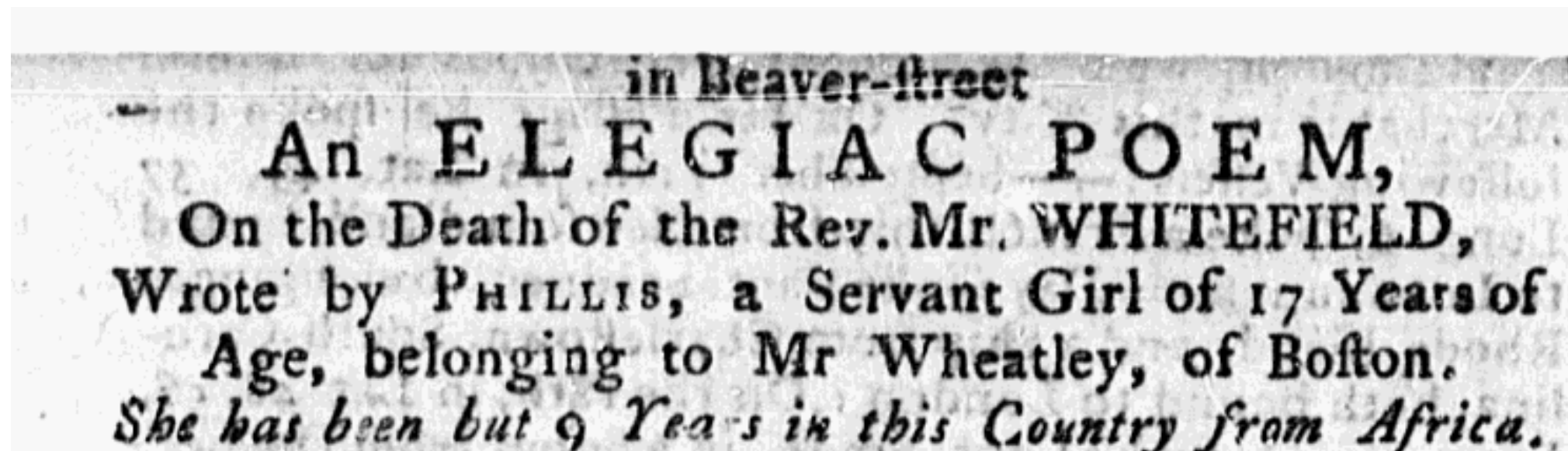
1770 *Mar. 5* Boston Massacre

Sept. Death of Rev. Whitefield
in Newburyport

Rev. George Whitefield, (1714 -1770)

Elegy to Reverend George Whitefield October 11, 1770

By PHILLIS, a Servant Girl of 17 Years of Age,
Belonging to Mr. J. WHEATLEY, of Boston: –
And has been but 9 Years in this Country from Africa.



Whitefield Elogy



October 25th 1770 Sends Elogy to the Countess of Huntingdon

Most noble Lady,

The Occasion of my addressing your
Ladship will I hope, apologize for this my
boldness in doing it. it is to enclose a few

lines on the decease of your worthy chaplain, the Rev'd Mr.
Whitefield..

..The Tongues of the Learned are insufficient, **much less the
pen of an untutor'd African**, to paint in lively character,
the excellencies of this Citizen of Zion! ...

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- 1768 Nov British troops arrive
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Sept. Death of Rev. Whitefield
in Newburyport
- 1771 Jan Mary Wheatley marries

Advertising for Book Subscribers

PROPOSALS
For Printing by SUBSCRIPTION,
A Collection of POEMS, wrote
at several times, and upon various occasions, by PHILLIS,
a Negro Girl, from the Strength of her own Genius, it being
but a few Years, since she came to this Town an uncultivated
Barbarian from Africa. The Poems having been seen and
read by the best Judges, who think them well worthy of the
Publick View; and upon critical examination, they find
that the declared Author was capable of writing them.
The Order in which they were penned, together with the
Occasion, are as follows ;
—On the Death of the Rev. Dr. Sewall, when sick, 1765.
—On virtue, 166.—On two Friends, who were call away, do.
—To the University of Cambridge, 1767.—An Address to
the Atheist, do.—An Address to the Deist, do.—On
America, 1768.—On the King, do.—On Friendship,
do.—Thoughts on being brought from Africa to America,
do.—On the Nuptials of Mr. Spence to Miss Hooper, do.
—On the Hon. Commodore Hood, on his pardoning a Defector,
1769.—On the Death of the Reverend Dr. Sewall, do.
—On the Death of Master Seider, who was killed by Ebenezer
Richardson, 1770.—On the Death of the Rev. George White-
field, do.—On the Death of a young Miss, aged 5 years, do.
—On the Arrival of the Ships of War, and landing of the
Troops.—On the Affair in King Street, on the Evening of
the 5th of March.—On the death of a young Gentleman.
—To Samuel Quincy, Esq; a Panegyrick.—To a Lady on her
coming to America for her Health.—To Mrs. Leonard, on
the Death of her Husband.—To Mrs. Boylston and Chil-
dren, on the Death of her Son and their Brother.—To a
Gentleman and Lady on the Death of their Son, aged 9
Months.—To a Lady on her remarkable Deliverance in a
Hurricane.—To James Sullivan, Esq; and Lady on the
Death of her Brother and Sister, and a Child, Aged 12
Months.—Goliath of Gath.—On the Death of Dr. Sa-
muel Marshall.
It is supposed they will make one small Octavo Volume,
and will contain about 200 Pages.
They will be printed on Demy Paper, and beautiful Types.
The Price to Subscribers, handsomely bound and lettered,
will be Four Shillings.—Stitched in blue, Three Shillings.
It is hoped Encouragement will be given to this Publica-
tion, as a reward to a very uncommon Genius, at present a
Slave.
The Work will be put to the Press as soon as three
Hundred Copies are subscribed for, and shall be pub-
lished with all Speed.
Subscriptions are taken in by El RUSSELL, in Marlborough
Street.

PROPOSALS

For Printing by SUBSCRIPTION,
A Collection of POEMS, wrote at several
times, and upon various occasions, by
PHILLIS, a Negro Girl, from the Strength
of her own Genius, it being but a few Years
since she came to this Town an uncultivated
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think them well worthy of the Publick
View; and upon critical examination, they
find that the declared Author was capable of
writing them. The Order in which they were
penned, together with the Occasion, are as
follows;

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral

To Maecenas

On Virtue

To the University of Cambridge, In New England

To the King's Most Excellent Majesty

On being brought from Africa to America

On the Death of Reverend Dr. Sewell,

On the Death of the Rev. George Whitefield

On the Death of a young Lady of Five Years of Age

On the Death of a young Gentleman.

To a Lady on the Death of Her Husband

Goliath of Gath

Thoughts on the Works of Providence

To a Lady on the Death of Three Relations

To a Clergyman on the Death of his Lady

An Hymn to the Morning

An Hymn to the Evening

Isaiah lxiii. 1-8

On Recollection

On Imagination

A Funeral Poem on the Death of C.E. an Infant of Twelve Months

To Captain H-D, of the 65th Regiment

To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c.

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral

Ode to Neptune. On Mrs. W-'s Voyage to England

To a Lady on her coming to North-America with her Son for the Recovery of her Health

To a Lady on her remarkable Preservation in a Hurricane in North-Carolina

To a Lady and her children, on the Death of her Son and their Brother

To a Gentleman and Lady on the Death of the Lady's Brother and Sister, and a child of the Name
Avis, aged one Year.

On the Death of Dr. Samuel Marshall

To a Gentleman on his Voyage to Great-Britain for the Recovery of his Health

To the Rev. Dr. Thomas Amory on reading his Sermons on Daily Devotion, in which that Duty is
recommended and assisted

On the Death of J.C. an Infant

An Hymn to Humanity. To S.P.G. Esq.

Niobe in Distress for her children slain by Apollo, from Ovid's Metamorphoses, Book VI and from a
view of the Painting of Mr. Richard Wilson

To S.M. a young African Painter, on seeing his Works

To His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, on the Death of his Lady.

A Farewel to America. To Mrs. S.w.

A Rebus, by I.B.

An Answer to the Rebus, by the Author of these Poems

Jeanne Pickering Phillis Wheatley Peters

Topsfield Historical Society January 2024

Earl of Dartmouth

Willam Legge

Evangelical Christian

Whitefield Supporter

Voted for repeal of Stamp Act

Unauthorized naming of Dartmouth College

August 1772 Appointed as Secretary of State for the Southern Department (colonies in America)

By 1776, opposed any proposal for reconciliation and called for the use of force to suppress the colonial rebellion



Wooldridge to Dartmouth 1772

While in Boston, I heard of a very extraordinary female slave, who had made some verses on our mutually dear deceased Friend [Rev. George Whitefield]; I visited her mistress, and found by conversing with the African, that she was no Impostor: I asked if she could write on any Subject; she said Yes; we had just heard of your Lordship's appointment; I gave her your name, which she was acquainted with. She immediately wrote a rough Copy of the inclosed Address & Letter, which I promised to convey or deliver.

I was astonish'd, and could hardly believe my own Eyes. I was present while she wrote and can attest that it is her own production; she shew'd me her Letter to Lady Huntingdon, which I daresay, Your Lordship has seen; I send you an account signed by her master of her Importation, Education &c. they are all wrote in her own hand.

To the Earl of Dartmouth

...

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of *Freedom* sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

Phillis Wheatley

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, 1772

Chronology

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in Newburyport
- 1771 *Jan* Mary Wheatley marries

London Visit -

Reasons for visit:

Illness

Book Publishing

Encouragement by British Abolitionists

Improve mercantile contacts

London Visit

Susanna Wheatley to Countess of Huntingdon, April 30, 1773



..Phillis being in a poor state of Health, the Physicians advise to the Sea air and as **my son is coming to England upon some Business** and as so good an opportunity presented I tho't it my duty to send her & as **your Ladship has condescended to take so much notice of my Dear Phillis** as to permit her Book to Dedicate to you, and desiring her Picture in the Frontispiece: I flatter'd my Self that your good advice and counsel will not be wanting..

Sailing

B O S T O N, M A Y 10.

Saturday failed the Ship London, Capt. Calef, for London; Mr. Nathaniel Wheatley, of this Town, Merchant, went Passenger; also Phillis, Servant of Mr. Wheatley, the extraordinary Poetess.

London: Arrived June 17 Departed July 17

B O S T O N, September 13.

In Capt. Calef came Passengers, Capt. Hillhouse and Lady, Mr. Aleing; also, Phillis Wheatley, the extraordinary Poetical Genius, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley.

London Visit

Susanna Wheatley to Countess of Huntingdon, April 30, 1773

..I tell Phillis to act wholly under the direction of your Ladiship. **I did not think it worth while nor did the time permit to fit her out with cloaths: but I have given her money to Buy what you think most proper for her, I like she should be dress'd plain.** Must beg the favor of your Ladiship to **advise my son to some Christian Home for Phillis to board at.** and as you are so dispos'd to promote the good of souls I hope you will not be wanting in your advices to my Dear Son...

Visits in London

To:

Lady Cavendish, and Lady Carteret Webb;

Mrs. Palmer a Poetess, an accomplishd Lady;

Dr. Thos. Gibbons, Rhetoric Proffessor,

Israel Mauduit Esqr.

The Earl of Dartmouth “made me a Compliment of 5 Guineas, and desir'd me to get the whole of Mr. Pope's Works, as the best he could recommend to my perusal, this I did, also got Hudibrass, Don Quixot, & Gay's Fables”

Mr. Brook Watson, Merchant, “presented with a Folio Edition of Milton's Paradise Lost, printed on a Silver Type, so call'd from its elegance, (I suppose) By Mr. Brook Watson Mercht. whose Coat of Arms is prefix'd.”

Visit from Benjamin Franklin

From Benjamin Franklin to Jonathan Williams, Sr., 7 July 1773

Upon your Recommendation I went to see the black Poetess and offer'd her any Services I could do her. Before I left the House, I understood her Master was there and had sent her to me but did not come into the Room himself, and I thought was not pleased with the Visit. I should perhaps have enquired first for him; but I had heard nothing of him. And I have heard nothing since of her.

To Benjamin Franklin from Jonathan Williams, Sr., 17 October 1773

The Black Poetess master and mistress prevaild on me to mention her in my Letter but as its turnd out I am Sorry I Did.

Visit With Grenville Sharp Esqr. 1735 - 1813



...who attended me to the Tower & Show'd the Lions, Panthers, Tigers, &c. the Horse Armoury, small Armoury, the Crowns, Sceptres, Diadems, the Font for christening the Royal Family. Saw Westminster Abbey, British Museum Coxe's Museum, Saddler's wells, Greenwich Hospital, Park and Chapel, The royal Observatory at Greenwich, &c. &c. too many things & Places to trouble you with in a Letter.

Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntington, 1707 - 1791



*Phillis Wheatley to Countess of Huntingdon,
July 17 1773*

I rec'd with mixed sensations of pleasure & disappiontment your Ladship's message favored by Mr. Rien acquainting us with your pleasure that my Master & I should wait upon you in So. Wales, delighted with your Ladship Condescention to me so unworthy of it. Am sorry to acquaint your Ladship that the Ship is certainly to Sail next Thursday (on) which I must return to America. I long to see my Friend there, (I am) extremely reluctant to go without having first seen your Ladship.

Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntington, 1707 - 1791

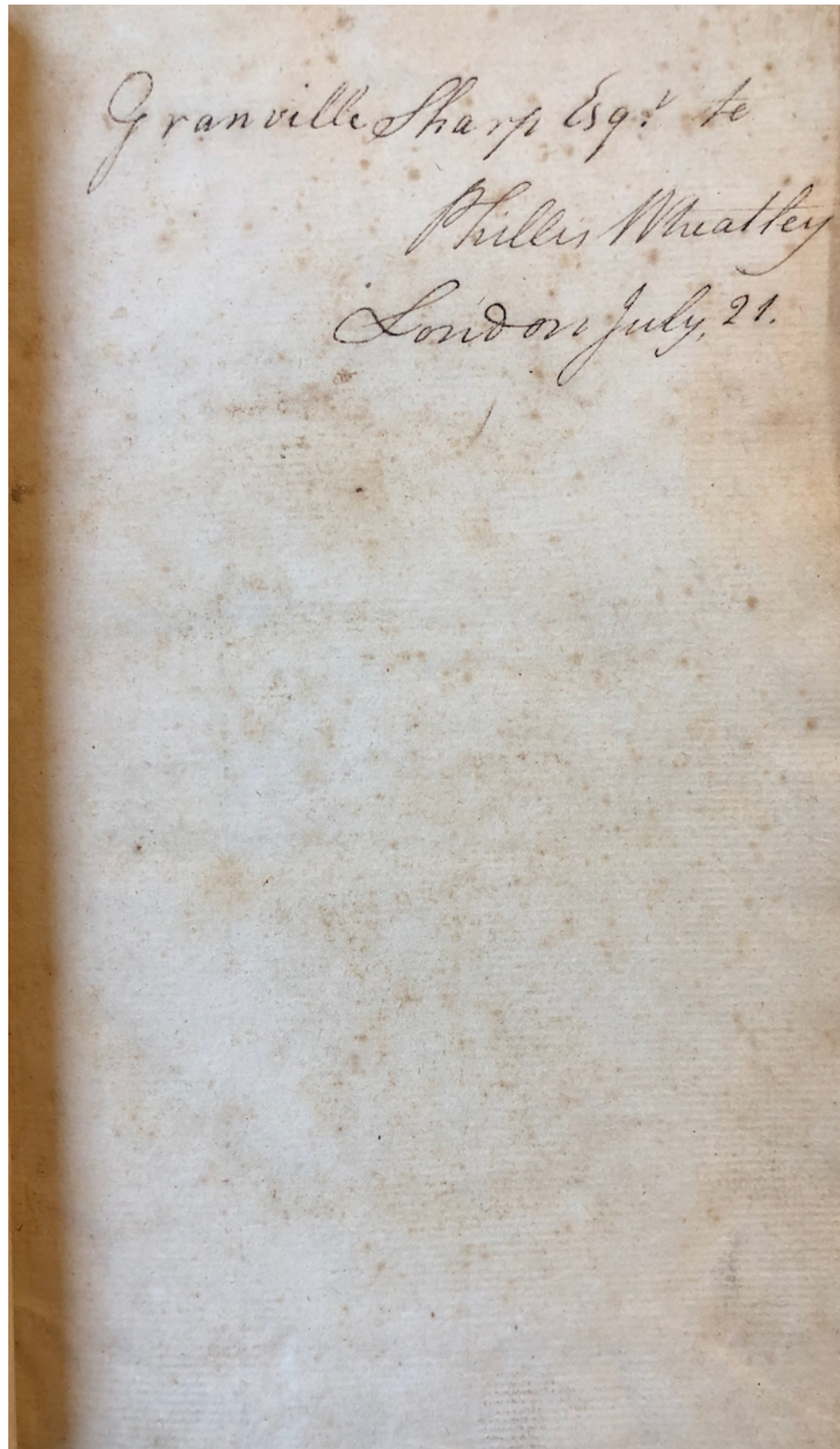


With greatest humility I am most dutifully
Your Ladship's obed't Sevt
Phillis Wheatley

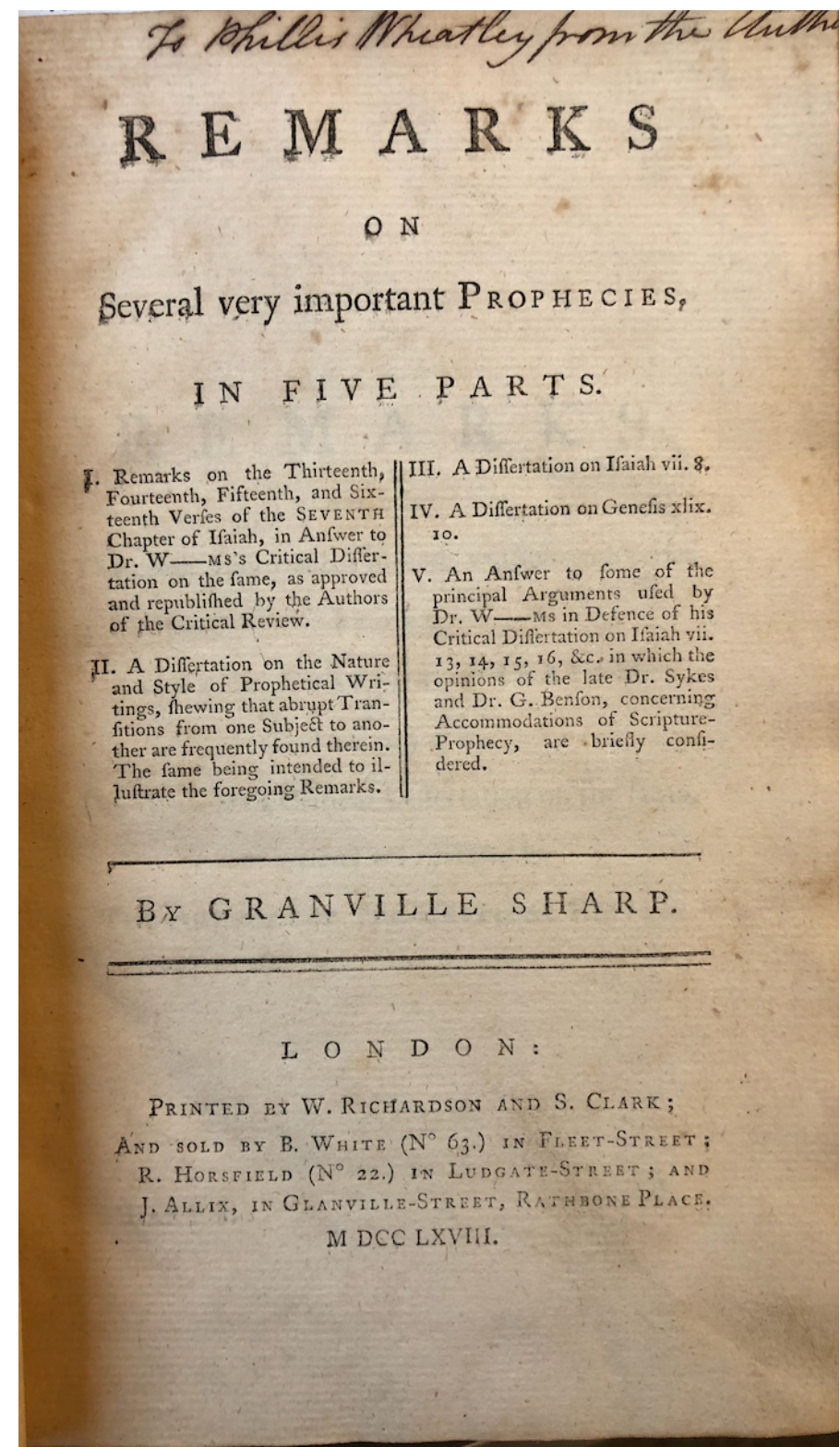
London July 17 1773
The Right Honble
The Countess of Huntington

My master is yet undetermind about going
home, and sends his dutiful respects to
your Ladship

London Gifts



Jeanne Pickering *Phillis Wheatley Peters*



Topsfield Historical Society January 2024

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Wheatley Family and Boston

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- 1771 *Jan* Mary Wheatley marries
Sept. Death of Rev. Whitefield
in Newburyport

Freedom

To Col. David Worcester in New Haven, Connecticut.

Boston 18 Oct. 1773.

Since my return to America my Master, has at the desire of my friends in England given me my freedom. The Instrument is drawn, so as to secure me and my property from the hands of the Executrs. administrators, &c. of my master, & secure whatsoever should be given me as my Own, a Copy is sent to Isra. Mauduit Esqr. F.R.S.

Four Freedom Scenarios

1. Delayed until return for Wheatley family benefit: book proceeds; credit to Wheatleys
2. As a result of trip, public opinion outside of Boston increasingly demanded it;
3. During trip, she insisted on freedom upon return;
4. Upon return, she insisted upon it.

Chronology

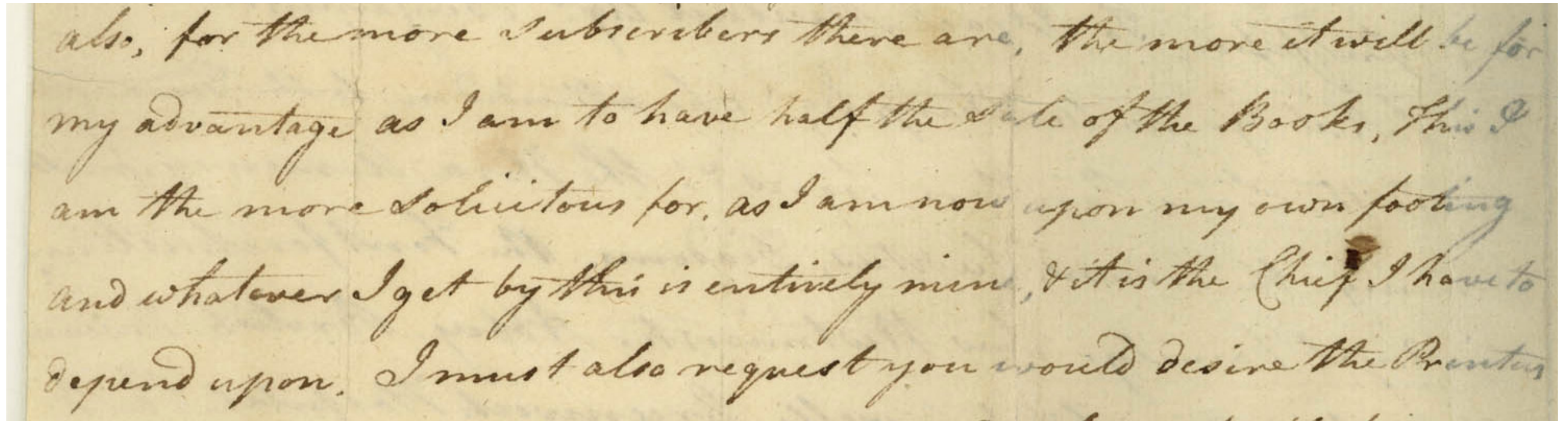
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in Newburyport
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- 1773 Nov. Nathaniel Wheatley marries
Boston Tea Party

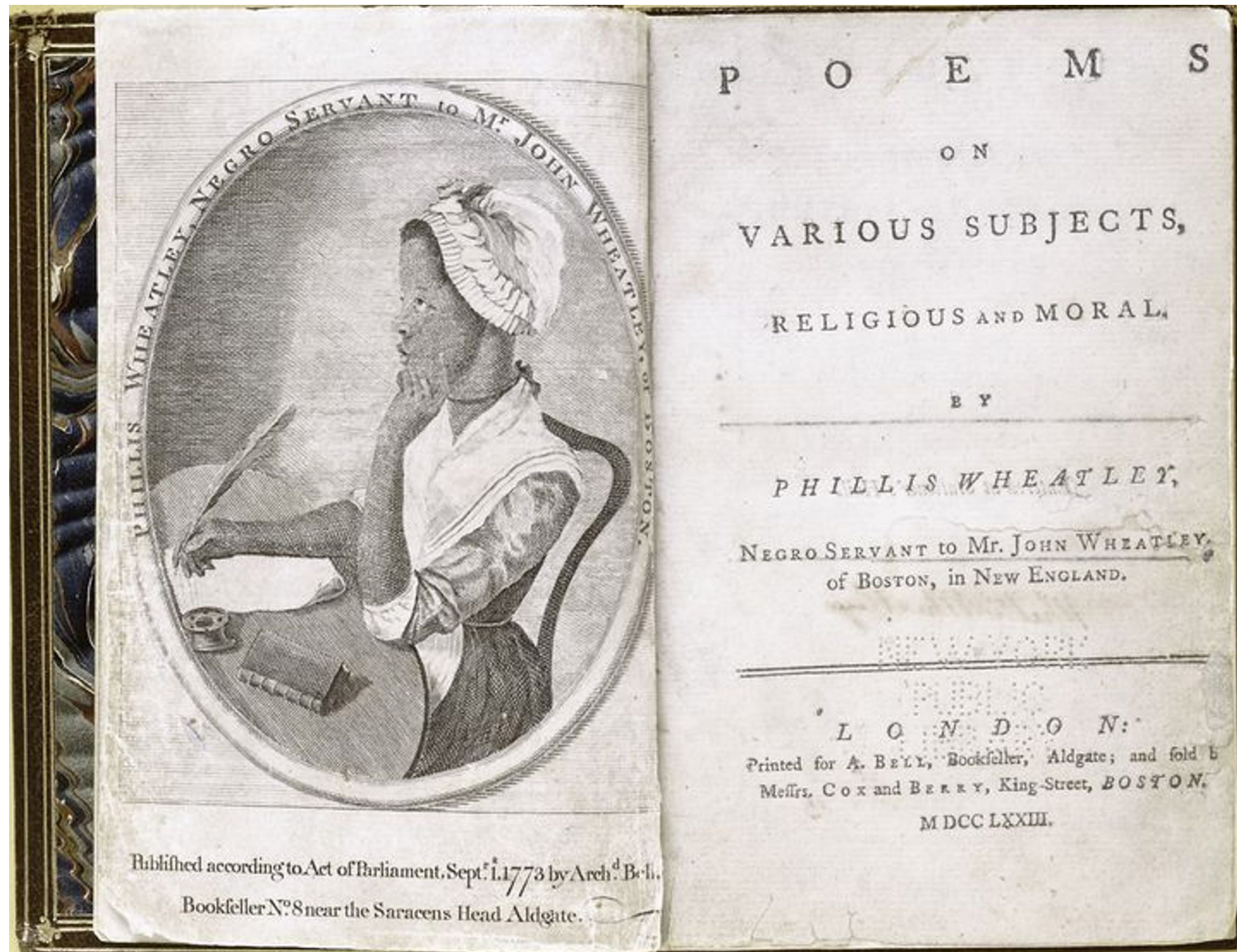
Book Sales

A snippet of a handwritten manuscript in cursive script on aged, yellowed paper. The text is written in dark ink and is slightly faded. It discusses the benefits of having more subscribers for book sales, mentioning that the writer receives half the sale of the books and is now on their own footing, depending entirely on the success of the sales.

also, for the more subscribers there are, the more it will be for
my advantage as I am to have half the sale of the Books, This I
am the more solicitous for, as I am now upon my own footing
and whatever I get by this is entirely mine, & it is the Chief I have to
depend upon. I must also request you would desire the Printers

I expect my Books which are publishd in London in Capt. Hall, who will be here I believe in 8 or 10 days. I beg the favour that you would honour the enclos'd Proposals, & use your interest with Gentlemen & Ladies of your acquaintance to subscribe also, for the more subscribers there are, the more it will be for my advantage as I am to have half the sale of the Books, This I am the more solicitous for, as **I am now upon my own footing and whatever I get by this is entirely mine, & it is the Chief I have to depend upon.**

Book Published



Book Sales

I must also request you would desire the Printers in New Haven, not to reprint that Book, as it will be a great hurt to me, preventing any further Benefit that I might receive from the Sale of my Copies from England. The price is 2/6.d Bound or 2/ Sterling Sewed. -- [. . .] Should be so ungenerous as to reprint them the Genuine Copy may be known, for it is sign'd in my own handwriting.

~~A present~~
A present from the Author
the owner, J. Tabney. And
many has been the pleasant
hours the owner has passed
with this prodigy!!

Presented at Stationers Hall.

Phillis Wheatley

blithely

Book

DEDICATION.

To the Right Honourable the
COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON,

THE FOLLOWING

P O E M S

Are most respectfully

Inscribed,

By her much obliged,

Very humble,

And devoted Servant,

Phillis Wheatley.

Boston, June 12,
1773.

Book Advertisement

THIS DAY IS PUBLISHED,
Adorn'd with an elegant Engraving of the Author.
[Price 3s. 4d. L. M. Bound]

P O E M S,

On various subjects, — Religious and Moral.

By PHILLIS WHEATLEY,

A Negro Girl.

Sold by Messrs COX & BERRY,

At their Store in King-Street, Boston.

N. B. The Subscribers are requested to apply for
their Copies.

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Sept. Death of Rev. Whitefield
in Newburyport
- 1773 *Nov.* Nathaniel Wheatley
marries; Boston Tea Party
- 1774 *Mar.* Susanna Wheatley dies

Susanna Wheatley's Death

— Last Thursday Morning died, after a languishing Illness, Mrs. *Susanna Wheatley*, Wife of Mr. *John Wheatley*, Merchant, of this Town, in the 65th Year of her Age. Her Funeral is to be on Wednesday next, if the Weather permits. When her Friends and Relations are desired to attend.

Letter to Rev. Occum Feb. 1774

...for in every human Breast, God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance; and by the Leave of our modern Egyptians I will assert, that the same Principle lives in us.

Letter to Thornton, Oct. 1774

..I attended, and find exactly true your thoughts on the behavior of those who seem'd to respect me while under my mistresses patronage; you say right, for Some of those have already put on a reserve;

Response to Missionary Invitation

You propose my returning to Africa with Bristol yamma and John Quamine if either of them upon Strict enquiry is Such, as I dare give my heart and hand to, I believe they are either of them good enough if not too good for me, or they would not be fit for missionaries; but why do you hon'd Sir, wish those poor men so much trouble as to carry me So long a voyage? Upon my arrival, how like a Barbarian Should I look to the Natives; I can promise that my tongue shall be quiet for a strong reason indeed being an utter stranger to the Language of Annamaboe.

Response to Missionary Proposal

Now to be Serious, This undertaking appears too hazardous, and not sufficiently Eligible, to go—and leave my British & American friends—I am also unacquainted with those Missionaries in Person.

Chronology

Phillis Wheatley

- 1754? Born in Senegambia
- 1761 July - sold in Boston
- 1767 First poem published
- 1770 Oct Publishes Whitefield Elegy
- 1771 Aug Baptized at Old South Church
- 1772 Feb Advertises for book subscribers
- 1773 June - July 17 Visits London;
Freed by Wheatley
- 1773 Nov. Books arrive from London
- 1775 Moves to Providence with Lathrops
Oct. Sends poem to G. Washington
- 1776 Feb. Receives reply from G.W
Returns to Boston after Evacuation

Wheatley Family and Boston

- 1765 Stamp Act Riots
- 1768 Nov British troops arrive
- 1770 Mar. 5 Boston Massacre
Sept. Death of Rev. Whitefield
in Newburyport
- 1771 Jan Mary Wheatley marries
Rev. Lathrop
- 1773 Nov. Nathaniel Wheatley
marries; Boston Tea Party
- 1774 Mar. Susanna Wheatley dies
- 1775 Apr. Siege of Boston begins
- 1776 Mar. British Evacuation of Boston

Reply from Washington

I thank you most sincerely for your polite notice of me, in the elegant Lines you enclosed; and however undeserving I may be of such encomium and panegyrick, the style and manner exhibit a striking proof of your great poetical Talents. In honour of which, and as a tribute justly due to you, I would have published the Poem, had I not been apprehensive, that, while I only meant to give the World this new instance of your genius, I might have incurred the imputation of Vanity. This and nothing else, determined me not to give it place in the public Prints.

If you should ever come to Cambridge, or near Head Quarters, I shall be happy to see a person so favoured by the Muses, and to whom Nature has been so liberal and beneficent in her dispensations. I am, with great Respect, etc.

Chronology

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 - 1776 Feb. Receives reply from G.W
Returns to Boston after Evacuation
 - 1778 April Marriage Intention
 - 1778 Nov. Marries John Peters
 - 1779 Dec. Second Book Proposal
 - 1784 Dec. Dies in Boston
- Jeanne Pickering *Phillis Wheatley Peters*

Wheatley Family and Boston

- 1765 Stamp Act Riots
- 1768 Nov British troops arrive
- 1770 Mar. 5 Boston Massacre
Sept. Death of Rev. Whitefield
in Newburyport
- 1771 Jan Mary Wheatley marries
- 1773 Nov. Nathaniel Wheatley marries
Boston Tea Party
- 1774 Mar. Susanna Wheatley dies
- 1775 Apr. Siege of Boston begins
- 1776 Mar. British Evacuation of Boston
- 1778 March John Wheatley dies;
- 1778 Sept. Mary Wheatley Lathrop dies
- 1783 June Nathaniel Wheatley dies

Second Book Proposal Dec. 1779

PROPOSALS,
FOR PRINTING,
By SUBSCRIPTION,
A Volume of Poems and Letters,
ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS
Dedicated to the Right Honourable,
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, Esq;
One of the Ambassadors of the United States,
at the Court of FRANCE.
By PHILLIS PETERS.

POEMS
Thoughtson the Times.
On the Capture of General Lee, to I. B. Esq;
o his Excellency General WASHINGTON,
On the death of General Worcester.
To Lieutenant R—— of the Royal Navy.
To the same.
To T. M. Esq; of Granada.
To Sophia, of South-Carolina.
To Mr. M'B—— of the Navy
To Lieutenant R—— D—— of the Navy.
Ocean.
The choice and advantages of a Friend; to Mr.
T——M——.
Farewell to England, 1773-
To Mrs. W——ms on Anna Eliza.
To Mr. T. M'B——d.

Epithalamium to Mrs. H——*
To P.N.S.& Lady on the death of her infant son.
To Mr. El——y, on the death of his Lady.
On the death of Lieutenant L——ds.
Te Penelope.
To Mr.&Mrs. L. on the death of their daughter.
A Complaint.
To Mr. T. I. M. on Virtue.
To Dr. L——d and Lady on the death of the
Son aged 5 years.
To Mr. L——d on the death of his son.
To Capt. F——r on the death of his daughter.
To Philandra, a Elegy.
Tiagara.
Chine to Calliope.
To Mogdora on Florello.
To Sir E. L——, Esq;
To the Hon. John Montague Esq; Real Admiral of the Blue.

LETTERS.

- 1 To the Right Honorable William E: of Dartmouth Sec'y of State of N. America
- 2 To the Rev. Mr. T. P. Framington.
- 3 To Mr.——— D——— C———
- 4 To the Honorable T. H. Esq;
- 5 To Dr. B. Rush, Philadelphia.
- 6 To the Rev. Dr. Thomas, London.
- 7 To the Rt. Hon. the Countess of H——
- 8 To I. M——Esq, London.
- 9 To Mrs. W.———c in the County of Surrey.
- 10 To Mr. T. M. Homerton, near London.
- 11 To Mrs. S. W———
- 12 To the Rt. Hon. the Countess of H——
- 13 To the same.

Messieurs PRINTERS,
The above collection of Poems and Letters was put into my hands by the desire of the ingenious author, in order to be introduced to public View.
The subjects are various and curious, and the author a *Female African*, whole lot it was to fall into the hand of a generous master and great benefactor. The learned and ingenious as well as those who are pleased with novelty, are invited to encourage the publication, by a generous subscription—the former, that they may fan the sacred fire which, is self enkindled in the breast of this *young African*—The ingenious that they may by reading this collection, have a large play for their imaginations, and be excited to please and benefit mankind, by some brilliant production of their own pens—Those who are *always* in search of some *new thing*, that they may obtain a sight of this *rara avis in terra*—And every one, that the ingenious author may be encouraged to improve her own mind, benefit and please mankind.

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They will be printed on good Paper and a neat Type; and will Contain about 300 Pages in Octavo.

The price to Subscribers will be *Twelve Pounds*, neatly Bound and Letter'd, and *Nine Pounds* sew'd in blue paper, one Half to be paid on Subscribing, the other Half, on Delivery of the Books.


The Work will be put to the Press as soon as a sufficient Number of Encouragers offer.

Those who subscribe for Six Books, will have a Seventh Gratis.

Subscriptions are taken by WHITE and ADAMS, the Publishers, in School-Street, BOSTON.

Late Book Proposal Sept. 1784

Boston Magazine, September 1784

 **T**HE POEM, in page 488, of this Number, was selected from a manuscript Volume of Poems, written by PHILLIS PETERS, formerly PHILLIS WHEATLEY---and is inserted as a Specimen of her Work: should this gain the Approbation of the Publick, and sufficient encouragement be given, a Volume will be shortly Published, by the Printers hereof, who receive subscriptions for said Work.

An

Obituary

A Letter from Boston mentions the Death of PHILLIS PETERS, formerly PHILLIS WHEATLY, known to the literary World by her celebrated Miscellaneous Poems.—— This Negro Poetess is an Instance, amongst numberless others, that the Supreme Being doth not confine his Gifts to any particular Colour ; that the Africans are capable of Improvement by Education, and being rational Creatures, are entitled to every humane Attention---and as we derive Wealth from their Labours, it is highly reasonable that we educate and improve their Minds in the great Principles of Christianity, and thus compensate them for the Severities of Slavery.

Lost Papers Feb 1785

• • The Southern Mail not arrived.

• • A list of Prizes in the Winchendon Lottery is received, and will be inserted in our next.

• • The person who borrowed a volume of manuscript poems, &c. of Phillis Peters, formerly Phillis Wheatley, deceased, would very much oblige her husband, John Peters, by returning it immediately, as the whole of her works are intended to be published.

NAVAL OFFICE, Boston, February 9.

E N T E R E D.

Schooner Fish-Hawk,	Howes,	Halifax.
Liberty,	Paine,	St. Andrews.
Annis,	Dennis,	Mole.

C L E A R E D.

Ship Sally,	Hopkins,	Charlestown.
Brig. Active,	Smith,	Martinico.
Sloop Warren,	Sprague,	North-Carolina.

Critics

“Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry.— Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination.

Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism.”

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1784

John Peters, Marriage and Middleton

Who Was John Peters?

Margaretta Matilda Odell, *Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley, A Native African and a Slave. Dedicated to the Friends of the Africans* (Boston: George W. Light, 1834)

“Much of the information in Odell’s account is either unverifiable, unreliable, demonstrably incorrect, or apparently intended to serve Odell’s literary and social agendas.” Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley Peters: Biography of a Genius in Bondage*, 2023

“In a stubbornly persistent portrait, Odell derides Peters as a con man and negligent husband.” Cornelia Dayton, “Lost Years Recovered: John Peters and Phillis Wheatley Peters in Middleton” *The New England Quarterly*, vol. XCIV, no. 3 (September 2021)

Discovering the Peters in Middleton

Cornelia Dayton, *Lost Years Remembered*, 2021.

John Peters:

- ◆ Held a wide range of skills, resourcefulness, legal literacy, mien of manly gravitas, and fierce defense of his rights;
- ◆ Aimed to insulate his wife from physically taxing housewifery and to create space and time for her to inhabit a writer's life and to be a mother.
- ◆ Goals were to be a respected landowner, accepted neighbor, and dependable town citizen.

John Peters Chronology

[Compiled from archival records with Lise Breen, also Dayton's study]

1751 June Peter, "servant child of John, Jr. and Naomi Wilkins," baptized in Middleton. Age 5? Probably had younger brothers, Snow and Frank Francis.

October 1776 Shopkeeper Peters in Boston won suit of £38, damages and costs in Suffolk County Superior Court of Common Pleas against Joseph Scott.

April 1778 Marriage Intention published

May 1778 Phillis Wheatley gives address as John Peters, Queen St.

Summer/Fall 1778 Traveling for trading in central MA and RI border

November 4 1778 John Wilkins dies, age 66.

November 26, 1778 Married Phillis Wheatley

John Peters

November 19 1778 description by Massachusetts Council President, Jeremiah Powell:

“He wears a black wig, is tall well-limb’d & a lusty likely black Fellow of lately married the famous Poetess, a Negro girl sometime past Servant to the late Mr. Wheatley of Boston.”

John and Naomi Wilkins

Descendants of original Middleton setter, first cousins

Owned farm near Wilkins Pond - now Middleton Pond

Married 1741

1743 Daughter Naomi born

1746 Son John born died as infant

1748 Son Solomon born

1751 “Servant child” Peter baptized at age 5

1765 Solomon Wilkins dies at age 17: "by a fall under ye wheel of ye corn mill, whether Drowned or Killed by ye fall is uncertain"

1768 Own “mulatto servant” Dinah Cubber

In mid-60s in 1768

John Wilkins' Will

I give to my *cousin Benj Wilkins* *all of my estate real and personal after the decease of my wife and daughter* as long as they shall live and see that they are well provided for with every necessary of life and see that the Farm which I now live on is well carried on ...

I give my *servant maid Dina* one hundred pounds to be paid her by my Exector after the decease of my wife and child if the said Dina shall live with my wife and do for her as well as she is capable of, further my will is that the said *Dina* shall have a handsome maintenance out of my estate, if she lives with wife & daughter as long as they live

I give to my *Servant maid Dinan* (with n) a feather bed & Bedding

I give to *Peter Frizer* which was formerly Servant ten pound paid

Peters' Chronology

May 10 1779 Phillis write to Obour Tanner from Boston that she had “been Silent” because of a “variety of hindrances.”

June 7, 1779 - probate hearing in front of Benjamin Greenleaf. Will contested by Wilkins' relatives. Will disproved and disallowed. Naomi Wilkins appointed executor following month.

Dec 1779 - Appeals of will begin

February 1780 - Naomi Wilkins, Jr. dies

April 1780 - Naomi Wilkins, Sr. deeds two parcels, 18 acres and 90 acres to John Peters in return for support for the rest of her life

April 1780 - John and Phillis Peters move to Middleton

Middleton Disputes, 1780-1783

Civil and Criminal Courts

- ◆ Probate Disputes: John Wilkins' will, executorship, appeals of Governor's Council, depositions taken;
- ◆ Land Disputes: Ejecting Peters from land, neighbors taking crops, land sold away from Peters
- ◆ Personal Disputes - Phillis's, Naomi's and Dinah Cubber's roles in household, John Peters' intentions for land, John Peters' support of and actions towards Naomi and Dinah, assault charges, suits and jailing for debt, Peters' disputes with brothers;
- ◆ Town Disputes: Major Ezra Putnam assisting Naomi, organizing disruption of John Peters' farm work and taking of crops, probate appeals, organizing town petitions against Peters' claims, half of town taxpayers sign petition against Peters

Results

John Peters - attended courts twelve times over three years; lost five of six civil suits, lost land, jailed for debt

Phillis - lost one or two pregnancies/children, infant's safety endangered, writing/publishing minimal, church attendance unknown, loss of books and possessions and second book manuscript

1784 - John and Phillis return to Boston, live “West Boston” on Queen St.

1784 - *Fall* John loses civil debt case. Imprisoned until debt is paid.

1784 - *December* Phillis Wheatley Peters dies

Obituary

Independent Chronicle, December 8, 1784

Last Lord's day died, Mrs. PHILLIS PETERS, (formerly Phillis Wheatly) aged 31, known to the literary world by her celebrated miscellaneous Poems. Her funeral is to be this afternoon, at 4 o'clock, from the house lately improved by Mr. Todd, nearly opposite Dr. Bulfinch's, at West-Boston, where her friends and acquaintance are desired to attend.

Phillis Wheatley Peters

Poetry, Race and Revolution

TopsfieldHistory.org

Recording
Selection of her poems
Bibliography

