



The New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

New York Court of Vice Admiralty records

1753-1770

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Compiled by Susan P. Waide, 2015

Summary

Creator: New York (Colony). Court of Vice Admiralty

Title: New York Court of Vice Admiralty records

Date: 1753-1770

Size: .1 linear feet (1 volume)

Source: Donated by Mrs. Henry Reese Hoyt, 1930

Abstract: The colonial Courts of Vice Admiralty were branches of the High Court of Admiralty in London, upholding British maritime law by power of royal prerogative. Vice-Admiralty courts, acting without juries, dealt with such cases as claims for salvage and seamen's wages, claims for prize vessels and cargoes taken in wartime, and violations of British trade and navigation statutes. The New York Court of Vice Admiralty had jurisdiction over New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. The New York Court of Vice Admiralty records, dating from 1753 to 1770, comprise one volume recording decisions chiefly on prize cases, with memoranda on commissions for privateers, at the Court of Vice Admiralty for the Province of New York. The bulk of the cases date from the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). Cases were heard before Judges Lewis Morris, Jr. (tenure 1738-1762) and Judge Richard Morris (tenure 1762-1775), in New York City or places convenient for Lewis Morris at the end of his life. Records for the years 1755, 1765-1766, and 1768-1769 are not present; those entered 1753-1754 concern a prize case from 1745.

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Related Materials:

New York (State) Court of Vice Admiralty records (RG 21). National Archives, New York, N.Y..

Creator History

The colonial Courts of Vice Admiralty were branches of the High Court of Admiralty in London, upholding British maritime law by power of royal prerogative. Vice-Admiralty courts, acting without juries, dealt with such cases as claims for salvage and seamen's wages, claims for prize vessels and cargoes taken in wartime, and violations of British trade and navigation statutes. The New York Court of Vice Admiralty had jurisdiction over New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Lewis Morris (1698-1762) was appointed Vice-Admiralty judge for that jurisdiction in 1738, holding the commission until his death in 1762 at Morrisania, New York. His son Richard Morris (1730-1810) served as judge from 1762 to 1775. He was chief justice of the New York Supreme Court of Judicature from 1779 to 1790.

Scope and Content Note

The New York Court of Vice Admiralty records, dating from 1753 to 1770, comprise one volume recording decisions chiefly on prize cases, with memoranda on commissions for privateers, at the Court of Vice Admiralty for the Province of New York. The bulk of the cases date from the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). Cases were heard before Judges Lewis Morris, Jr. (tenure 1738-1762) and Judge Richard Morris (tenure 1762-1775), in New York City or places convenient for Lewis Morris at the end of his life. Records for the years 1755, 1765-1766, and 1768-1769 are not present; those entered 1753-1754 concern a prize case from 1745.

Proceedings are chiefly prize cases, adjudicating the condemnation and public sale of captured ships and cargo brought in by privateers and, to a lesser extent, the Royal Navy, during the Seven Years' War. Captured ships are mostly French, taken at points ranging from the coast of Newfoundland to the West Indies. A few cases concern the seizure of ships and smuggled goods by customs officers, and claims for wages by seamen. Reports on prize cases include the "lybell" (libel) or pleading of the captor for lawful seizure, recounting the capture and location at sea; any further proceedings; and the Court's decision. In some cases the ship's company or crew included slaves, considered as captured property. The volume concludes with the case against William Dean of Windsor, Cumberland County (Vermont) for the unlicensed cutting of white pines, 1770, brought by John Wentworth, Surveyor General of His Majesty's Woods in America, followed by a suit for items salvaged from a wrecked ship at Rockaway, and an incomplete entry. The records also include memoranda recording the stipulated payment of parties seeking commissions to act as privateers, mostly New York City merchants. Memoranda identify the names of the partners, the ship, and its captain, and the date the commission and instructions were issued by the Court. Commissions and instructions are given in full for the ships Hardy (1756 August), Anne (1756 December), and Prince of Brunswick (1762 April), cited by subsequent entries.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Actions (judicial events)
Legal documents

Subjects

Admiralty -- Great Britain
Maritime law -- Great Britain
Merchants -- New York (State) -- New York -- 18th century
Privateering
Prize law -- Great Britain
Seven Years War, 1756-1763 -- Naval operations, British

Occupations

Judges

Lawyers

Merchants

Seamen

Ship captains

Geographic Names

New York (N.Y.) -- Commerce

New York (N.Y.) -- History -- Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775

New York (State) -- History -- Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775

United States -- History -- French and Indian War, 1754-1763 -- Economic aspects

United States -- History -- French and Indian War, 1754-1763 -- Naval operations

Names

Morris, Lewis, 1698-1762

Morris, Richard, 1730-1810