



The New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

William Wilson letter book

1757-1760

MssCol 24505

Processed by Susan P. Waide in 2018

Summary

Creator: Wilson, William, 1739-1816

Title: William Wilson letter book

Date: 1757-1760

Size: .1 linear feet (1 folder)

Source: Purchased from Scott & O'Shaughnessy, Inc., 1916.

Abstract: William Wilson (1739-1816) was a Philadelphia Quaker merchant. He was the son of George and Mary Wilson and the stepson of merchant Solomon Fussell (1704-1762), formerly a chairmaker. William Wilson's letter book at Philadelphia, 1757 June 23-1760 October 5 (1 volume in 1 folder), contains copied letters sent to merchants and ship captains trading chiefly in the West Indies and Great Britain, and along the eastern North American coast. Letters typically give instructions followed by lists of goods ordered or bills for goods shipped. Most letters are from Wilson, but a few are from merchants Solomon Fussell and Robert Parrish, or from Wilson on their behalf. Letter recipients include James Verree of South Carolina, John and Samuel Gould of Rhode Island, Tristram Coffin and Christopher Starbuck of Nantucket, ship captain Nathaniel Donnell, and British merchants William Neate and the firm of Devonshire, Reeve, & Lloyd. Commodities include flour, sugar, molasses, coffee, cotton, whale oil and bone, mackerel, indigo, rice, and iron bar, as well as clothing, hardware, and household goods.

Preferred citation: William Wilson letter book, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Susan P. Waide in 2018

Creator History

William Wilson (1739-1816) was a Philadelphia Quaker merchant. He was the son of George and Mary Wilson and the stepson of merchant Solomon Fussell (1704-1762), formerly a chairmaker.

At an early age, Wilson engaged in mercantile ventures on his own behalf and in collaboration with Fussell and merchant Robert Parrish (1727-1815), as represented in Wilson's letter book dated 1757-1760. In his letter of August 23, 1760 to William Neate, Wilson describes himself as a young man engaged in trade, about to conclude his apprenticeship with Thomas and William Lightfoot. With the encouragement of the Lightfoots and Solomon Fussell, he is considering opening a store. Advertisements for imported dry goods at William Wilson's store on Market Street appeared later that year in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

Although Wilson identified Fussell as his father-in-law in his letters, he was, rather, his stepfather. Solomon Fussell and Mary Wilson, both widowed, were married in Philadelphia on October 12, 1751. Among the witnesses were members of the Wilson, Fussell and Lightfoot families, prominent merchant Israel Pemberton, and Robert Parrish, the husband of William Wilson's sister Mary. William Wilson married Abigail Mott in Philadelphia on January 27, 1763, with members of the same families attending.

Scope and Content Note

William Wilson's letter book at Philadelphia, 1757 June 23-1760 October 5 (1 volume in 1 folder), contains copied letters sent to merchants and ship captains trading chiefly in the West Indies and Great Britain, and along the eastern North American coast. Letters typically give instructions followed by lists of goods ordered or bills for goods shipped. Most letters are from Wilson, but a few are from merchants Solomon Fussell and Robert Parrish, or from Wilson on their behalf. Letter recipients include James Verree of South Carolina, John and Samuel Gould of Rhode Island, Tristram Coffin and Christopher Starbuck of Nantucket, ship captain Nathaniel Donnell, and British merchants William Neate and the firm of Devonshire, Reeve, & Lloyd. Commodities include flour, sugar, molasses, coffee, cotton, whale oil and bone, mackerel, indigo, rice, and iron bar, as well as clothing, hardware, and household goods.

Key Terms

Subjects

Coastwise shipping

Merchants -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia

Geographic Names

Great Britain -- Commerce -- United States

Philadelphia (Pa.) -- Commerce

United States -- Commerce -- Great Britain

United States -- Commerce -- West Indies

West Indies -- Commerce -- United States

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Letter books

Occupations

Merchants.

Ship captains.

Names

Fussell, Solomon, 1704-1762

Parrish, Robert, 1727-1815

Wilson, William, 1739-1816
Wilson, William, 1739-1816 -- Correspondence