



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

New York City Court of Aldermen records

1795-1798

MssCol 29975

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Summary

Creator: New York (N.Y.). Common Council

Title: New York City Court of Aldermen records

Date: 1795-1798

Size: .2 linear feet (2 volumes)

Source: Purchase, 2019

Abstract: In New York City during the 1790s, certain criminal and municipal offenses were quickly adjudicated at City Hall by one or two aldermen acting in their capacity as justices of the peace, meeting in a room that came to be known as the Police Office. The collection of New York City Court of Aldermen records, 1795-1798, consists of two consecutive volumes dated 1795 December 18-1796 August 12, and 1796 August 15-1797 March 22, recording proceedings before "a Court of Aldermen held at the Police Office at the City Hall in the City of New York." Laid in at the end of the second volume is a similar record, an abstract of cases before Alderman Richard Furman at the Police Office, dated 1797 November 20-1798 March 1 (15 pages in a sewn gathering). The records are rough minutes, in journal form, of cases held in court each day. Charges cover a broad range of offenses under state and municipal law. Ship desertion by mariners, bastardy cases, and aspects of poor law administration were included in the justices' jurisdiction.

Preferred citation: New York City Court of Aldermen records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

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Separated Materials:

New York City Court of Aldermen records, 1797-1798; Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Creator History

In New York City during the 1790s, certain criminal and municipal offenses were quickly adjudicated at City Hall by one or two aldermen acting in their capacity as justices of the peace, meeting in a room that came to be known as the Police Office. The Police Office, an inferior criminal tribunal under the direction of the Common Council, was established in New York State law on March 2, 1798. It was the predecessor of the Police Court, subsequently the City Magistrates' Court.

Scope and Content Note

The collection of New York City Court of Aldermen records, 1795-1798, consists of two consecutive volumes dated 1795 December 18-1796 August 12, and 1796 August 15-1797 March 22, recording proceedings before "a Court of Aldermen held at the Police Office at the City Hall in the City of New York." Laid in at the end of the second volume is a similar record, an abstract of cases before Alderman Richard Furman at the Police Office, dated 1797 November 20-1798 March 1 (15 pages in a sewn gathering). Both volumes are disbound and in fragile condition; the first volume lacks pages between the entries for February 6 and May 10, 1796.

The records are rough minutes, in journal form, of cases held in court each day. The Court met on a nearly daily basis, except Sundays and holidays. Case notes identify the presiding aldermen and parties involved, and any witnesses, and variously describe the charges and circumstances; any action taken, such as the issuing of warrants; and disposition of the case as to release or sentencing. Any fee, fine, bail, or surety imposed, or term and place of confinement, was noted. Being a court of first instance, some cases were referred to higher courts or other City authorities.

Charges cover a broad range of offenses under state and municipal law, including assault and battery, sexual assault, prostitution, theft, counterfeiting, violations of health and safety laws, vagrancy, disorderly behavior, selling liquor or keeping a tavern without a licence, rioting, and breaking market laws and Sabbath laws. Disputes concerning free and enslaved blacks, slave owners, and indentured servants, apprentices, and their masters, are represented in the records. Ship desertion by mariners, bastardy cases, and aspects of poor law administration were included in the justices' jurisdiction. Presiding aldermen include Nicholas Bayard, Theophilus Beekman, John Campbell, Gabriel Furman, Robert Lenox, Jacob De La Montagnie, Jotham Post, Cornelius C. Roosevelt, and Andrew Van Tuyl. The name of Bernard O'Brien, a clerk for the Police Office, also appears.

The minutes were taken by the clerk during the proceedings, as can be seen by memoranda to obtain further information, details added later, and the entry of witnessed receipts with original signatures. The purchase of a blank book to "ingest the minutes of this Court" is noted on January 8, 1796.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Criminal court records
Judicial records

Subjects

Criminal courts -- New York (State) -- New York
Criminal justice, Administration of
Justices of the peace -- New York (State)

Occupations

Justices of the peace.

Geographic Names

New York (N.Y.) -- History -- 1775-1865

New York (N.Y.) -- Social conditions -- 18th century

Names

New York (N.Y.). Common Council