

INVENTORY OF THE
PAUL CUFFE PAPERS
IN THE OLD DARTMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
WHALING MUSEUM LIBRARY

Content: Business and personal papers of a Westport, Mass.,
Afro-American merchant and philanthropist, 1811-1828.

Volume: 5 inches.

Provenance: Source and accession date unknown.

Restrictions: None.

Processed By: Barbara E. Austen.

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National Endowment for the Humanities.

INTRODUCTION

Existing records reveal neither the source nor the accession date of this collection. The materials were probably acquired as a gift to the Old Dartmouth Historical Society before 1960.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Paul Cuffe was born in 1759 on the island of Cuttyhunk, Mass., and later became a resident of Westport, Mass. He was the son of a black slave who had purchased his own freedom. Despite racial prejudice, Cuffe became a successful whaleman, merchant, and ship's captain as well as a respected citizen of Westport, joining the Society of Friends and establishing the first free school in the town. Although he was accepted in white society, he was acutely aware of the poor social conditions of slave and free blacks in America. This concern led to his first voyage to Sierra Leone, Africa, in 1811, to assess the British colony as a resettlement area for freed American slaves. Before his death in 1817, Cuffe managed to transport thirty-eight free blacks to Africa and establish several abolitionist and colonization societies in America.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Materials in this collection reflect the involvement of Paul Cuffe in the resettlement of freed American slaves in Sierra Leone, Africa, dating between 1811-1828. The majority of the material consists of business, personal, family, legal, and financial correspondence dating from 1812-1816. The business correspondence concerns mercantile ventures, primarily those related to his trip to Sierra Leone in 1816, and includes letters from William Rotch, Jr., of New Bedford, Mass., John James, a Quaker merchant of Philadelphia, and Peter Williams, Jr., who was instrumental in starting the New York African Institute. Of particular note is the personal correspondence which includes requests from freed slaves for passage to Africa, letters from William Allen of London regarding Cuffe's safe passage to Sierra Leone and the resettlement issue in general, and perhaps most important, several letters from settlers of Sierra Leone describing conditions in their new home. A letter book of Cuffe's includes copies of letters to Representative Laban Wheaton of Mass., Hannah Little, a good friend of First Lady Dolley Madison, and a letter of petition to the President, Senate, and House of the United States.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE (cont.)

Other papers in the collection consist of addresses, ca. 1816; provision lists for passengers, 1816; pledges, ca. 1816; receipts, 1815-1816; lists and clippings, 1816-1817; and a small number of personal papers of Paul Cuffe's brother, John Cuffe, and Paul's son, William Cuffe, dating from 1811-1828.

Researchers should note that the bulk of Paul Cuffe's papers are in the collection of the New Bedford Free Public Library.

- Series A. Correspondence, 1812-1816.
Business, personal, family, legal and financial correspondence. 92 items.
- Series B. Addresses, ca. 1816. 1 item.
- Series C. Provision lists, 1816. 6 items.
- Series D. Pledges, 1815. 1 item.
- Series E. Receipts, 1815-1816. 4 items.
- Series F. Lists, Clippings, and Miscellany, 1811-1828.
13 items.

DESCRIPTION

Series A. Correspondence, 1812-1816

Sub-series 1. Incoming, 1812-1816

Folder 1. 1812.

" 2-6. 1815

" 7-11. 1816

Sub-series 2. Outgoing, 1813-1815

Volume 1. 1813-1815

Folder 1. 1814, 1815

Series B. Addresses, ca. 1816

Folder 1. Address to settlers of Sierra Leone, ca. 1816

Series C. Provision Lists, 1816

Folder 1. Provisions for passengers to Sierra Leone, 1816

Series D. Pledges, ca. 1816

Folder 1. Pledge of passengers to repay travel expenses,
ca. 1816

Series E. Receipts, 1815-1816

Folder 1. 1815-1816

Series F. Lists, Clippings, and Miscellany, 1811-1828

Folder 1. Passenger list to Sierra Leone, 1816

" 2. Newspaper clippings on life and death of
Paul Cuffe, 1817

" 3. Correspondence, 1811, 1827, 1828, of John Cuffe

" 4. Receipt, 1814 and pledge, 1827, of William Cuffe

ADDED ENTRIES

African Americans SEE Afro-Americans
 Afro-American business enterprises--Mass.--Westport
 Afro-American business people SEE Afro-Americans in business
 Afro-American colonization SEE Afro-Americans--Colonization
 Afro-American Friends
 Afro-American merchant seamen
 Afro-American Quakers SEE Afro-American Friends
 Afro-Americans--Biography
 Afro-Americans--Colonization--Africa--Sierra Leone
 Afro-Americans--Mass.--Westport
 Afro-Americans--Mass.--Westport--History--To 1863
 Afro-Americans--Mass.--Westport--Social Conditions--To 1964
 Afro-Americans--Relations with whites SEE United States--
 Race Relations
 Afro-Americans--United States SEE Afro-Americans
 Afro-Americans in business--Mass.--Westport
 Allen, William, 1770-1843
 Back to Africa movement
 Black Americans SEE Afro-Americans
 Blacks--United States SEE Afro-Americans
 Businessmen, Afro-American SEE Afro-Americans in business
 Colonies in Africa
 Colonization
 Colonization by Afro-Americans SEE Afro-Americans--Colonization
 Colored people (United States) SEE Afro-Americans
 Cuffe, John, 1757-1836
 Cuffe, William, 1799-ca. 1845
 Merchant seamen, Afro-American SEE Afro-American merchant seamen
 Negroes (United States) SEE Afro-Americans
 Philanthropists--Mass.--Westport
 Shipmasters--Mass.--Westport
 Sierra Leone, Africa--Colonization
 Slavery in the United States--Colonization SEE Afro-Americans--
 Colonization
 United States--Race relations
 Westport, Mass.--Biography
 Wheaton, Laban, fl. 1834
 Williams, Peter, Jr., ca. 1780-1840
 Traveller (Brig)

SEPARATIONS LIST

Removed to printed collection:

Boston Recorder, October 21, 1817.