WILLIAM TRENT

COLONIAL MERCHANT
IN THE SLAVE TRADE

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Based on research by Ephraim Hadley
Trent – A Wealthy Man of Business

• Trent’s wealth came from shipping, industry, and commerce

  – He owned shares in many ships doing business in the colonies and with England

  – He owned several mills and a bakehouse on his plantation in New Jersey

  – He bought and sold goods between England, the West Indies, and the colonies
Wealth Built on Slavery

• Slavery was central to Trent’s wealth

  – Eleven enslaved people were assessed as one-third of the value of his belongings at the time of his death

  – These people were essential to running his household in a manner that showed his wealth and social standing

  – They also worked in his businesses building that wealth

  – And Trent profited from buying and selling enslaved people
Trading in People

- Trent’s ledgers recorded his purchases and sales of enslaved people

  - Between 1703 and 1708 there were 13 ledger entries of those purchases and sales

  - These transactions tied Trent closely with many prominent Philadelphians

  - This network included provincial councillors, assemblymen, a sheriff, a ship’s captain, and two mayors
Trent’s Network of Buyers & Sellers Enslaved People, 17xx – 17xx

Each transaction is shown in detail on the following pages.
Enoch Story was an innkeeper in Philadelphia.

- **Enoch Story**
- **William Trent**

**One Man for 60 pounds**

Story sold one enslaved man to Trent for 60 pounds in 1703.
Samuel Carpenter was a Provincial Councillor and Assemblyman.

Carpenter sold four enslaved men to Trent in November of 1703.

Four enslaved men for 130 pounds
Samuel Buckley was Councilman of Philadelphia.

William Trent sold four enslaved men to Buckley in 1703/4.
Thomas Masters was a Provincial Councillor and Assemblyman of Pennsylvania, as well as Mayor of Philadelphia.

Trent and Masters each owned half of an enslaved man, valued at 27 pounds.
Robert French was a Provincial Councillor and Assemblyman of Pennsylvania.

William Trent sold an enslaved girl for 33 pounds to Robert French in 1703/4.
Miles Forster was a New Jersey merchant.

William Trent ➔ Miles Forster

Freight charges of 1.4 pounds for an Indian man.

Miles Forster ➔ William Trent

One enslaved woman for 35 pounds
Bartholemew Penrose was a Philadelphia shipwright.

A woman and her child for 50 pounds

This woman is the same person Forster sold to Trent, now with a child. Trent then sold her and her child to Penrose.
John Guest was a judge and a Provincial Councillor and Assemblyman for Pennsylvania.

John Guest sold an enslaved boy to William Trent in 1705/6.

An enslaved boy for 40 pounds

Guest sold an enslaved boy to Trent in 1705/6.
Captain John Finney was a Provincial Councillor and Assemblyman of Philadelphia, as well as High Sheriff of Philadelphia.

William Trent

Captain John Finney

One enslaved boy for 40 pounds

Finney purchased an enslaved boy from Trent in 1705/6.
Edward Farmer was a Philadelphia gaoler (jailor).

Edward Farmer sold four enslaved men to William Trent in 1706.

Four enslaved men for 130 pounds

Farmer sold four enslaved men to Trent in 1706.
William Fishborne was Mayor of Philadelphia.

William Trent sold an enslaved woman to Fishborne in 1708, who was acting as broker for Mrs. Lewis of Barbados.
Trent sold one enslaved man named Peter to Harry.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>FROM</th>
<th>TO</th>
<th>ENSLAVED PERSON</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1703</td>
<td>Enoch Story</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>One man</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Innkeeper of Philadelphia c. 1704</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1703</td>
<td>Samuel Carpenter, Provisional Councilor and Assemblyman of Pennsylvania</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>Four men</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Sold these four men to Trent, then Trent sold them to Samuel Buckley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1703/4</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>Samuel Buckley, Councilman of Philadelphia, 1701</td>
<td>Four men</td>
<td>140</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1703/4</td>
<td>Thomas Masters, Provisional Councilor and Assemblyman of Pennsylvania, Mayor of Philadelphia, 1707-1709</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>One man</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Trent and Thomas, Masters each owned half on an enslaved man</td>
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<tr>
<td>1703/4</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>Robert French, Provincial Councilor and Assemblyman of Pennsylvania</td>
<td>A girl</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Transactions in Trent’s Trade Ledgers, 1703 – 1708

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>FROM</th>
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<th>ENSLAVED PERSON</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1705</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>Miles Forster</td>
<td>Indian man</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Forster is charged 1.4 freight for his Indian man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1705/6</td>
<td>John Guest Judge, Provincial Councilor and Assemblyman of Pennsylvania</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>One boy</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1705/6</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>Captain John Fowrey Provincial Councilor and Assemblyman of Pennsylvania</td>
<td>One boy</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Trent sold the boy from above for no profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1706</td>
<td>Edward Farmer Worked for the Philadelphia Gaol (jail) 1702</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>Four men</td>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEAR</td>
<td>FROM</td>
<td>TO</td>
<td>ENSLAVED PERSON</td>
<td>AMOUNT</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1706</td>
<td>Miles Forster New Jersey Merchant</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>One woman</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1707</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>Bartholomew Poverose Philadelphia Shipwright</td>
<td>Woman and child</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Miles Forster sold this woman to Trent, then Trent sold her and her child to Poverose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1707/8</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>Mrs. Fearnot Lewis of Barbados</td>
<td>One woman</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1708</td>
<td>William Trent</td>
<td>Evan Harry of Morryan</td>
<td>One man, Peter</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Purchase was made on behalf of Mrs. Lewis by William Fishbourne - Fishbourne was the mayor of Philadelphia from 1719 to 1722.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>