

**The Nathaniel and
Thomas Shaw Papers,
1755-1799**

*Guide to the Scholarly Resources
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Introduction

During the American Revolution, Nathaniel Shaw was a leading shipping merchant of New London, Connecticut. His vessels were engaged regularly in West Indies trade, shipping lumber, cattle, and other provisions to the islands and bringing back sugar and molasses. An active partisan for the colonies, he was appointed as a naval agent for the Continental Congress in 1776 and acted as “agent of the Colony (Connecticut) for naval supplies and taking care of sick seamen.” Nathaniel’s brother, Thomas, succeeded him in managing the family business.

Nathaniel Shaw’s letterbook describes the dramatic, ongoing conflicts of the Revolutionary period. In addition to the letterbook, this collection also contains ledgers, account books, and over 8,000 bills and receipts that describe shipping activities during the American Revolution and afterward. The ledgers and account books illustrate the financial side of the shipping industry, including the accounts of privateers and the disposition of prizes taken by American ships during the war. These documents are a rich source for the study of Colonial and Revolutionary America and the shipping trade during this period.

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| | 143. Isaac Wharton letters Item Nos. 9095-9111 | 1786 |
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| | 150. | Transcripts of letters made by the Department of State for Nathaniel Shaw Perkins in 1900 15 Letters from Nathaniel Shaw to General Washington | |

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| | 2 letters from Governor Trumbull to President Hancock | |
| | Letter to Governor Trumbull from Thomas Shaw and others | |

| Reel | Accounts, etc. | Dates |
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| No. | | |
| 21 | Ledger no. 1, 1772-1795, of accounts with customers. This was kept in conjunction with ledger no. 25. These two volumes with a few pages of accounts in no. 2 constitute the customer accounts of Shaw's mercantile business, 1765-1797. There are entries p. 216 for settlement of the estate of the widow Ann Ledyard, 1791. | 1772-1795 |
| 22 | Ledger no. 2, 1790-1797, containing 30pp. of entries recording debits and credits for services including some for farming; one p. of receipts, 1796-1799, for interest on a note from John A. Lawrence due the estate of Thomas Shaw. Most of the volume is blank. | 1790-1799 |

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No. Accounts, etc.

- 21 Ledger no. 3 in two parts, 1778-1779, 1777-1795. The first part deals with the sale of clothing and cloth goods, with off-setting credits for shares in mercantile ventures sponsored by Shaw; and entries for supplying the ship *General Putnam*. The magnitude of some of the transactions is indicated by the accounts with Capt. Nathaniel Saltonstall and Amaziah Joicelin pp. 71, 72. In inverse and reverse order there are lists of articles removed from, date of capture of, destination of, and list of men left in charge of, the prizes *Surprise*, *Joseph*, *Princess Royal*, *Dispatch*, *Elizabeth*, and *Carolina*.
- 21 The second part contains 5 pp. of an inventory (probably that of a ship's cargo); a list of notes and securities held by Shaw, giving date, number, and in whose favor drawn; a list of securities given "soldiers in the Connecticut Line"; a list of Continental Loan Certificates; underwriting accounts showing rate, gains and losses on total premiums, adjusted premiums, vessels' name, makers' name, destination, and payee.
- 22 Ledger no. 4, 1756-1780, of mercantile accounts, including inventories of cargoes shipped, entries for the outfitting, supplying, and financing of various ventures, and 7 pp. of accounts of the building and outfitting of 1756-1780

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|--|-----------|
| No. Accounts, etc. | |
| 22 <i>Ledger no. 4 (cont'd.)</i> the sloop <i>American Revenue</i> . Cargoes shipped by Shaw included staves, shingles, headings, hay, meat, fresh vegetables, candles, horses, fowl, etc. There are accounts for the prize ship <i>La Jean Teresa</i> , 1757 (see Record no. 40), and entries concerning the estate of Josiah Rogers, 1761. More than half the pages are blank. | |
| 22 Ledger no. 5, 1765-1782, describing the mercantile business of the Shaws in account form. The accounts are arranged alphabetically by customers with place of residence often indicated, and show sales of wheat, bread, meal, oats, sugar, salt, tea, butter, turnips, onions, beans, beef, mutton, veal, vinegar, molasses, rum, brandy, wine, flannel, oil, indigo, yarn, shingles, staves, planks, nails, iron, shovels, spades, axes, marine hardware, supplies, etc. There are a few credit entries indicating the purchase of hay, sugar, brandy, rum, molasses, peas, corn, and beef; also constant references to a "Ship Book," probably kept in conjunction with this ledger; annual property lists, 1768-1781, of Nathaniel and Thomas Shaw; and three pages of accounts with Nathaniel Shaw, Sr. | 1765-1780 |

Reel

Dates

No. Accounts, etc.

- 20 Ledger no. 6, of accounts of the sloop 1779
American Revenue, kept by the captain, William Leeds, listing of officers and crew, articles of clothing to the latter, charges for food and services to the ship, and expenses incurred in disposing of the prize ships *Nancy*, *Dispatch*, and *Polly*, and their cargoes.
- There are copies of five letters from Capt. Leeds to Patrick Moor, probably an owner, written from Basse Terre, Guadaloupe, describing privateering activities of the sloop in this region and giving information on the French and British fleets in these waters under D'Estaing and Byron, respectively.
- 20 Ledger no. 7, 1776-1781, of accounts of 1776-1781
 sale of marine supplies and services to vessels; maintenance and preparation for sale of prize vessels; 80 pages for the sale of cloth and cloth goods; and entries for the disposition of the prize vessel *Polly*. Accounts concerning the prize vessels *Arthol*, *Mary*, *Two Brothers*, *Sally*, and *Polly* are found throughout the ledger, as are those for the ships *American Revenue*, *Sampson*, and *Fair American*.
- 20 Ledger no 8, undated, recording sales of n.d.
 contents of numbered boxes, trunks, tierces, etc., presumably a ship's cargo. The first 26 pages are a continued list of articles sold, purchaser, and price, apparently recorded as each trunk or cask was opened.

- | Reel | Dates |
|---|-----------|
| No. Accounts, etc. | |
| 20 <i>Ledger no. 8 (cont'd.)</i> | |
| <p>The next 37 pages are a record of these sales at vendue, arranged by purchasers, with an index to the names in back of volume.</p> <p>There is one page near the end of the volume headed "The Owner of the Sloop <i>American Revenue</i> 6th Cruise." Showing net proceeds "of the Prizes sold in West Indies" and of other ventures of this cruise. It is not clear that the preceding entries relate to this ship, but the allusion to prizes indicates the Revolutionary period.</p> | |
| 20 Ledger no. 9, 1777-1778, describing the outfitting of various warships, including the <i>Cabot, American Revenue, Defense, Revenge, and Oliver Cromwell</i> . There are charges for processing the prize ships <i>John, Sally, and Clarendon</i> ; and a list of sale at "Public Vendue" of coffee from the prize <i>True Blue</i> ; also, an account with the (Connecticut) Colony for military supplies. Miscellaneous customer accounts appear throughout. | 1777-1778 |
| 20 9 folio pages (no. 12). Undated, recording the disposition of the cargoes of the prize ship <i>Putnam</i> , and the ships <i>Nancy, Clinton, and Charming Nancy</i> , whose status is not clearly indicated. Some of the foods were given over directly to the Board of War, while the others were sold at auction and the proceeds | n.d. |

Reel

Dates

No. Accounts, etc.

- 20 *Ledger no. 12 (cont'd.)*
distributed to owners and crew. An interesting account of the charges for disposition can be found on the last two pages.
- 20 Ledger no. 13, 1755-1757, of entries for the sale of foodstuffs, hardware, and cordage. Cordage is bartered for yarn and meats.
- 20 Ledger no. 14, 1757-1758, concerning the 1757-1758 sloop *Sally*, the prize schooner, *St. Ann*, and her capturer, the sloop *Blakeney*. Sales of the prize cargo of the *St. Ann* show amounts of each commodity, purchaser of same, and price; followed by record of sales arranged by purchasers, with credits to some for shares in the prize. Records of the sale of the privateer sloop *Blakeney* show purchasers, items purchased, and cost; followed by record of sale arranged by purchasers, with credits to those owners shares in the sloop. The last 4 pp. are entries for the sloop *Sally* on her first, second, and third voyages.
- 20 Record no. 16, 1777, listing weights of 1777 cargoes of a prize taken by the ship *American Revenue*, and a prize taken by both the ships *American Revenue* and *United States*. The disposition of the proceeds to crew and owners is carefully computed. The weight of a shipment of hogsheads of sugar shipped for

| Reel | Dates |
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| No. Accounts, etc. | |
| 20 | <i>Record no. 16 (cont'd.)</i> |
| | Messrs. Grilling and Dickson is recorded. Shaw deducted 12 percent of the cargo for "fares," and recorded the sale of this cargo. Most of the pages are blank. |
| 20 | Pocket account book no. 18, 1786-1788, of 1786-1788 Elias Perkins, 1767-1845, Yale 1786, lawyer of New London, Conn., who married Lucretia Shaw Woodbridge, granddaughter of Nathaniel Shaw, Sr. Entries are not numerous and are for personal and legal matters. On last page are entries showing that Perkins boarded with Justice Oliver Ellsworth, from Nov. 1786 to some time in 1788, during which time he probably read law under Justice Ellsworth. |
| 20 | Record no. 21, 1777-1782, containing entries 1777-1782 for personal accounts, records of Continental, State, and personal notes held by Shaw, and various records of legislation giving insight into the procuring, financing, and maintaining of the local and state militia. Near the middle of volume is "a Continental scale of depreciation of money." There is a page entitled "Connecticut Quota of Supply" listing various amounts of beef, salt, hay, and rum, followed by a list of "Prices (for foodstuffs) that each State are to Charge." |

Reel

Dates

No. Accounts, etc.

- 22 Ledger no. 25, 1765-1783, of accounts 1755-1783
 with customers. Sales include those of wheat, meal, oats, bread, sugar, salt, rice, cinnamon, molasses, rum, tobacco, coffee, brandy, wine, vinegar, chocolate, butter, pork, beef, mutton, veal, fish, onions, turnips, beans, corn, oil, indigo, yarn, flannel, linen, cloth, articles of clothing, hides, shingles, staves, planks, boards, cordage, tar, pitch, calking, nails, iron, shovels, spades, axes, marine hardware, and supplies. The origin of many of these goods is indicated in the contra or credit accounts with each customer.
- 20 Ledger no. 26, 1776-1779, 1796-1804, 1776-1779
 consisting mainly of entries describing 1796-1804
 Shaw's activities in the Revolutionary War. There are charges for the outfitting of the ships *Defense*, *Oliver Cromwell*, *Trumbull*, *Resistance*, etc.; for war supplies to the forts Trumbull, Griswold, and Stonington; to the State of Conn.; to Col. Woolcot's Regiment, stationed at New London; to the Hon. Marine Committee (the 1st on pp. 100-106, 129) and to the Continental Navy Board (p. 131). There are several pages of accounts headed "Expenses of Flags to New York," describing expenses incurred in sending prize vessels to New York, and transporting prisoners to New York and to various forts.

| Reel | Dates |
|--------------------|---|
| No. Accounts, etc. | |
| 20 | <i>Ledger no. 26 (cont'd.)</i> |
| | Removed from this volume is an inventory and appraisal of the estates of Lynide and Richard Manwaring of Waterford, Conn., n.d., but not before 1825. |
| 20 | Ledger and daybook no. 27, 1779-1795, 1779-1795 recording sales of the usual goods and produce. The first 118 pp. are customer accounts, many of which contain little more than the account heading. Nearly half of the book is devoted to daybook entries, 1781-1795. |

In back volume there are: 6 pp. of "Duties Received," 1790-1794; a list of "Disposition of Certificates," 1789; and, in reverse and inverse order, lists of the capture of the prizes *Hunter, Polly, Liberty, Nancy, Charming Nancy, Clinton*, showing their date of capture and goods removed from and prizemaster and crew left with same. A folio sheet, "Roll of the Officers and Men belonging to the Sloop *American Revenue* July 1778," was removed from this book. From other account books in this collection it is clear that the *American Revenue* shared in the disposition of these prizes; therefore it seems likely that the lists in no. 27 describe this shop's very active privateering record.

There are 60 blank pages in this book, the first 34 pp. are missing, and the binding is in poor condition.

Reel

Dates

No. Accounts, etc.

20 Ledger no. 28, 1771-1795, of accounts 1771-1795

with customers for sale of the usual and produce dealt in by the Shaws. There are accounts with Peter Vandervoort, Thomas and Isacc Wharton, and Hubbard & Greene, jobbers for Shaw in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, respectively. These transactions indicate the great amount of business done by Shaw. There is an account, 1775, with Joseph Trumbull, p. 43; several with the Town of New London; and charges for a 5 percent commission from the sale of various cargoes, plus duties paid, wharfage, piloting, etc. There is an index of customers in the front.

Removed from this volume was a memorandum, probably by Thomas Shaw, concerning charges of Peter Mumford against the estate of Nathaniel Shaw. Undated but not before 1792.

22 Ledger no. 29, 1770-1785, of customer 1770-1785

accounts, indicating sales of rum, sugar, tea, molasses, tobacco, brandy, corn, pork, beef, fish, salt, chocolate, boards, nails, articles of clothing, hides, etc. Index in front.

22 Daybook no. 30, 1775-1778, describing 1775-1778
sale of commodities indicated in no. 29 above.20 Ledger no. 31, 1778-1779, of accounts for 1778-1779
sale of beef, sugar, coffee, and shares in

| Reel | Dates |
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| No. Accounts, etc. | |
| 20 | |
| <i>Ledger no. 31 (cont'd.)</i> | |
| mercantile ventures. Off-setting credits for customer's share in realized ventures are frequent. Near the end of volume are 2 pp. describing the disposal of the cargoes of the prizes <i>Hunter</i> and <i>Polly</i> to owners and crew, containing a list of owners and their respective shares in the capture. There is an index at the end. | |
| 22 | 1788-1792 |
| Daybook no. 32, 1788-1792, recording fees charged for legal services, including pleading of cases in court, settling of financial disagreements, and claims, and serving summonses, etc. | |
| 22 | 1779-1781 |
| Daybook no. 33, 1779-1781, of entries for sale to individual customers and vessels of rum, wine, beef, pork, fish, sugar, salt, chalk, tallow, nails, cordage, powder, etc. | |
| 21 | 1778-1780 |
| Ledger no. 34, 1778-1780, of accounts dealing with the maintenance and supply of privateers operated by the government, the State of Connecticut, and Shaw; with the care of "Sick Prisoners from New York" (12 p.); charges for materials and labor on the ships <i>Le Despencer</i> , <i>Nancy</i> , <i>American Revenue</i> , <i>Defense</i> , <i>General Putnam</i> , <i>Oliver Cromwell</i> , <i>Trumbull</i> , <i>Elliot</i> , and <i>Pompey</i> ; and charges for dockage, storage, and legal expenses incurred | |

Reel

Dates

No. Accounts, etc.

- 21 *Ledger no. 34 (cont'd.)*
in the disposition of the prizes *Polly, Berkley, Hazard, Sally, and Dove.*
- 21 Record no. 35, 1777, of the sale at public 1777
vendue of the brigantine *Sally* and cargo (a
prize of the ship *American Revenue*, including
a list of all items sold, their purchasers, and
price; and an account of all legal expenses and
of the settlement with the owners.
- 21 Ledger no. 36, 1756-1778, lacking entries 1756-1778
for 1763-1775 incl. In the front of the volume
are three pages of lists, 1758-1762, of vessels
grounded or captured by the British or French,
their masters, destination, and the average loss
incurred by underwriters on their shares of
cargo; and in inverse and reverse order in back
of volume, 14 pp. of "Premiums received,"
1756-1767, listing vessels, their masters,
underwriters, destination, and the insurance
rate charged on specified sums. Accounts,
1776-1778, record charges to various
customers and off-setting credits to some on
shares in mercantile ventures. Eight pages are
devoted to the disposition of prizes taken by
the ship *American Revenue* in 1777, including
a list of sales at vendue with the customers
designated for each item by lot.
- 21 Volume no. 37, consisting of several 1733-1791
different records, including: 10 pp. listing lands

| Reel | Dates |
|--|-----------|
| No. Accounts, etc. | |
| 21 | |
| <p><i>Volume no. 37 (cont'd.)</i> acquired, 1733-1791, by Nathaniel Shaw, Sr. and Jr., and Thomas Shaw, giving names of persons from whom acquired; 9 pp of "commissary Proceedings," 1781-1784, describing the administration of prisoners placed in Shaw's care, including charges to the "United States" for his services: in inverse and reverse order, charges, 1777, incurred in the disposition of the prizes <i>Two Brothers</i>, <i>Mary</i>, <i>Athol</i>, <i>Rebecca</i>, <i>Sally</i>, <i>Carolina</i>, and <i>Sheelah</i>; and records, 1776-1779, of the 6th and 7th cruises of the privateer, <i>American Revenue</i>.</p> | |
| 21 | 1769-1777 |
| <p>Record no. 38, 1769-1776, listing cargoes of a number of vessels on specified voyages and disposition of same to various customers. There is a record, May 1776-Jan. 1777, of supplies, including guns and powder, received from the Continental government, and the disposition of these supplies to various individuals and forts. An inventory of "Goods received on shore" from a prize ship captured by the ship <i>Andrea Doria</i> also appears. Scattered through the book are ledger entries to various people.</p> | |
| 21 | 1776-1778 |
| <p>Ledger no. 39, 1776-1778, containing accounts of Nathaniel Shaw's duties as Continental agent for the colony of</p> | |

Reel

Dates

No. Accounts, etc.

21 *Ledger no. 39 (cont'd.)*

Connecticut, in fitting and supplying vessels of the Continental and Connecticut Navy, caring for sick sailors, disposing of prize vessels and their cargoes, and as agent of supply for the Secret Committee of Connecticut. Most of the entries are for outfitting and supplying ships of the Continental and Connecticut Navies, including the *Alfred*, *Cabot*, *Andrea Doria*, *Hampden*, *Trumbull*, *Fly*, *Resistance*, *Schuyler*, and *Continent*. Shaw was rewarded with a 5 percent commission on materials furnished to these ships, and on pp. 53-54 there is an account with "The Honorable Marine Committee" of Philadelphia for settlement of the various charges incurred in this capacity.

Pages 8-11, 16 contain accounts of payments made by Shaw to townspeople of New London for room, board, and care of seamen ill from small pox or wounded in action around the Bahamas under Capt. Esek Hopkins, commander of the Continental Navy.

On pp. 32-37 are accounts of sales of prizes, showing the distribution of proceeds: Shaw's commission, 1/3 of the remainder to the capturers, and 2/3 to the government. The proceeds from these sales are charged off on pp. 53-54 against the expenses incurred from outfitting the government ships.

In inverse and reverse order in the back of the book are charges for goods and services to

| Reel | Dates |
|---|-----------|
| No. Accounts, etc. | |
| 21 <i>Ledger no. 39 (cont'd.)</i> the Ordinance Store of New York, the Marine Committee of Philadelphia, Col. Richmon's Regiment, the Continental Board of "Warr", the Continental Navy Board, Forts at Groton, Mamecock, and Stonington, and to General Washington, Joseph Trumbull, John Michel (the last including a charge to General Gates), and Barnabus Dean, procurer on the Secret Committee. | |
| 21 Record no. 40, May 1757, of the sale at public vendue at Newport, R.I. of the cargo of the prize ship <i>La Jean Teresa</i> which was captured by the sloop <i>Little Rogers</i> . There are 9 pp. of entries for the sale of sugar and coffee, listed by numbered lots with price and name of purchaser for each. | 1757 May |
| 21 Unnumbered ledger, 1760-1766, of accounts with vessels for the sale of rope, cable, marlin, yarn, planks, turpentine, hay, candles, corn, salt, beef, rum, etc. | 1760-1766 |
| 21 Unnumbered letterbook, vellum covers. 1765-1786. (This is the "Commercial letterbook" referred to in Rogers.) | 1765-1786 |
| 21 Papers removed from account books | n.d. |

