

18th—19th Century Commemorative Ceramics of American Slave Ships

Introduction

Throughout the 18th-19th century at the height of the American Slave Trade, the American people developed an interest in ceramics commemorating their country's slave ships, following the British trend. Many British ceramic factories especially in the port city of Liverpool catered to this market, providing jugs and punchbowls to the American people. Today, many of these ceramics can be found in museum collections. With the help of databases such as the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, we can learn the stories of American slave ships and their passengers both willing and unwilling.

Aims

- Contact museums on the east coast of the United States and search their online catalogues (where available) to find maritime ceramics featuring ships.
- If online catalogues are not available, get in contact with a representative of the museum.
- Use the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database to identify if any of the featured ships ever made slaving voyages for the United States of America.
- Once identified, find out more information about the ship, its slaving voyages, and its captain and crew.

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Liverpool Jug depicting the ship "William of Newburyport". There are several possible matches on the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database. On the reverse is the Apotheosis of George Washington. This design became extremely popular after George Washington's death in 1799. This can aid in dating the jug because any ceramics decorated with this image were not made until after Washington's death in 1799. (Photos courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg).

Liverpool jug featuring the ship "Merchant". "Merchant" appears many times in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database. This is one of a major line of ceramics featuring the quote "Peace, Plenty, and Independence". Some indications point to the origin of this quote as being the War of 1812. However others indicate an origin as early as the late 1700s, 10+ years before the War of 1812 began. (Photos courtesy of Winterthur Museum).



	Total Slaves	Total Voyages	Average	Standard Deviation
Slaves Embarked	168	2	84.0	46.7
Slaves Disembarked	138	2	69.0	38.2
Tonnage of Vessel		2	46.0	0.0

Summary statistics table relating to the 2 slaving voyages made by the schooner Nabby in 1797 and 1798 captained by John Munro. (Table courtesy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database).



Voyage map of Nabby's 2 voyages. In 1797, slaves were picked up in the Banana Islands, Africa and dropped off on St. Kitts in the Caribbean. In 1798, slaves were picked up on the Windward Coast, Africa and dropped off in Savannah, Georgia. (Map courtesy of Transatlantic Slave Trade Database).

Liverpool jug featuring the ship "Thomas". The name has several matches on the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database. On the reverse a wish for liberty to spread from America, where it began, to the rest of the world. This quote and design also appeared on several vessels, however the exact origin of the quote is unclear (Photos courtesy of Winterthur Museum).



Conclusions

- The ceramics are transferware, meaning the image has been transferred onto the pottery vessel rather than painted on by hand.
- Owing to the simplicity of the jug's design, most only showing the ship's name under the print, positive identification of the slave ship is proving difficult and requires further study.
- At this point, 11 possible identifications of slave ships have been made including one featured on a reproduced 20th century jug.
- In the early 20th century, reproductions of Liverpool ceramics featuring American slave ships were reproduced. Whether this was for a market with pro-slavery leanings or a market interested in maritime ceramics is still unclear.
- Many jugs also feature scenes or celebrations of American patriotism. The Apotheosis of George Washington, the quote "Peace, Plenty, and Independence", and other similar quotes are very common on these jugs.

Sources

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