



The Historical  
Society of  
Pennsylvania

Collection 3061

**William Trent (d. 1724)**  
**Ledger**

1703-1709

1 vol. (in 5 boxes), 0.75 lin. feet

**Contact:** The Historical Society of Pennsylvania  
1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107  
Phone: (215) 732-6200 FAX: (215) 732-2680  
<http://www.hsp.org>

**Processed by:** Leslie Hunt

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**Abstract**

William Trent, born in Scotland, immigrated to Philadelphia by the 1690s and established himself as a highly successful merchant. He was also a member of the Provincial Council and the Supreme Court in Pennsylvania. After purchasing a large tract of land in central New Jersey in 1714, he and his family moved there in 1721, where he served on the Assembly and was a judge of the Supreme Court. He died suddenly in 1724.

His ledger, dated 1703-1709, displays a range of financial and trade interests, including wine, pelts, tobacco, and slaves. It also provides a list of many prominent men of the time with whom Trent did business. The ledger also includes an account documenting his purchase of and improvements to the Slate Roof House, where William Penn lived briefly.

**Background note**

William Trent, born in Scotland, immigrated to the United States by the early 1690s with his brother James. He embarked upon a successful career as a merchant in Philadelphia, trading mainly with Great Britain and with other American colonies. He was also involved in the African and West Indian slave trade. He served on Pennsylvania's Provincial Council and also was a justice on the Supreme Court, though he was not a lawyer.

In 1714 William Trent purchased a large tract of land in central New Jersey and began construction on a house. His family moved there in 1721, and Trent continued his active civic life, serving on the colony's Assembly and as their chief justice. He died on Christmas Day, 1724. The area around his home, called Trent's Town, eventually became known as Trenton.

Trent and his first wife, Mary Burge, had four children: James, John Maurice, and Mary. Following Mary (Burge) Trent's death in 1708, William married nineteen-year-old Mary Coddington, who was about twenty-five his years his junior. Their son William (b. 1715) was their only child who lived to adulthood.

## Scope & content

William Trent's ledger begins in 1703 and continues through 1709. Entries, made in the double-entry style of bookkeeping, span more than 230 pages. Most entries contain few details and merely consist of names, prices, and methods of payment. Nevertheless, the ledger does allude to the large volume of business that Trent conducted and the breadth of his interests, which included grain, tobacco, wine, and pelts. Many entries refer to ships and voyages, briefly chronicling trade with the Carolinas, Curacao, and St. Thomas. In addition, Trent's "account of Negroes" on page 156 is a brief account of his involvement in the slave trade.

Among the individual accounts noted in the volume are several merchants who are noted as being "of London," as well as numerous prominent Philadelphians, including James Logan and Isaac Norris. Among the more interesting accounts is one entitled "house in ye 2<sup>nd</sup> Street bott of Sam'l Carpenter." This account, begun on April 29, 1704, chronicles work done on what was known as the Slate Roof House. This house was briefly inhabited by various members of the Penn family while they were in Philadelphia. Before selling the house to Isaac Norris several years later, Trent made numerous improvements to the house, including the installation of a pump.

While most of the volume was written in the same hand, presumably that of Trent's clerk, occasional entries were recorded in another, less precise style. An 1897 newspaper clipping, laid into the back of the volume, provides some history and interpretation of the accounts, with particular attention to Trent's purchase of the Slate Roof House.

Please note that this volume has been microfilmed. Researchers are asked to use the microfilm before consulting the original ledger.

## **Separation report**

None.

## **Bibliography**

William Trent House, [www.williamtrenthouse.org](http://www.williamtrenthouse.org) (accessed 17 November 2004)

## **Subjects**

Hides and skins industry – Pennsylvania – 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Merchants – Pennsylvania – Philadelphia – 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Philadelphia (Pa.) – Commerce – 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Slave trade – United States – 18<sup>th</sup> century  
United States – Commerce – 18<sup>th</sup> century  
United States – Commerce – West Indies – 18<sup>th</sup> century

Penn, William, 1644-1718 – Homes and haunts  
Trent, William, d. 1724

## **Administrative Information**

### **Restrictions**

The collection is open for research.

### **Acquisition information**

Gift of the Mercantile Library, 1923.

### **Alternative format**

Microfilm available (call number XR 754).

### **Preferred citation**

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], William Trent Ledger (Collection 3061), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

### **Processing note**

Processing made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this finding aid do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

This volume previously had the call number Am .948 and was part of artificial collection 108. The pages from this volume had been treated at an earlier time with something that chemically altered the paper. It seems to have perhaps been burned with an alkaline substance. The pages are therefore extremely brittle. To stabilize the pages and make it possible to handle them, the volume was disbound and each page has been placed in a mylar sleeve. The pages have been boxed, and the volume's original boards are housed in the last box.

## Box listing

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Box</b>
Pages 1-64	1703-1709	1
Pages 65-114	1703-1709	2
Pages 115-159	1703-1709	3
Pages 160-222	1703-1709	4
Pages 223-234	1703-1709	5