

## A Buried Treasure in Society Hill, Philadelphia: 1716?

Currently, the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia is featuring its famed '**Real Pirates**' exhibit, revealing the treasures found on the British slave ship, *Whydah*, which sank near Cape Cod in 1717.

The eastern coast of Colonial America was no stranger to the voyages and marauding ventures of famed pirates, such as 'Captain Kidd' and Edward Teach or 'Blackbeard.'

According to the early antiquarian of Philadelphia, John F. Watson, in his famous *Annals of Philadelphia, And Pennsylvania, in The Olden Time (Vol.2: 1900 edition)*, it was a prevalent belief that,

"especially near the Delaware & Schuylkill waters, that the pirates of Black Beard's day had *deposited treasure in the earth*. The fancy was, that sometimes they killed a prisoner and interred him with it, to make his ghost keep his vigils there and guard it." (p.32)

As is well-known, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania's vast collections include many on-site rich 'treasures' in the form of written and published histories pertaining to both the state and the nation. However, perhaps its documents also reveal a *hidden history*, one which *literally* lies buried, *beneath the ground*, in the city of Philadelphia.

One of the earliest records, housed at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, is an enigmatic & mysterious document, written by an unknown man to his brother, residing in Philadelphia, as of May 14, 1716. However, this early 'treasure map' if you will, was penned at Saint Jago de la Vega, Jamaica, the site of a Spanish colony as early as 1509, and which presently retains the oldest existing Spanish cathedral in the West Indies. Jamaica has historically been known as the 'hotbed' of piratical activities in the Western hemisphere, with such famous places as Port Royal, quickly coming to mind.

The document below describes denominations of Spanish currency, heavily utilized by both merchants & pirates during Colonial times, such as silver 'Double Reals,' 'Pieces of Eight,' & 'pistoles,' etc., all said to have been buried in what is now the 'Society Hill' section of Philadelphia.

'Society Hill' takes its name, not from present-day standards of affluence, but from the mercantile establishment known as, 'The Free Society of Traders,' who as early as 1682, were granted a charter by William Penn. They consequently erected an office and warehouse, "on the west side of Front Street, near the south side of Dock Creek" (See *PMHB*, Vol.XLVII: 333; see also Mss Collection No.1277, call no. Am.2085 & 'Free Society of Traders: Charter of Incorporation: 1681-1682, in the 'Society of Miscellaneous Collections, Box 6b, Folder 11), a site early surveyor Thomas Holme aptly portrays upon his famous 17th-century map of the 'City of Brotherly Love.'

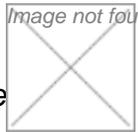
HSP's mysterious 'treasure' document specifically mentions a locale referred to as the "Cherry Garden," which was indeed located in early Society Hill, and though the 'Free Society of Traders' never prospered as it hoped, and came to an end in 1723, perhaps some member of

the organization decided to deposit his investment close by, somewhere in the ground, for safe-keeping or for rapid retrieval if the 'Society' should go 'belly-up' like a piratical ship besieged by fellow entrepreneurs.

Our unknown 18th century author, besides giving 'location' information as to where the above monies were hidden, emphatically instructs his brother, stating: "*I order you immediately to burn this Direction,*" in fear that perhaps 'others' may also be able to follow his directions to the 'buried treasure.' But alas, his advice was evidently ignored, since the document has survived up until the present-day. Did his brother fail to receive the letter? Did he meet some untimely death or misfortune? It's difficult to say at this point in time.

The question which naturally arises is the following: was the 'treasure' retrieved & removed from Society Hill? Did the 'pirate currency' ever see the light of day and bring fortune to the two 'brothers,' as contained in the "*chest, 4 and a half foot long-2 foot broad and half foot and*

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the  [1] *same Depth accordingly...*" **OR, does it lie in the ground, even today, waiting to be discovered?**

[1]  
*I leave it to the curious and to those with an imagination, to uncover the truth! Just click on the image of the document to read the directions & instructions yourself. Perhaps you'll be able to solve the mystery of 1716 and discover the treasure!*

Image is from the Society Collection, under 'Society Hill'. 'Treasure Buried,' May 14, 1716.

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## Links

[1] [https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy\\_files/society\\_hill\\_treasure\\_map.jpg](https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/society_hill_treasure_map.jpg)