



The Historical  
Society of  
Pennsylvania

Collection 3033

USS Alliance  
Ledger

1782-1783

1 vol., 0.2 lin. feet

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**Abstract**

The USS *Alliance* was a 36-gun frigate built in 1777. The ship, one of the stars of the American Navy during the Revolution, captured a number of prizes during the war and was involved in several battles. Initially under the command of Pierre Landais, her subsequent commanders included John Paul Jones and John Barry. In September 1782 the *Alliance* captured four British merchant vessels: *Britannia*, *Anna*, *Commerce*, and *Kingston*. This ledger records the prize money distributed to the *Alliance*'s crew.

**Background note**

The USS *Alliance* was a 36-gun frigate built in 1777 by Massachusetts shipbuilders William and James Hackett. Initially named *Hancock*, the ship was launched in April 1778, then renamed a month later to recognize the newly-formalized alliance between France and the United States. The first mission of the *Alliance*, initially under the command of Captain Pierre Landais, was to carry the Marquis de Lafayette back to France. Once there, the *Alliance* was assigned to a squadron commanded by John Paul Jones.

In September 1779 several vessels belonging to Jones's squadron were involved in a battle with the HMS *Serapis* and the HMS *Countess of Scarborough*. During the battle, Landais, in command of the *Alliance*, disobeyed orders and missed most of the fight, returning to the action only to indiscriminately fire upon the other American ships. Jones's flagship, *Bonhomme Richard*, was severely damaged, largely by the *Alliance*, and foundered the next morning. Not long after, Landais, who had frequently been insubordinate, was relieved of duty. Jones himself assumed command of the *Alliance* after the battle. The ship spent much of that winter cruising European waters looking for prizes. In June 1780, she set sail for Boston. After her arrival, John Barry was appointed her new commander.

Now under the command of Commodore Barry, the *Alliance* set sail in early 1781 and quickly began capturing prizes in the Atlantic waters near Europe. In May the ship was again engaged by British sloops of war, and Barry was wounded during the battle. The ship returned to the United States for repairs, and was made ready for a December

voyage to again transport Lafayette to France. After making the round trip, the *Alliance* set sail for Europe again, first sailing south to cruise the waters around the West Indies. On the way there, Barry and his crew captured several prizes. During the last days of September 1782, near the coast of Jamaica, the *Alliance* captured the British merchant ships *Britannia*, *Anna*, *Commerce*, and *Kingston*. The ship and its prizes reached France in mid-October, then returned to the West Indies. In March of 1783, Barry encountered a number of British ships in West Indian waters. After the ensuing battle, *Alliance* sailed for Newport, Rhode Island, where most of the crew was released so that the ship could be overhauled.

In 1785, the *Alliance* was sold to John Coburn in Philadelphia. She was subsequently sold to Robert Morris, who converted her to a merchant ship and made her ready for sailing to the Orient. The ship arrived in Canton in 1787. Little is known of the subsequent voyages of the *Alliance*. She was eventually abandoned on Petty Island in the Delaware River, and the last of her hulk was destroyed in 1901.

### Scope & content

This ledger, which chronicles prize money distributed to the crew of the USS *Alliance* in the wake of the capture of *Britannia*, *Anna*, *Commerce*, and *Kingston*, dates from October 1782 to March 1783. Each man has an account, and each account is numbered. There were a total of 237 men, but the first twelve accounts became detached from the volume at some point and are now absent.

Each account has an October 1782 entry for “prize money on account of the *Kingston*, *Britannia*, *Anna*, and *Commerce*.” The amount paid was almost always £120, which was probably the amount awarded to the lowest-ranking crew members for those particular prizes. Each account also has a December 1782 entry for “an order on Thomas Barclay Esq. in favour of Mr. P. F. L. Doinet.” Those sums varied, but most were in excess of £200. Thomas Barclay was the American Consul in France, and was often responsible for doling out prize money from captured vessels that were brought to French ports. Mr. Doinet is not identified, but it was noted that he was a merchant. A few men’s accounts have one or two additional entries for prize money that the men received in the early months of 1783. No account has more than four entries, and no credits were ever posted in the ledger.

## Separation Report

None.

## Related materials

At other institutions:

John Barry Papers, Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia, Pa.

Benjamin Franklin Papers [John Barry's letters to Franklin], American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pa.

## Bibliography

*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*. Washington, D.C.: Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, 1959.

Department of the Navy, Navy Historical Center, "Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships," <http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/a/alliance.htm>

## Subjects

Bounties, Military

Sailors – 18<sup>th</sup> century

United States – History – Revolution, 1775-1783 – Prizes, etc.

United States – History – Revolution, 1775-1783 – Naval operations

Barry, John, 1745-1803

Barclay, Thomas, 1728-1793

Alliance (frigate)

## Administrative Information

### Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

### Acquisition information

Provenance unknown.

### Alternative format

None.

### Preferred citation

Cite as: USS *Alliance* Ledger (Collection 3033), 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 ledger was previously part of Collection 1540, an artificial collection of business records, and had the call number Amb. 5535. In the second edition of HSP's *Guide to Manuscript Collections* it was identified as an anonymous ledger. It had also been more recently misidentified as the ledger of Thomas Barclay.