



## **BOSTON TEA PARTY SHIPS & MUSEUM ANNOUNCES NEW ACQUISITION OF PHILLIS WHEATLEY'S FIRST EDITION FAMOUS BOOK OF POETRY IN 250<sup>TH</sup> BOSTON TEA PARTY ANNIVERSARY YEAR**

**Today, 250 Years to the Day, the Dartmouth, the First of Three Boston Tea Party Ships Laden with Tea AND this Book, Arrived in Boston**

BOSTON (November 28, 2023) - The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum announces and unveils the newest acquisition to its collection today in this 250<sup>th</sup> Boston Tea Party anniversary year -- a first-edition book of Phillis Wheatley's famous book, Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral having first arrived in Boston 250 years ago today onboard the *Dartmouth*, the first of three Boston Tea Party Ships to arrive in Boston Harbor. This December 16, 2023, will mark the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party, an historic event that forever changed the course of American history.

Phillis Wheatley was a talented poet who acquired international renown and is now a key figure in the literary canon. She is the first woman of African descent and former enslaved person in both Britain and America to have a book published, and only the third woman in America to publish a book of poetry.

What is the connection to Ms. Wheatley and the Boston Tea Party? Today, exactly 250 years ago to the day, the *Dartmouth*, the first of three Boston Tea Party Ships, arrived in Boston. Nestled among the *Dartmouth*'s cargo of East India Company tea was a crate of another kind. This one would hold a shipment of the newly published Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral written by Phillis Wheatley. This book was a literary sensation in its day. Ms. Wheatley wrote her first poem in 1765 and six years later, in 1773 the year she was emancipated from slavery in Boston (also the year the Boston Tea Party took place), she would publish this famed book of poetry.

The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum acquired this book via an auction specializing in historic artifacts in Texas.

"We are thrilled to have secured this significant new acquisition of a first edition copy of Phillis Wheatley's famous book in this, the 250<sup>th</sup> Boston Tea Party anniversary year." says Shawn P. Ford, VP and Executive Director of the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum. He continues, "We will begin designing and programming a new and permanent exhibition of Phillis Wheatley, telling her story and connection to the Boston Tea Party, with this newly acquired gem of a book as the centerpiece. This new exhibit will be unveiled at the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum in late 2024 or early 2025. In the meantime, we will be hosting a temporary pop-up exhibit at the museum that launches today to be sure her story gets told leading up to the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party next month."

### **NEW PHILLIS WHEATLEY POP-UP EXHIBIT – November 28 - December 5, 2023**

As of today, November 28, through December 5 (the date of Ms. Wheatley's death in 1784), the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum will be hosting a temporary pop-up exhibit in Abigail's Tea Room showcasing the newly acquired book of poetry, a new photography exhibit highlighting Phillis Wheatley at various stages in her life taken by Valerie Anselme, a Haitian-American professional photographer from Boston, MA, and a replica of Phillis Wheatley's dress as noted in the frontispiece in her book at Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum Abigail's Tea Room during business hours.

## **Brief History of Phillis Wheatley**

Phillis Wheatley was born in West Africa (most likely in present day Gambia or Senegal) circa 1753. At the age of about seven years old, she was captured, transported to the Americas away from her family and sold to the Wheatley family in Boston. The family changed her name to 'Phillis' after the ship that had transported her across the Atlantic.

Phillis became a household servant for the Wheatley's, who taught her to read and write. She studied widely, including British literature, Greek and Latin, learning to translate both languages, and write poetry. Some of her early poems were published in local newspapers and pamphlets and, by the age of 18 she had written enough for a book. At the age of 20, Phillis was tasked with accompanying the family's eldest son, Nathaniel, to England. There she succeeded in publishing her volume of poetry, in 1773, making her the first African American and first African American woman to be published.

Her book was a success and received critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic, although others claimed that her work was too sophisticated to have been written by an African. Her poetry was based on classical themes, Christianity, the 'new world' of America and her African heritage. She also wrote about her experiences of slavery and spoke out against it at public meetings.

In 1778, John Wheatley, Phillis' master, legally freed Phillis, allowing her to marry John Peters, a freed African American. But the deeply ingrained racist attitudes of the time meant life was hard for freed slaves, especially during the American War of Independence. The couple struggled with ill-health, a low income and the death of two of their children in infancy. Phillis died in Boston in 1784, aged just 31.

## **250<sup>th</sup> Boston Tea Party Anniversary LIVE Reenactment - Saturday, December 16, 2023**

This 250th anniversary year will culminate in a grand-scale, live reenactment of the Boston Tea Party on the actual anniversary of the Boston Tea Party - Saturday, December 16, 2023. Hundreds of reenactors will tell the story of the infamous Boston Tea Party and theatrically recreate the events of December 16, 1773 at Boston's historic Old South Meeting House and Faneuil Hall in addition to Downtown Crossing with a series of performances and programming, followed by a major public procession to the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum where the Sons of Liberty will destroy loose tea, 250 pounds of tea sent to Boston from London's East India Company, in addition to tea sent in from citizens/students from around the world, into Boston's historic harbor.

### **ABOUT THE BOSTON TEA PARTY SHIPS & MUSEUM**

The Boston Tea Party, "the single most important event leading up to the American Revolution, occurred the night of Dec. 16, 1773. The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum, owned and operated by Historic Tours of America, is dedicated to accurately reliving and representing a key time in history (1773-1775) through actors, tea throwing reenactments, high-tech interactive exhibits, authentic replica ships: the *Beaver* and the *Eleanor* and an award-winning multisensory film, *Let it Begin Here*. The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum is open 7 day/week from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. (Summer/Spring) and from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. (Fall/Winter). Tours run every 30 minutes in the fall/winter and every 15 minutes in the spring/summer and last 1 hr. Closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum was voted #1 'Best Patriotic Attraction' in *USA Today's* '10Best Readers' Choice Awards 2016'; voted 'Best New Museum' in 2012 by *Yankee* magazine and 'Best of the New 2012' by *Boston Globe Magazine*. To learn more visit [www.bostonteapartyship.com](http://www.bostonteapartyship.com) or call 1-855-(TEA)-1773. The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum is located at 306 Congress St. on the Congress St. Bridge, Boston, MA 02210, over the same body of water where The Boston Tea Party took place.

### **ABOUT THE 250<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE BOSTON TEA PARTY**

Meet Boston, the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party Board of Advisors (BOA) and Revolution 250, a consortium of organizations geared to commemorate the 250th anniversaries of the events that led to the American Revolution, are working together to create a series of commemorative programs throughout the entirety of 2023 culminating in a grand-scale, live reenactment celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party taking place on Sat., December 16, 2023. Details of all programming and the major reenactment celebration is available at [www.BostonTeaParty250.com](http://www.BostonTeaParty250.com). Instagram/Facebook: @bostonteaparty250; Twitter: @BOSTeaParty250.

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