

Phillis Wheatley Peters, A Chronology |

- 1753/54      The child, who would later be known as Phillis Wheatley, is born in the Senegambia region of West Africa; it is bordered by the Senegal River to the north and the Gambia River to the south.
- 1761      11 July: The approx. 7-year-old Senegambian child arrives in the Boston harbor aboard the slave ship *Phillis*. She is purchased by either Susannah Wheatley or her husband, John, a merchant and occasional trader in slaves. They name the Senegambian child, “Phillis” after the ship that brings her. The Wheatleys own at least one other slave.
- 1767      21 December: Phillis Wheatley’s first published poem, “Messrs. Huffey and Coffin is published in Rhode Island’s *Newport Mercury*.
- 1768:      22 Feb: Wheatley writes a poem in response to the murder of 11-year-old Christopher Seider (or Snider). Snider was killed by Ebenezer Richardson, a British customs informer, while protesting the sale of British goods.
- 5 March: A | On a snowy evening, Boston Massacre takes place on King St. Wheatley lives on King Street and writes “On the Affray in King Street, on the Evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> of March;” it’s, eventually, listed in a proposal for a 1772 volume of poetry. B | Rev. Samson Occom asks Susannah Wheatley if Phillis Wheatley would want to be a missionary in Africa.
- Oct and Nov: A seventeen-year-old Wheatley writes and publishes an elegy for widely known Rev. George Whitefield. The poem is advertised in newspapers throughout New England. The young poet writes the Countess of Huntingdon to let her know about poem because Whitefield is the Countess’ chaplain.
- 1771      7 Oct: Wheatley’s poem “On the Death of Doctor Samuel Marshall” is published in the *Boston Evening-Post*.
- Late fall: Abigail May [?] asks Wheatley to write about “recollection,” and she does. Wheatley includes the poem in her letter to May. Wheatley’s poem “On Recollection” is published in *London Magazine* and Dublin’s *Hibernian*.
- 1772      29 Feb: Ezekiel Russell’s newspaper, *Boston Censor*, publishes Wheatley’s proposal for an American edition of her volume of poetry. It is published again on Mar. 14 and Apr. 11.
- 28 Oct: Wheatley’s “Attestation” is signed by 18 of Boston’s leading merchants, clergy and government officials. John Moorhead, one of its

signers owns Scipio Moorhead, to whom Wheatley writes a poem (Slauter 99). Wheatley decides not to publish her poems in Boston with printer, Ezekiel Russell, but instead will send her poems to London (Isani 102-104).

Nov: Wheatleys' poems travel to London with Capt. Robert Calef on the ship, *London Packet*.

1773

24 Feb: John Andrews, a Boston merchant, writes to his brother-in-law William Barrell in Philly with an update about the status of Wheatley's poems and with a mention of the attestation's origins (Brooks, "Our Phillis" 4-5). Andrews claims that Wheatley—after consulting with "friends"—had the attestation drawn up to ensure that her audience believed her to be the sole writer.

Mar: Samson Occom writes a letter to Susannah Wheatley and asks her to free Phillis Wheatley.

May: Boston-area newspapers announce Wheatley's departure for London, and it's noted that Wheatley has been invited by Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon. The voyage will take about five weeks. Wheatley travels with Nathaniel Wheatley, son of Susannah and John Wheatley and takes with her a letter from Richard Casey, Esq. to the Countess of Huntingdon.

3 Jun: Wheatley's "To the Right Honourable William [Legge], Earl of Dartmouth" is published in the *New-York Journal*. The NY Journal publishes the accompanying letter too. | "Farewel" and a letter from Boston (dated May 10) is published in the *London Chronicle* with a note explaining that the poem is addressed to Susanna Wheatley.

Sept: Wheatley's London publisher Archibald Bell registers the frontispiece for copyright, nine days before he registers *Poems*. London-area newspapers announce the publication of Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*.

16 Sept: Boston newspapers report Wheatley's return. She is referred to as "the extraordinary Poetical Genius." When Wheatley returns, Susannah Wheatley frees her.

Dec: Wheatley's book is on sale in New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Nova Scotia. Wheatley's friend, Obour Tanner, helps her sell books in Newport, Rhode Island.

- 15 Dec: Wheatley publishes an elegy on the death of John Moorhead, a Presbyterian minister, as a broadside.
- 1774 Feb: A | Susannah Wheatley dies. B | Wheatley writes to Rev. Samsom Occom. The letter is printed by various newspapers.
- 1775 26 Oct: Wheatley writes a poem for Gen. George Washington.
- 1776 14 Feb: Wheatley, in Providence, writes a letter to her friend, Obour Tanner. She mentions that she's received Tanner's letter from Cato Coggeshall. She didn't get to see Coggeshall though. She writes, "I doubt not that your present situation is extremely unhappy: nor that you with wonder exclaim on the proceedings of nations that are fav<sup>d</sup>. With the divine revelation of the Gospel. Even I a mere spectator am in anxious suspense concerning the fortune of this unnatural civil contest—" She is walking down the street with Quamine and they run into Zingo Stevens.
- 1778** Phillis Wheatley marries John Peters. She takes the name Phillis Peters (or Phillis Wheatley Peters) in her correspondence; she appends the name to her second book proposal.
- 1779 30 Oct: Wheatley Peters publishes a proposal for a second book in the *Boston Evening Post; and General Advertiser* (vol. 2 no. 55).
- 1781 late: Wheatley's popularity continues. A woodcut based on the frontispiece from her 1773 Poems is featured on the title page of *Bickerstaff's Boston Almanack, for the Year of Our Redemption, 1782*. It is published by Ezekiel Russell; Russell publishes three editions of the Whitefield elegy in 1770, her 1784 poem "Liberty and Peace," and her elegy for Dr. Samuel Cooper. Note that during the war Wheatley Peters's preferred printers went out of business; Russell is among the first and the last to publish Wheatley Peters' poetry.
- 1784 July: *Arminian Magazine* (vol. 7, pp. 395-396) publishes Wheatley Peters's "Elegy on Leaving\_\_\_\_\_."
- 5 Dec: Phillis Wheatley Peters dies in Boston. Her last poem is published.
- 1801 Wheatley Peters' husband, John, dies.