

George Cook and James Manshore

People of London Town, Maryland¹

On March 18, 1754, the lives of George Cook and James Manshore took a dramatic turn, they just didn't know it yet. On that day, far to the southeast of London Town in the Choptank River, three crewmen aboard the small Annapolis sloop *Hopewell* mutinied and murdered Captain William Curtis. The leader of the mutiny, a convict servant and navigator by the name of John Wright, put on the clothes of his captain and guided the sloop across the bay to the Patuxent River.

Neither George Cook nor James Manshore was aboard the *Hopewell*. Cook was an African American slave, belonging to the London Town sea captain William Strachan. Manshore was a white convict servant under the successful London Town merchant James Dick. They were both aboard a schooner which was sailing the Patuxent River on March 20th. It was this day that the *Hopewell* sailed into sight, and both Cook and Manshore took a boat loaded with bread to the mutineers. Unaware of the act of piracy, the unsuspecting servants were "decoy'd" aboard and kidnapped. Newspaper articles followed in the Maryland Gazette and Pennsylvania Gazette, warning residents of the murderous pirates and the missing servants, but two months went by before they were seen again.

A Sloop of about 45 Tons, William Curtis, Master, belonging to Mr. Creagh, sail'd from hence some Weeks ago, in order to lead on the Eastern Shore; but we have an Account that the Crew, consisting of two White Men, and a Mulatto, have run away with the Vessel and Cargo, and 'tis suppos'd they have murdered the Master; one of the Men having been seen with the Master's Cloaths on. A Boat well mann'd and arm'd sail'd from hence last Sunday in quest of them, but are not yet returned.

Maryland Gazette, March 18, 1754

FIFTY PISTOLES REWARD.
Annapolis, in Maryland, March 25, 1754.

RAN away on the 18th Instant with the Sloop *Hopewell*, belonging to the Subscriber, *William Curtis*, Master, the two following Const^l Servants; and Negro Man, viz. *John Wright*, a White Man, of a swarthy Complexion, very lusty, talks hoarse, and is much pitted with the Small Pox. *John Smith*, also a lusty White Man, with short black Hair. *Tony*, a yellowish Negro, and not quite so lusty, pretends to be a Portuguese, speaks good English and pertly, is a good Hand by Water, also can do Cooper's Work, Butchering, &c. Had on or with him, a Dove colour'd Surtoot Coat. They may have sundry Cloaths, Wigt, Linnes, Cash, &c. belonging to the Captain, as it is believed they have murdered him; and the above *Wright* was seen with the Captain's Cloaths on, which were red; tho' he had Cloaths of sundry Colours with him: He also had a neat Silver billed Sword, and Pistols mounted with Silver. The Captain had the Register of the Sloop with him, but he was not indorsed thereon, as he was to return here to make up his Load, and clear at the proper Office. They were seen off *Patuxent* on the 22d Instant, at which Time the said *Wright* assumed Master, and took two Men with them, belonging to a Schooner of Mr. *James Dick's* and Company; one a White Man, belonging to said *Dick*, the other a Negro, belonging to Capt. *William Strachan*, of *London Town*, who went on board with some Bread for them, at which Time they hoisted Sail, and cut their Boat adrift, and carried them off. They had some Lumber on board, such as Staves, Heading, and Plank; also Rum, Melasses, Sugar, Linnes, &c. &c. The Sloop is about 45 Tons, Square Stern'd, with a Round House, with a Partition under dividing the Cabin and Steerage, the Waite black, yellow Gunwales and Drift Rails, and the Drift and Stern blue. Whoever secures the said Sloop and Goods, so that the Owner may have her again, and the three White Servants, and two Slaves, so as they may be brought to Justice, shall have FIFTY PISTOLS Reward, paid by *Patrick Creagh*.

Maryland Gazette, April 4, 1754

¹ As the research into colonial London Town's inhabitants is an ongoing process, the caveat is offered that additional information may be found at any time and that a correction of information might also occur at any time.

Finally, in June of that year, the *Hopewell* was spotted in South Carolina abandoned on the Carolina bar. Search teams combed the area for the pirates and their victims, rounding up the criminals and saving both Manshore and Cook. The pirates were sent up to Annapolis in chains, where two of the mutineers were hung for their crimes and gibbeted at the entrance to the Severn River as a warning to other would-be pirates. George Cook and James Manshore are mentioned in a June 20, 1754 letter from Virginia Governor Robert Dinwiddie as being safely returned to Maryland.ⁱ

ⁱ *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1751-1758*, Vol. I, (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1881), page 212.