George Cook and James Manshore

People of London Town, Maryland

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 a 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.

Maryland Gazette, March 18, 1754

RAN away on the 18th Instant, with the Sloop Hopewell, belonging to Mr. Strachan, William Curtis, Master, the two following Convict Servants, and Negro Man, viz.:

John Wright, a White Man, of a Swansea Complexion, very lofty, suitably bearded, and of much presence with the small Fox,

John Smith, also a White Man, with dark black Hair.

They are a yellow Skinned, Negroe, and one clad in white, pretends to be a Parsonet, speaks good English and perfectly, is a good Hand at Water, and can do Cooper’s Work, Backtery, Etc. Had on or with him, a Dove colored Summer Coat.

There may have a few Casks, Wigs, Linens, Cash, Etc, belonging to the Captain, as it is believed they have murdered him; and the above Wright was foul with the Captain’s Clothes on, which were red; the other had Cloaths of fancy Colours with him. He also has a red Silver banded Sword, and Powder and Musket with Silver.

The Captain had the Ropeller of the Sloop with him, but he was not identified therein, as he was to return here to make up his Load, and clear at the proper Office.

They were seen off Patuxent on the 12th Instant, at which Time the said Wright affirmed Master and took two Men with them, belonging to a Schooner of Mr. Jones DoD’s and Company; one a White Man, belonging to Mr. Deal, the other a Negro, belonging to Capt. William Stracker, of London Town, who went on board with them, and were seen to have Ropeller, and carry their Boat, and proceed.

They have three Shovels and spades, two Old Irons, Heavy, and Planks; also Rum, Molasses, Sugar, Linens, Etc. Etc.

The Sloop is about 45 Tons, Square Stern’d, with a Round Hold, with a Partition under dividing the Cabin and Store-rooms, in which the Black, yellow and white Servants, and others may be brought to London. Deal have FIFTY PISTOLS Reward, paid by

Patrick Creech.

Maryland Gazette, April 4, 1754

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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.¹