



The first American-born colonial portraitist was Robert Feke (1706/07-1752). He painted this refined formal portrait of John Banister on commission in 1748. Toledo Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the Florence Scott Libbey Bequest in Memory of her Father, Maurice A. Scott, 1945.16. Photography Credit: Photography, Incorporated, Toledo, Ohio.

Private Lives and Public Spaces: Newport Merchant John Banister and Colonial Consumers

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Tourists stream into shops and restaurants on Banister's Wharf in Newport, purchasing products from Rhode Island and around the globe. When merchant John Banister (1707-1767) owned this wharf in the 1740s, he imported luxury apparel, tools, household items, and foods from many places. For nearly thirty years Banister's ships traded goods from and to other American colonies, the West Indies, and Europe. The Banister Journal of September 1746 through December 1749, purchased by the Newport Historical Society in 2003, was first analyzed in detail in 2012. This manuscript is a rich source for data about Banister's trade.¹ The lists of commodities provide information about the lives of consumers and producers in the public marketplace. The transactions reveal a merchant's family expenses and income. Banister's careful delineation of profit, loss, commissions, taxes, and ownership shares provides insight into his roles as merchant, retailer, ship owner, broker, and as a trade and industry leader of Newport. These details of mid-18th-century Newport reveal how Banister, as an adventurous capitalist, influenced the economy of pre-Revolutionary America.

The Banister Journal is bound with a vellum cover decorated with diamond shaped designs on "Russia leather" reinforcing bands. Russia leather was a trade name



John Banister's Journal, covered in vellum with Russian leather banding, encompasses the period from September 1746 through December 1749. It is a rich source for information about the lives of 18th-century consumers and producers in the public marketplace. Newport Historical Society Archives. NHS 2003.18.

for shaved hide of calf, horse, goat, or sheep that was vegetable-tanned, using willow or birch bark, to transform it into leather that was used primarily to strengthen the binding.² The book size is thirteen inches by eighteen inches and nearly four inches thick; the weight is seventeen-and-a-half pounds. Daily transactions were entered by beautiful cursive penmanship on 552 numbered watermarked pages. The data coursed the life of merchant Banister, his family, and Newport during a time of increasing opportunities for business owners and workers.

This article will use data from the Journal to focus on John Banister's role in Newport life. What was this colonial merchant's role in the Rhode Island export trade? How was he involved in the import trade? What was his importance to the outfitting and building of ships? How do the purchases by the Banister family reflect the ongoing consumer revolution and the family's aspirations to Georgian gentility?

John Banister in Newport

Mr. John Banister (1707-1767) traveled a distinct path to becoming a respected citizen and a successful merchant with a diversified portfolio and a complex business model. He came from a family of notable Boston merchants and married into a family of high social status in Newport.³ Banister bought land and built Banister's Wharf; he paid for a pew in Trinity Church, the house of worship for many English gentry; and he became a real estate developer of Arnold-Pelham lands that he inherited.⁴



This view of Newport shows the bustling harbor and developing city during its so-called Golden Age of mercantile wealth prior to the American Revolution. This 1880s lithograph by John Newell is based on an 18th-century over-mantel painting. The prominent profile of the Colony House, erected between 1739 and 1744, suggests that the painting dated from the late 1740s. Collection of the Newport Historical Society. NHS 01.953.

At the same time, Banister outfitted and built vessels as a broker for European ship owners. For each brokered voyage in the trade along the North American coast, to Europe, or the West Indies, he garnered a 5% commission. Moreover, he brought needed capital investment to Rhode Island by partnering with English merchants. What the Journal demonstrates is the increasing Banister fortune from 1746 to 1749, accrued from trade in consumer durables, ship building, and outfitting ships. He was among twenty colonial merchants of similar economic standing in the Newport community who made their money through a complex trade. Banister was involved in forty-six vessels clearing out of Newport, which represents 17% of the total ships trading from Newport during these years. As such, Banister was responsible for one out of every six ships leaving Newport to trade.

Table 1: Entries and Clearances of Vessels in Newport for the Last Year of the Late French and Spanish War and for the First Year of the Present Peace.

From 25 March 1747 to 25 March 1748

	Ships	Snows	Brigs	Sloops	Scooners	Total
Entered in	2	3	20	27	4	56
Cleared out	4	5	33	71	5	118

From 25 March 1748 to 25 March 1749

	Ships	Snows	Brigs	Sloops	Scooners	Total
Entered in	2	2	30	37	4	75
Cleared out	8	11	49	9	83	160

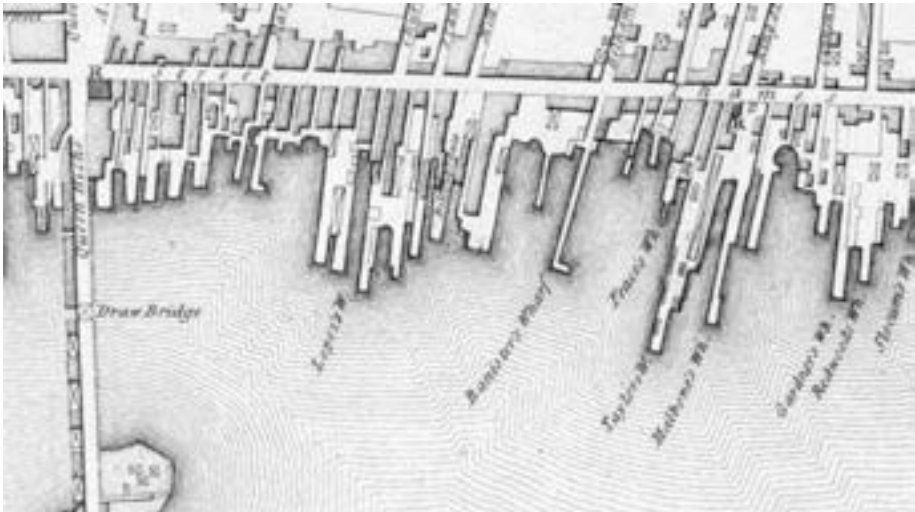
Reproduced from William Douglass, *Summary Historical and Political of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements, and Present State of the British Settlements in North America* (New York: Arno Press, 1972 [reprint of 1751 text]), vol.2, p. 99.

Furthermore, the goods in Banister's warehouse on the wharf were both local and global. On any given day he had iron tools and lumber, naval stores and shingles, textiles, and hourglasses. He sold wares to people of various occupations, who were often newly prosperous yeomen and artisans. Women shopkeepers, such as Widow Sarah Rumreil, bought imported brocade pumps and silk hosiery, tea forks and ceramics, buckles and buttons, scissors and knives. Widow Sarah Peckham's shop sold Russian handkerchiefs, damask tablecloths, and Indian calico cloth. Lydia Townsend and Sarah Arnold, clothes makers, bought many yards of wool, linen, and

silk from him. Others, such as Robert Sloan, bought imported Bohea tea, coffee, sugar, and chocolate, along with matching cups and saucers of English, Dutch, German, and Chinese origin, to sell in his shop. Ship captains such as James Brown and Caleb Godfrey kept accounts for the purchase of glass tumblers and tea pots, mugs and porringers, chests and tables. Daniel Ayrault purchased molasses to distill into rum; Joseph Tillinghast and Moses Levy purchased sets of horn table knives and forks; and Jonathan Nichols purchased foods to serve at his tavern. Banister's Wharf in Newport was a nexus for trade.

Outbound Ships Leaving Newport

What was John Banister's role in the export trade? The pages of the Journal are filled with "Adventures to the Leeward Islands and the Bay of Honduras," where Banister captains transported a variety of goods. Many people think that colonial New Englanders' trade consisted of rum for slaves. In fact, this was not true of Banister's trade from 1746 to 1749. The bulk of trade items were barrels of fish from New England and Newfoundland, combined with agricultural produce and livestock from western Rhode Island plantations, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, as well as lumber and naval stores loaded from New Hampshire, New Jersey, and the Carolinas. Note this typical entry from the Journal in the voyage of the Brig *Abigail*:



The British mapped Newport Harbor during the occupation of Newport in 1777. This detail shows Banister's Wharf at the center. Reproduced from A Plan of the Town of Newport in Rhode Island Surveyed by Charles Blaskowitz. Engraved and Published by Will.m Faden, Charing Cross, Sept. 1777. Collection of the Newport Historical Society. NHS 01.952.

[Newport, 3 June 1749, p. 469]

Voyage to the Leeward Islands in Brigantine *Abigail* Caleb Godfrey Mast'r Debt to Sundry Accounts for Cost & Charge of Sundry Merchandise Ship'd on board said Vessel September for the West Indies on my own Account of Risque Consigned Said Godfrey.....VIZ

To Merchandise Proper

195 Barrels Menhaden.....	£1365.0	
133 lb Cheese.....	233.16	
12 Keggs Salmon with Spice.....	66.0	
150 ditto Oysters.....	67.10	
2 Hhds Beans.....	21.4.0	
54.2.16 Hay.....	81.19.3	
40 Water Hhds.....	140.0	
1 White Oak Hhds for corn.....	4.10	
1 bb Tallow.....	46.8	
4 Broadcloth Great Coats.....	140.0	
2 Desks of Carving.....	64.0	
2 small ditto.....	<u>32.0</u>	
	£2262.7.3	

To Account of Flour...20bbs.....389.3.10

To Account of Onions 1300 Bunches Onions.....195

To Account of Livestock 27 Shoats [young pigs].....	97.10	
49 Sheep.....	<u>171.0</u>	£268.10

To Acct of Horses 12 Horses.....£1420.0

To Acct of Grain

75 ½ Bushels Corn.....	113.5	
100 Bushels Oats.....	<u>80.0</u>	£193.5

Fish (alewives, cod, mackerel, menhaden, and salmon) were smoked, dried, or pickled. Plantation owners in the Indies bought the best codfish for themselves and fed the lower end fish to their slaves.⁵ On the voyage of Sloop *Little Polly* to Surinam Banister listed in the Journal these types and amounts of codfish:

[Newport, 11 August 1749, p. 504]

37 Quintals codfish	£296.0
63 Quintals dry'd cod.....	£56.14
14 Barrels pickled cod.....	£23.16

A quintal was 100 pounds and a barrel held 250 pounds of pickled codfish; therefore, Banister's captain was selling 3700 pounds of salted codfish, 6300 pounds of dried cod, and 3500 pounds of pickled cod.

Before departing for ports further south, Banister purchased dairy products and livestock from the western Rhode Island farms of Champlin, Gardiner, Hazard, and Robinson. Rhode Island Colony was “a Country for Pasture...110 Cows on their dairy farms produced about 13,000 Wt of Cheese...each cow yields one Firken of Butter, 70 to 80 Wt. [a weight is equal to a pound]”⁶ Prized Rhode Island cheese from Narragansett farms was likely an imitation of England’s Cheshire cheese, whose salty flavor came from salt springs under the fields where the cows pastured, similar to Narragansett cattle grazing on pastures adjacent to salt water.⁷

Rhode Island commerce in horses was assisted by two events. When British law (1654) placed a duty on the export of horses from England, colonial merchants had a cost advantage in selling horses to Caribbean markets. Also, the Dutch government in Surinam passed a law (1704) admitting foreign traders only if they brought horses, because horses were essential for the work of turning the cylinders to crush the sugar cane.⁸ By 1700 Rhode Islanders had developed a breed of horse called the Narragansett Pacer, which they exported to the West Indies. The Narragansett Pacer had strength, an easy gait, great endurance, and speed. It became a popular racing horse, saddle horse, and plantation work horse.⁹



This map of the West Indies dates from around 1740, when John Banister exported the Narragansett Pacer, a special Rhode Island breed of horse to the area. Reproduced from Emanuel Bowen, “An Accurate Map of the West Indies,” Gentleman’s Magazine, vol. 10 (Jan. 1740), frontispiece. Reproduced Courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library.



In 1939, Ernest Hamlin Baker (1889-1975) carried out murals on commission for the post office in Wakefield, Rhode Island, depicting The Economic Activities of the Narragansett Planters. Among the images shown is a depiction of the exporting of Narragansett Pacers. On loan from the U.S. Department of the Treasury to the Pettaquamscutt Historical Society, Kingston, Rhode Island.

In Banister’s accounts, Rhode Islanders were active boarding and selling horses. A sloop outfitted for horse trade could carry thirty-five horses along with cargo; a brig could take forty-nine horses in one voyage. The Banister Journal shows the purchase price was between £70 and £100 per horse:

[Newport, 20 January 1749, p. 543]

Sundry Accounts Debit to Oliver White

Account of Horses	£3045.18
12 Horses Bot Oct. 1748 and Ship’d on the <i>Abigail</i>	
with Commission and Charges buying them.....	1316.0
5 ditto Bot. Novem 1748 and Ship’d on the <i>Hannah</i>	415.0
Commission and Charges buying 10 Horses Ship in D.....	60.6
Horsehire and Time Looking for a Horse that Ran away.....	1.15
Horsehire and Expenses to Narragansett.....	2.10
12 Horses Bot this Month and Ship’d in the <i>Hannah</i>	
with Commission and Charges in Buying them.....	1250.7

Horses and life stock required two tons of cargo capacity because of the need to include food and water for the journey.¹⁰

The accounts do not provide the survival rates of the horse on these long journeys. Despite the fact that horses can stand for twenty hours at a time and sleep standing, the journey was over a month. Did the captain stop en route to allow the horses out

to exercise? The problems of a pitching, rolling ship—and an unventilated hold of the ship—are readily imagined. Care for the horses would have included keeping the steeds cool from tropic heat and removing forty-five pounds of manure and two gallons of urine per horse. During the colonial era Spanish ships transported equines on slings, cross-tied and hobbled.

Banister captains also stopped in Pennsylvania and Maryland for livestock and food for the Caribbean plantations. The Account of Livestock for sheep and pigs for November 1747 to October 1749 indicated shipments totaling £2050 on the brig *Abigail*, the ship *Lee Frigate*, the settee *Eagle*, and the ship *Honduras Galley* on their way to Jamaica and the Leeward Islands. Also loaded on Banister's ships were agricultural produce (onions, peas, beans, corn, cheese and tobacco) in addition to grain and flour (oats, wheat, rye).¹¹

From the northern colonies, Banister bought lumber (shingles, staves, boards, and hoops). New Hampshire's contributions were extensive, including planks, spars, rafters, clapboards, anchor stock, and masts. Their mills produced the sawn boards and lathes for plastered ceilings and walls in homes, as well as wood for wagons and carriages, sledges and sleighs, furniture and boats.¹² Banister captains transported shingles from Egg Harbor, New Jersey and hoops from Falmouth, Maine. On a voyage to Jamaica and the Bay of Honduras these items were listed in the Journal:

[Newport, 1 October 1749, p. 521]

Honduras Galley with Nathaniel Sweeting Master

104 M 46 Egg Harbour Shingles.....	@10.....	£1044.0
2 M Long ditto.....	@25.....	50.0
3 M New England ditto.....	@7.....	21.0
30 M ditto.....	@110/.....	165.0
9 M feet Pine Boards.....	@35.....	315.0
33 634 feet Ditto.....	@30.....	1009.0.6
3404 feet ditto.....	@ 30.....	102.3.6
14 m Hogshead Staves.....	@25.....	350.0

On another journey to the Caribbean, Captain James Brown transported 55,005 board feet of lumber on one of Banister's ships listed under 1 February 1748, p. 430. For taxation purposes the number equivalent to a ton was 600 board feet of lumber; so he transported nearly 92 tons of lumber. He also transported "19.M7C ½ Staves" [19,700 ½ staves], which were 18 tons of staves valued at £10211.10. In Banister's Account of Lumber for 1747-1749, he recorded a total of £37 722.10.7 ½ in wood transported to the Indies.¹³

Equally important to colonial trade were maintenance materials such as naval stores (turpentine, rosin, tar, and pitch), derived from the sap of pine trees. Turpentine was a thinner for oil-based paint on ships, rosin was for sliding friction, while tar was painted on riggings that held masts and sails in place, and pitch preserved the ship's sides and bottoms. New England and the Carolinas were providers of this trade

commodity. According to the Journal, Captain John Brown paid Banister £345.10 for naval stores:

[Newport, 18 September 1746, p. 7]

79 Barrels Turpentine.....	£237.0
29 Barrels Tarr.....	£72.10
12 Barrels Pitch.....	£36.0

Abraham Borden paid £746.13.10 for his shipment:

[Newport, 27 February 1746/47, p. 65]

100 Barrels Tarr.....@50/.....	£250.0
87 Ditto Pitch.....@65/.....	£282.15
30 Tierces Turpentine 119.2.25 Neat..@30/.....	£179.11.7
8 Tierces Rosin...27.1.27.....@ 25/.....	£34.7.3

One day in February of 1747, the purchase of naval stores amounted to over £5000, which is equivalent to over £627,000 (\$1,019,063) in today's money.¹⁴

In order to determine which consumer commodities to transport, Banister kept track of changing markets and the shipping news by reading the *Boston News Letter* and the *Boston Gazette* newspapers (Newport had no continuously published newspaper until 1758). He networked with business clients, customers, and associates locally at Trinity Church and on the wharves. It was a surprise to learn that rum did not dominate the coastal or Caribbean export trade of Banister. Instead lumber, naval stores, pork, horses, and grain were the largest accounts as summarized in Table 2:

Table 2: Key Exports in Banister's Trade
Banister Ledger B (August 1746-December 1750)

Account	Value
Lumber (shingles, staves, boards, hoops)	£ 37 722.10.7 ½
Pork	16 657.3.9
Naval Stores (tar, pitch, turpentine, rosin)	11 969.9.6 ¼
Grain (oats, wheat, rye)	10 366.9.5
Narragansett Horses	10 013.7.0
Beef	5 088.10.0
New England Rum	4 388.11.1
Flour	4 105.15.6
Onions	2 344.3.6
Livestock	2 050.5.5

Banister ensured continuing trade arrangements with a dozen English merchants in Hull, Liverpool, and Amsterdam by constantly posting letters to them, merchants such as Millington Eaton, Joseph Manesty, and John Steadman. He developed the ability to meet consumer needs and wants, while advertising his abilities within the colony and abroad through newspaper advertisements. Indeed Banister wisely engaged in trade of a variety of commodities to meet different demands.

Inbound Trade to Newport

The size of colonial markets and therefore of consumption grew as population increased; Newport was characteristic of emergent seaports with 6,508 residents by 1748. Colonial imports were in five categories: raw foods (tea, fruit, salt, and spices); raw materials (coal, wool and cotton); processed foods (wine, rum, butter, flour, molasses, and sugar); semi-manufactured goods (pig iron, wrought brass, wrought copper, lumber, and indigo); and manufactured goods (cloth, shoes, hosiery, casks, glassware, earthenware, and tools).¹⁵ Consumer demand in the colonies for these goods created a strong trade with the West Indies, across the Atlantic, and among the American colonies. Some colonial merchants also imported slaves from the Indies.

Foods from the Caribbean provided Rhode Island consumers with great variety in their diet. Much desired were salt, molasses, sugar, and spices. Spices bought in the West Indies came from many sources: cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cloves, pepper, and anise seed from Asia; pimento from Jamaica; and cayenne from the French Guiana town of Caian. Interesting new items in colonial food fare were fruits and nuts (almonds, oranges, lemons, currants, raisins, and olives from the Middle East). Imported beverages were tea from China, coffee and cocoa, rum from the islands of Jamaica and Barbados, and wines from Madeira and Portugal.¹⁶ The fact that these goods were imports from around the world shows the economic strength of this Newport merchant and his important role in expanding consumer choice.

From the Caribbean Banister imported raw materials for furniture and textiles. Imported woods from Honduras, Belize, Jamaica, and Hispaniola included mahogany, lignum vitae, logwood, and brazillito. Shipbuilders valued mahogany because it repelled rot, worms, and cannonballs. Newport colonial cabinetmakers, the Townsends and Goddards, prized the beauty of the wood as they created desks, clocks, and tables. Purchase of these items by businessmen and artisans reflected status, elegance, and financial success.¹⁷ Additionally, logwood and brazillito provided bright dyes for textiles when iron and salt were added to the boiling pots.¹⁸ Raw cotton was occasionally a part of the Banister trade. For example, he listed one cargo with four bags at 1,813 pounds valued at £906.10.¹⁹ Foreign wood and salt were more important commodities in the Banister import trade than West Indies Rum as is evident in Table 3.

Table 3: Some Key Imports in Banister's Caribbean Trade
Banister Ledger B (August 1746-January 1750)

Account	Value of Import Transactions	Page in Ledger
Foreign Wood	£ 19029.4.13	4,181, 245
Salt	5 204.14.6	188, 215, 272
West Indies Rum	2 493.3.11	321
Sugar	2 193.7.10	244
Molasses	1 097.12.0	303

Mr. Joseph Manesty.
Newport Dec: 16: 1746.

Sir,

For my Journey from Piscataqua to this place I took

John Banister kept letter books documenting his correspondence relating to his far-reaching and varied trade. This letter to Joseph Manesty dates from December 16, 1746. It is found on page 3 of a letter book dated 1748 on its title page but covering the years from 1746 to 1749. Newport Historical Society Archives. NHS FIC.2013.70.

Imports to Newport from Europe were predominately manufactured and semi-manufactured goods. In the Banister Journal there were daily lists of imported textiles from Europe and Asia through trade in Dutch, English, and French ports. The accounts show over 3,000 yards of cloth in the fall and again in the spring that were woven in England, Ireland, Holland, France, India, and China. There were eighty-six distinct types of fabric imported and recorded by John Banister's clerk; two dozen were types of English wool, eighteen were weaves of linen from Holland and Ireland, and twenty types of silk from Italy and France. There was cotton chintz and calico from India, Russian duck and leather, as well as twenty blends of wool, silk, and cotton. The transactions also included bags of buttons and buckles, which were prominent in men's attire. Items related to beauty and fashion were entries on nearly every page.

Typical of other merchandise from England were household, personal, or commercial goods and wares, bought and sold in wholesale or retail. The Account of Merchandise Proper over three years totaled £111 315.19.6, more than any other.²⁰



The Townsend-Goddard workshops in Newport produced some of the finest furniture in the colonies. This mahogany chest-on-chest by John Townsend, dating from around 1760, is representative of the firm's celebrated craftsmanship. Collection of the Newport Historical Society. NHS 69.3.

The following list from the Journal is representative of the variety of commodities:
[Newport, 3 September 1746, p. 3]

[Beginning on Line 9 of this page with sixty-two lines of trade items listed]

Peleg Thurston Debit	£1689.6.8
2 Brass Kettles 15oz??.....	@15.....11.5
36 Basons 72.....	@2/6.....30.12
2 Quart Coffee Pots	@3.....6.0
1 ps? blue Twilled Frize 14 bales 30 Yards.....	@24/.....36.0
1 ? light drab 17 bales 17 Yards.....	@37/6...31.17.6
1 ? callamancoe30 Yd.....	17.0
3 flower de Sattin 5 bales... 84.....	25.0
11 Scarlett Damask 1.....28.....	@34/.....7.12
1 blue Broad Cloth 8 Bales..29 ¾ yd.....	@6.....178.10
1 kersey.....6117.....	@26/.....22.2
1 Forester Cloth...104.....17.....	@27/.....22.19
1 Bag Hair Butt.(Box 16).....	@3.10...38.10
½ dozen Tin Buckles...104.....	@1.10...3.1.5
1 ? needles.....	.6.10
1 doz. Snuff boxes.....	1.16
1doz. Fine White Men's Buckles.....	7.15
1 Doz. Black Shoe Buckles.....	3.5
½ Doz. Box Irons.....	@40.....12.0
1 Doz. Iron Candlesticks.....	3.0
½ gro? Jimblottes.....	@1.12...2.6
2 Doz. Grey Welt. Hose.....	38.0
6 Small Tea Forks.....	@25/.....7.10
6 large Forks.....	@27.....8.2
28 pewter dishes.....	@10/.....53.10
½ Doz. Tin Sauce Panes.....	@12/.....3.12
6 ½ doz. Pewter plates.....86.....	@15/.....43.0
6 doz. Pewter spoons.....	@18/.....5.8
1 doz. Fryingpanes.....	@1.16. 25.0
3 Pair Gamblet.....	@24.....72.0
1 Tammy 1 Bale.....	18.0
1 Red Duffle 549 yards.....	@40/.....98.0
1 Cambrick.....12.....	20.0

Was Banister one of the Rhode Island merchants importing slaves? In reading the 552 pages of this Journal there were five payments for slaves:

Sundry Account Debit to Cash...Negro Cato...£120...Paid Rick Dunn in Full for him [28 February 1747, line 15, p. 68].
To Account of Negroes...£150 received on Mr. Moses Lopez Note...for

Negro Mingo...£150 [31 August 1747, line 50, p. 198].

Voyage to Bay of Honduras Brigantine *Abigail* Capt William Warner
To Account of Negroes...2 Negro Men...@£400...£800
[24 January 1749, line 42, p. 544].

Paid to Jaheel Brenton Esq...a Negro Boy Fortune bought of him...£350 [30
June 1749, line 26, p. 485].

From Capt. Charles Bardin...a Negro Man named Caesar...bot of him...£340
[14 December 1749, line 20, p. 538].

Frequently in the Journal, Banister referred to two Negroes, Cato and Tony, for whom he purchased breeches, stockings, jackets, caps, and shoes. At no time did he use the word slave in the records. Instead his entries read, “Horse hire for my servant Anthony to Boston,” or “Paid Cato 18 s” [shillings] for [one day’s] “work on my wharf.” At this time Banister was not funding voyages for the purpose of buying slaves, yet he did own these two men.²¹ As with many Newport households, the men may have served a variety of roles, such as coachmen, gardeners, and maritime laborers, who set masts and unloaded cargo.

Colonial imports arrived from the Caribbean islands and filled Thames Street with raw and processed goods from many parts of Asia and Europe. Brass, copper, and iron tools arrived from Hull and Liverpool, while glass and ceramic ware came from Antwerp and Frankfurt. Banister loaded on his vessels the ever-abundant supply of textiles, originally shipped from Lyon, Genoa, or Liege to the Caribbean and then to Rhode Island on his ships. Workers and households of Rhode Island had many choices.

Banister’s Key Role in Newport Trade

The Journal provides clear evidence of one man’s growing participation from outfitting eight ships and eight voyages in 1747 to fifteen ships and twenty-four voyages in 1749. Banister was one of Newport’s commercial leaders, who provided employment related to trade and shipbuilding and the distinct possibility of advancement for those who were industrious.

For the long trade voyages Banister’s captains needed supplies produced by locals, so he developed a network of vendors on whom he relied to meet the needs of sailors and captain on his voyages. He paid butcher Rouse Potter, baker George Gibbs, distiller Daniel Ayrault, brewer Nicholas Eyres, and ship chandlers Stephen Ayrault and Samuel Vernon. Banister also engaged a team of skilled craftsmen for ship construction. He paid ship builder Daniel Goddard, block maker Nathaniel Bosworth, rigger William Mey, carver William Allen, blacksmith Benjamin Miller, sail maker Benjamin Thurston, and cordage maker Peter Buliod. He hired joiner Nathaniel Langley, caulker John Pearce, cooper Edward Thurston, glazier Jeremiah Child, instrument maker Benjamin King, and boat builder Joshua Sayer. Cahoon and

Yeates tarred, weatherproofed, and painted ten vessels for Banister. Banister also paid for cannon to be installed on numerous vessels, including the snow *Fox*, the ships *Lee Frigate*, *Honduras Galley*, and *Rising Sun*.²² Banister paid Newport stonemason John Stevens II (1702-1778) between £3 and £6 for constructing each of the cooking areas, or “Caboose with three potts” on twenty-nine vessels.²³

In the Journal Banister recorded the ships in which he was involved, the multiple payments to completion, and his commission for his role. By careful notation a summary of these activities can be demonstrated for the year 1749: (see table on page 16.)

Indicated are the names and the destinations of these ships and his income from outfitting. He earned £6142.0.2 ½ equal to the sum of £797,000 (\$1,295,364.10) in today’s money. By constructing similar tables for 1747 and 1748, it was notable that over three years Banister’s commission income totaled £16243.7.7 ½; in today’s money that would be over £2,000,000 (\$3,250,600.00).

While Banister made a substantial fortune from his shipbuilding and outfitting he was also infusing the Newport economy. Newport residents, such as ship captains, shopkeepers, innkeepers, and artisans involved in the construction, metal, and leather trades were increasing their incomes. And there were many mariners and laborers, who also aspired to higher status and whom Banister paid during the outfitting of ships. Banister was essentially one of the “rainmakers,” who generated income for others and provided a market for selling goods overseas. The income allowed Newport families in turn to purchase the consumer goods from his and other warehouses and stores on the Thames Street wharves. Finally, Banister’s substantial yearly income made it possible for him to invest in infrastructure and for his family to buy consumer goods.

Family Purchases from the Trade Items Entering Newport

What can be learned about the aspirations of American colonials for Georgian gentility through the purchase of consumer goods? An examination of the purchases of Banister’s family might uncover a part of the historical narrative. On the pages of the Journal, Banister listed income and family spending under an “Account of Family Expences.” Additionally, he listed a lump sum for family sundries on the last day of each month. To analyze this data required establishing categories of spending for each month during the years from 1747 to 1749. Then it was possible to determine patterns of spending for basic needs, as well as luxuries for the merchant and his family. Yearly family expenditures were close to £3000, equal to 56% of his commission income over the three years of these accounts.

Comparing the amounts spent on basic needs and luxuries over three years provides insight into the daily lives of the Banister family as consumers in colonial Rhode Island society. The categories analyzed were utilities (heating and lighting), groceries (food and drink), clothing, property (interior home furnishings and exterior home improvements), services (tutors, repairs), and sundries (entertainment, transportation). Table 5 demonstrates the total spending that Banister recorded in the Journal in these categories:

Table 4: Banister's Commissions of 1749

Month	Name of Ship Number of Voyage	Destination	Commission	Cost of Outfitting	Page
Jan	Ship African		£877.1.5	£1541.8.11	426
Feb	Ship Honduras Galley		[318.8?]	6376.8.11½	549- 552
Mar	Ship Queen Elizabeth		23.13.2	439.3.2	439
	Snow		388.2.7	7762.12.3	444
	Sloop Little Jack	Caïan			448
May	Snow Handley	London	448.8	6504.10	466
	Sloop Little Jack (2 nd)	Caïan			467
Jun	Brigantine Abigail (1 st)	Leeward Islands	321.7.1	6748.8.9	469
	Brigantine Prudence Hannah	Leeward Islands	464.11.6	9291.11.1	470
	Settee Eagle	Leeward Islands	262.12.6	5252.10.10	471
	Ship Prince of Orange	Antigua	1182.18.3 ½	23656.5.4 ½	479
	Brig Abigail (2 nd)	Jamaica	401.1.9	5191.7.11	483
	Sloop Little Jack (3 rd)	Jamaica	131.17.8	844.9.3	484
Jul	Sloop Betsy Bell	Antigua	101.6.9	945.13.4	490
	Sloop Little Polly	Antigua	331.3.6	2061.0	492
	Brigantine Hannah	Leeward Islands	494.11.6	7844.18.9	497
	Sloop Little Jack (4 th)	Caïan	49.3.2	[983.3.4?]	502
Aug	Schooner Success	Cape Francois			502
	Little Polly (2 nd)	New York	18.14.6	748.19.7	504
	Snow William	Leeward Islands	2036.7.5	16290.19.5	509
	Brig Abigail (3 rd)		151.10	2047.10.1	511
	Settee Eagle (2 nd)				513
Oct	Ship Honduras Galley	Jamaica	493.15	9875.1.3	523
	(2 nd)				
Dec	Brig Abigail (4 th)				541

Table 5: Banister Family Expenses for 1747, 1748, and 1749

Category of Spending	Total Recorded In the Category	Percentage of Total Spending Over Three Years
Utilities	£160.0.0	<2
Services	£223.9	2
Groceries		
Food	£883.11.2 ½	10
Drink	£745.3.0	8
		Total: 18
Clothing	£1976.10.7 ½	21
Property Improvements		
Interior Furnishings	£1694.5.1 ½	18
Exterior and Interior Modernization	£1007.8.5 ¾	11
		Total:29
Sundries	£2599.4.4	28
Total	£9289.12.6 ½	99%

Because the family owned its land and home there were no expenses for mortgage or rent. Other expenses were listed under individual accounts and not included as family expenses, such as postage for letters or charitable contributions.

Utilities: Heating and Lighting Expenses

For example, in 1747, the Banister family spent £112.16 for thirty cords of wood (3,840 cubic feet since there are 128 cubic feet (4 x 4 x 8) in each cord). The other half of the expenses for heating involved the purchase of “two chaldrons of sea coal.” Each chaldron was seventy-two bushels and weighed a few thousand pounds. “Sea coal,” or coal transported by sea from Nova Scotia, was a supplement to households as Rhode Island forests declined. Without data for the kind of winter weather experienced, it is curious that Banister purchased only three cords of wood to heat the home two years later in 1749 (£6). Over the three years of the Journal Banister’s spending averaged less than 2% of his income for “utilities.”

Historians indicate that the average colonial family used thirty to forty “chords of wood” per year, the equivalent of one acre of forest, to heat its home, cook meals, and provide light. Clergymen who needed to read and write to prepare sermons were often given sixty to eighty cords of wood from their parish.²⁴ The Banister family in this period may have been living in a home with the new technological innovation of smaller fireplaces two to three feet across, which reduced heat loss. This heating improvement was coupled with moving the cooking to the back of the house, where a large kitchen fireplace with a huge cavity of two yards was used for cooking.²⁵

Similarly, it is difficult to determine how much Banister relied on candlelight in the dark days of winter since there was so little expended on candles. He spent from £7 to £10 per year on tallow. Tallow candles were most common and made from the fat of sheep and cows, but they burned unevenly, smoked, and smelled.²⁶ One hundred candles cost £18.²⁷ Colonists also used beeswax or sweet smelling bayberry candles but Banister did not list these types of candles specifically. Instead he listed “dipt’d” and “mould” candles, costing about £4 for a hundred dipped candles and £5.5 for a hundred molded candles.²⁸ Spermaceti candles, available from as early as 1712, were the most expensive and gave three times more light than others; they were also odorless and smokeless candles.²⁹ Banister lodged only one entry of purchase in the year 1749 for three-and-a-half spermaceti (no number of candles or boxes were given) for his family at £3.10.³⁰

Large sash windows in his Georgian home may have assisted to reduce lighting costs. Additionally, Banister imported new ways to enhance the lighting of the parlor. Lighting devices such as sconces, which were candle fixtures on the wall, and pier glass, which were long mirrors situated between windows, created an effect of magnifying light.

Groceries: Food and Drink Expenses

The percentage spent on groceries remained constant over the three years at 18% of the yearly income; the family may well have been supplementing with produce from its inherited Arnold-Pelham lands in Newport. (Banister’s two farms in Middletown were not purchased until 1753-54 from Joseph Whipple). What is known from merchant John Banister’s 1767 will is that there were “gardens at my Dwelling house in Newport,” which “I built in the field commonly Called the Upper Mill Field.”³¹ Although Banister purchased seeds from trading ventures, the types of plantings are hypothetical. Banister may have planted vegetables (peas, beans, turnips, and squash) since these are not listed as purchases in the account, but were very typical of colonial diets.

On the other hand, Banister may have imitated contemporary English gardens around his house with Georgian ideals of symmetry and balance in the planting of herbs, flowers, and boxwood. Perhaps there was a grand aisle in the middle, an oval surrounded with fruit trees, and a sundial similar to the property of Metcalf Bowler. Or there may have been a hot house for orange trees and exotic flowers as at the property of Abraham Redwood. Did Hermione Banister grow roses, mint, or lavender?

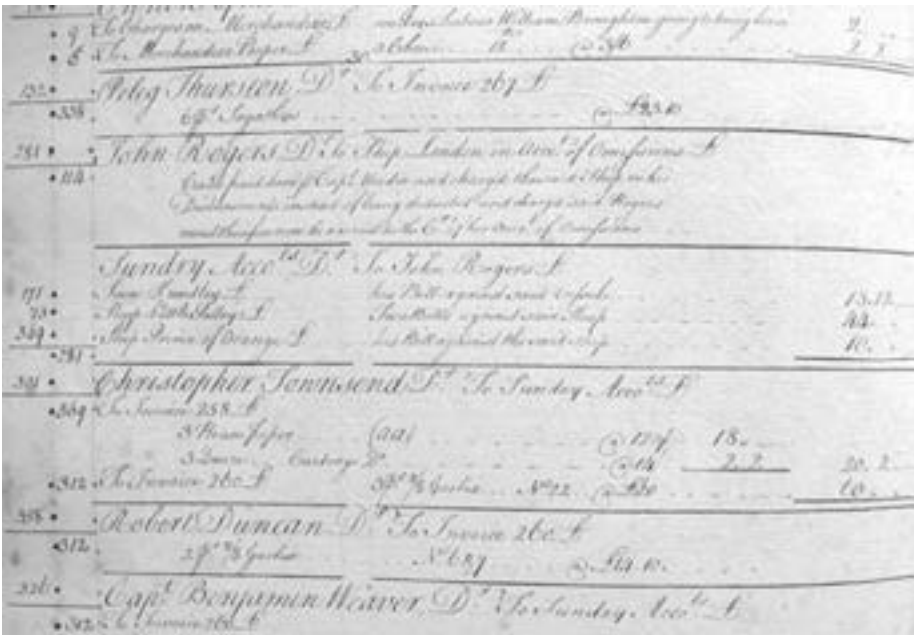
There were many references to the mowing and the maintenance of the fields. Using a scythe, six acres a day could be mowed, resulting in nine tons of hay.³² The haying probably was on Banister city properties; described in the Arnold and Pelham wills, this land included “eight acres in the Upper Mill Field” surrounding the Old Stone Mill. There may also have been additional haying in the Lower Mill Field which extended from Spring Street to Thames Street, since the precise date when Banister built homes on the lots that he had surveyed in 1741 is not known.

Yearly, the Banister family purchased quantities of produce: corn, wheat flour, butter, cheese, onions, and rice. Generally, the family purchased two to three barrels

of wheat and rye flour a year which was over 400 pounds of flour.³³ One year 1748, they bought seventeen bushels of corn, which was 952 pounds of corn. Some of this corn may have been ground into flour for corn pancakes, known as “Johnny Cakes,” and some may have been used to feed livestock. In 1747 the Banister family purchased a cask of rice, but no potatoes were in the lists of purchases.

The family purchased buttered bread and milk bread by the cask. These breads were a delight to eat with preserved fruit when the women enjoyed their afternoon tea.³⁴ Although bread making was a typical occupation of rural housewives, in Newport professional bakers with economies of scale created products convenient for purchase by the consumer. The family purchased Gloucester cheese from England and Dolphin cheese from France, as well as two to four firkins of butter annually. Since there were fifty-six pounds per firkin, they bought 224 pounds of butter a year! The household consisted of Banister, his wife, his child, and between two and five servants.

At the writing of this account, Mrs. Banister (1718-1765) was in her early thirties with one young son of under five years of age. Presumably Hermione Pelham Banister managed the household servants who prepared and cooked the meals. What is not clear is whether they cooked “peas porridge,” brown bread, baked beans, New England boiled dinners, and fruit pies. These would have been typical for families whose roots were in East Anglia.³⁵



John Banister’s Journal details the expenses related to both business and family life. These entries date from April 26, 1748, and are found on page 305. Newport Historical Society Archives. NHS 2003.18.

Several imported food items offered variety to the diet of the merchant family: almonds, oranges, lemons, currants, raisins, olives, salt, and sugar. Nuts and fruit became a dessert at the end of a meal. Salt was imported from Europe or the Caribbean. In order to sweeten food the family had several less expensive choices: maple sugar, honey, molasses, or muscovado (dark raw sugar).³⁶ Instead, Banister bought white sugar in loaves, which were shaped and wrapped in paper. Generally, a three-to-four pound loaf suited family needs, but the Banister family purchased six-and-a-half pounds of sugar in October 1747.³⁷

The meat purchased in largest quantity was from pigs: hams, gammons, cheeks, and tongues. Amounts were not always identified, but in 1748 Banister recorded one bushel of pork and fifteen hams. In 1749 he bought “222 Gammons” [bacon] and “195 Hogg’s Cheeks Smoked,” which was a delicacy of English cooking. Since pigs multiplied faster and could be slaughtered sooner than cattle, pork products were abundant. Pork also had a long preservation life when it was salted, dried, smoked or made into sausage. But the Banisters also purchased “caggs” of beef and veal, from three-month-old calves slaughtered in early summer. Although Banister did not give pounds of meat purchased, the expenditures per year suggest that meat purchases were approximately half of the food costs.³⁸

Salmon and cod, two fish prized for their great taste and few bones, were listed as were mackerel and menhaden. For the first time in November of 1749 Banister listed the purchase of a turkey. It is unknown whether lamb was in the diet because it was not listed. The Banisters had farmland in the Neck, however, and sheep would have been raised for meat and wool.

Out of the 18% spent yearly on groceries, expenses for beverages for the household were 8% of the total. There were wines including Madeira from the islands near Africa, “Clarett”—a French Bordeaux—and Sherry, a Spanish white wine. Rum was not among Banister’s purchases until January 1749; since it cost him thirty-five shillings a gallon it was likely to be from Antingua, Barbados, or Jamaica, rather than the less expensive New England Rum. In 1747, alcoholic drinks included three barrels of beer (thirty-six gallons per barrel, equivalent to 108 gallons), five casks of ale (one cask was thirty-two gallons, for a total of 160 gallons), and fourteen barrels of cider (with thirty-six gallons per barrel, or a total of 500 gallons). Although men, women, and children drank beer and cider, it was typical for men of the merchant class to consume claret, sherry, wine, or other alcoholic spirits after a formal dinner. There was also a purchase of arrack, a distilled alcoholic drink typically produced in Asia from either the fermented sap of coconut flowers, sugarcane, or fruit.

Banister purchased small quantities of Bohea tea and coffee—tea being more expensive since it came from Asia. Coffee available on many Caribbean islands was cheaper than chocolate. Chocolate purchased by the Banister family several times a year was likely from the Dutch island of Curacao, or French controlled Haiti or Cuba, where plantations had been started in the 17th century. The chocolate that Banister bought would have been a solid block, termed a “pressed cake.” This would have been pounded with a mortar and pestle, mixed with sugar, and put into a little pot of boiling water. The method described was called Du Pour’s Method for Making Hot Chocolate. Around 1700, the English custom was to add milk and spice to the chocolate stirring it into froth in order to create a smoother taste.³⁹



This circa 1740 over-mantel painting was removed from the Matunuck, Rhode Island residence of John Potter, a wealthy South Kingstown planter who was notorious for his counterfeiting activities. It depicts his family using the kind of tea wares imported by John Banister for this popular beverage. Collection of the Newport Historical Society. NHS 53.3.

Clothing

The yearly cost for Banister purchase of readymade clothing, textiles, and trimmings totaled £1976.10.7 ½; this amount represented 21% of family spending. In Newport colonists could purchase English-made shoes, hose, hats, gloves, handkerchiefs, and coats readymade. Notably, fabric colors included various hues of red, yellow, and blue rather than the “sadd” brown, crimson, or forest green of their Puritan ancestors. From imported textiles Banister commissioned clothes for special events. While the merchant purchased “2 ½ yd Taffaty and 4 yards Corded Drugget for £20” for five-year-old John,⁴⁰ for his wife there was Persian taffaty, India Chintz, Holland garlix, and French silk. Banister also had a suit made for himself of Blue Plain wool cloth for £81.5.⁴¹ By 1749, both Lydia Townsend and Sarah Rumreil were paid for making clothes and household furnishings from the 150 yards of cloth the family purchased. Additional purchases included a wig, inlaid snuff box, “stone” cuff links, studs, lambs wool gloves, mourning rings, hoop petticoats, and ivory fans.

Property: Interior Furnishings

From Journal entries between 1747 and 1749, the Banisters spent over 18% a year adding to their home furnishings and 11% of their expenses on improving the interior and exterior of both their home and land.

Of the specific purchases listed, there were chamber pots, kitchen cutlery, glassware, and “serviettes,” as well as bed chamber curtains and coverlets. In 1747 Banister purchased a clock from John Goddard for £160, while in 1748 he purchased two beds for £12 each, a tea table for £12.9, and two desks for £62. That same year

he bought two cedar desks from Christopher Townsend for £83.1.6. Banister bought 2,119 feathers from Thomas Teakle Taylor (likely for the mattresses and pillows) at a cost of £131.8 and a coverlet for £30. Interestingly, there was no record of the purchase of chairs, leather or caned, which would have been matched and “compartmentalized” in specific rooms for the merchant family.⁴² It is possible that most of the inventory of chairs and kitchenware, including fashionable teapots, cups, saucers, spoons, and linens from father-in-law Edward Pelham’s household was already in possession of Hermione and John Banister. They lived with her parents after their marriage; “Father Pelham” died in 1740.

One fascinating discovery was this entry for “Household Furnishings” dated 22 December 1748 [page 405]: “Drawing mine and Wife’s Picture...Robert Feke... £200.” That bill payment was for an important luxury that only a few could afford, specifically an oil painting by a respected colonial artist. In having their visages committed to canvas, the Banisters counted themselves among those in colonial America who represented a semblance of British gentility. Robert Feke painted at least twelve Newporters during his decade in Newport and the Banister couple was among the select group. The contract with the artist was made six months earlier in the Journal.⁴³

Where are these portraits of John and Hermione Banister? An online search revealed that the oil painting of Hermione, with dimensions of 50 x 40 inches and set in a gilt wood frame, hangs in the Detroit Institute of Arts. The companion work of John Banister, measuring 50 9/16 x 40 9/16 inches, is owned by the Toledo Museum of Art. According to the provenance provided, before his death, John Banister Jr. gave the two portraits to his brother Thomas (1750- around 1815), then living in Lawrence, New York on Long Island. Thomas lived at “Rockaway,” the home of his wife, Rachel, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Josiah Martin. The sitters were apparently identified as Mr. and Mrs. Josiah Martin and the error continued for decades after the museums made their purchases during World War II.⁴⁴

It is satisfying to finally view the forty-one year old colonial merchant John Banister and his wife. Banister seemed to prepare for the portrait sitting by purchasing nearly fifteen yards of Mantua silk for his wife. In Feke’s portrait of Hermione Banister she wore a voluminous gray silk dress. Banister bought twenty-six-and-one-quarter yards of velvet for £229.13.9, of which at least five yards was used in his velvet coat and breeches seen in the Feke portraits.⁴⁵

During these years, 1747 to 1749, Banister was involved in construction of a Newport manse on Spring Street. As with other merchant families that were part of the urban elite, he constructed a Georgian home with its central hall separating two rooms on either side. The transom above the centrally located, front door contained glass to admit more light into the house.⁴⁶ From the front, the central door and portico were flanked by paired evenly spaced windows and a central second floor window directly over the door. These windows have multiple panes of glass and sliding sashes.⁴⁷

Distinctive features were obvious to those who entered a Georgian house as distinguished from earlier decades of home construction. The home was a square, four-room house with front to back central hall and two chimneys instead of one



The Banister Journal records the payment for portraits of John Banister and his wife from Robert Feke on December 22, 1748 (page 405). Newport Historical Society Archives. NHS 2003.18.

large hearth. Once through the doorway there was a hall stairway with wide stairs leading to a second-floor landing. Guests walked into a front parlor, whose purpose was reception or entertainment. The space was no longer for cooking, working or sleeping. Instead one front room was for dining and the other for tea time or perhaps an alcoholic beverage after dinner, cards, dancing, or conversation. Within a Georgian home each room had a specialized function, meaning that living and working spaces were individualized.⁴⁸

18th-century aesthetics called for plaster to smooth the wall surface, which was then whitewashed or wallpapered. Banister paid for bricks, laths, lime, “hare,” and sand, as well as for the plastering and “whiting of nine rooms” in 1749. The ceiling rafters were lathed and plastered to form a flat surface. It took three coats of lime plaster (lime, sand, and hair) to properly cover the lath.⁴⁹ Decorative wood features included baseboards, wainscoting, and cornices, crown molding, and mantles over the fireplace, as well as boxed in corner post timbers.⁵⁰

Journal entries show that there was an increased spending on stones and bricks and the hiring of local labor to work on the property. In 1747 Banister purchased “218 ½ feet of Square Stone” and three loads of stone. In October 1747, he built “98 perch” of a wall, a length of 1617 feet. In October 1748, Stevens built “a chimney of four Smokes” or flues for £36 and a hearth with “29 tiles.” In April 1749, Stevens charged Banister £25.15 “To pulling down your Celler Wall & Clearing the Foundation” and “to Building of Foundation 14 Perch.” Within a month Stevens charged £6.5 to “pointing of Celler & Foundation of the Chimney.”⁵¹

In July 1749, Stevens charged Banister £12.11 “to setting Steps in the Yard and in August “to Cutting & Laying 108 foot of Flatt Paving.”⁵² This may have been a walkway through the garden. In November Banister hired men to dig a warehouse cellar and a “necessary house” [latrine]. He paid Thomas Melville and Israel Chapman £334.15 “to build a house” and side it with “250 clapboards” and he hired “Cahoone and Yeates” to “paint 72 sashes.”⁵³ Sash windows were hung so that one or both windows in the frame would slide up and down; they replaced the casement windows of the previous century that swung open like a door.⁵⁴ He also paid Cahoone and Yeates to paint the outside of the house, the cellar doors, and “the house on the shore.”



The John Banister House, built in 1751, still stands on Pelham Street at the corner of Spring Street in downtown Newport. Photograph by the author.

The best frame houses of the period were painted on the exterior with a colored surface of blue, brown, red, or green. In 1749, Banister paid for nails, timbers, planks, joists, and clapboards for work on the house and construction of small buildings in the yard. Banister hired Jeremiah Child to glaze the windows of his house and “the warehouse on the wharf” to keep out the cold.⁵⁵

Banister also paid for improvements to his wharf and his Stone Mill. For example, in February 1749 he listed: “39 Loads of Stones for Wharf house Cellar and a Load of 7 Bushels of Sand.” He paid for “iron work on the powder house,” which was an alternate use for the Stone Built Mill.⁵⁶

Over three years Banister spent £1007.8.5 $\frac{3}{4}$ on improvements to his property, which is equivalent in today’s money to £131,000 (\$212,914.30). In the 1740s, John Banister was not of the wealth of Redwood or Malbone, whose city houses were enclosed by brick walls and wrought iron gates. He was similar to his business friends, Jaheel Brenton and William Wanton, however, in constructing a large, three-story manse.⁵⁷ Banister’s home with its large windows and high ceilings of ninety inches held more grandeur than the Arnold-Pelham home of 1720 on Thames Street. Banister’s prosperous income and sense of pride in his social position was evident in

the larger more refined 18th-century Georgian home. The new home was situated up the hill, a distance from the dock and bustling waterfront yet within view of Newport harbor.⁵⁸

Payments for Services to the Family

Over time, spending increased in the category of services to the family. For example, Banister paid for services such as repair of his watch, clock, couch, lantern, and chaise [two-wheeled open carriage]. He paid Content Sanford for an unspecified assignment, which took ninety-one weeks or nearly two years. Sanford was a single reputable woman of good family and may have worked as a tutor for young John, aged five in 1749, or perhaps she attended to the mistress of the household, who may have been ill at the time. Hermione Banister's first son Pelham was born in 1738 and died in 1739; her second son John was born in 1744; Thomas was not born until 1750. A physician, Ebenezer Gray (1697-1773) was paid £117 for assisting the family in a time of illness from 26 May to 12 June 1749. Dr. Gray was a 1716 Harvard graduate and one of the forty-six founders of Redwood Library.

Sundry Monthly Expenses

Banister put into a sundry account many of his miscellaneous expenses, totaling over 28% of the family spending over three years, or £2599.44. It is not known whether they were expenses for travel, leisure activities, or luxuries. Would the Banisters have traveled to Boston or to Connecticut to visit family? Did Hermione visit England? Since they were members of genteel society, their purchases could have been for imported musical instruments, playing cards, dolls, dice, marbles, tobacco pipes, or tickets to a current play production in Newport, or to a turtle frolic. It would be interesting to have more details, particularly to know if this was a family that valued books. Did Banister read Defoe on trade or de Courtin on civility? Were there children's books for young John? It is known that, for the tombstone of Banister and his wife, he selected a long passage from the poetry of Alexander Pope (1688-1744).

Purchases by the Banister family demonstrated how consumerism affected dramatic and lasting changes in the daily lives of colonial Newporters. They enjoyed a diet of various meats and vegetables, spices, and salt. Sugar, citrus fruit, and nuts were frequent additions to the palate. Family purchases of imported ale and wines rivaled locally produced apple "cyder" and beer. Imported tea, coffee, and hot chocolate drinks expanded the fare. The family bought soft white linen for everyday wear and complemented fashionable dress in luxurious colorful fabrics, which were transformed by local mantua makers into stylish fashion without the ostentatious flair of the Continent. They purchased ready made and inexpensive English coats, shoes, hosiery, and gloves. The Banister home was increasingly decorated with useful and beautiful furniture made by Newport craftsmen in the Townsend and Goddard workshop and with imported chintz bed curtains and window treatments that reflected aspirations for Georgian gentility.

Conclusions

Several key observations can be made about merchant John Banister and colonial consumers. Banister's ships accounted for 17% of ships leaving Newport during the period from 1746 to 1749 to sell fish, livestock, lumber, naval stores, and agricultural produce in the Caribbean and Europe. On return trips to Newport, Banister's ships carried new foods and drinks, as well as fabrics, fashions, tools, and furnishings, reflecting increased enjoyment of life and status. These commodities were global in origination and transformed those who could purchase the merchandise into awareness of the world beyond colonial Rhode Island. Banister also created enormous possibilities for trade by partnering with English merchants to hire local shipbuilders, while bankrolling the work of local and regional craftsmen and laborers. Banister used his position as merchant, retailer, and shipbuilder to create jobs and provide income for artisans, whose families aspired to purchase goods from his trade. Finally, Banister's tabulation of his family's expenses helps to illuminate the role both of merchant and consumer in this transformative era.

John Banister's ships carried trade goods that were utilitarian, affordable, and beautiful, providing consumers with many choices. He was integral to Newport's commerce with Europe and the Caribbean. He was a driver of economic growth in Rhode Island, affecting both public spaces and private lives. The detailed records of the Banister Journal reveal this remarkable man in a golden era of colonial trade.

NOTES

¹ The term "Journal" appears on the title page, and clearly is the term used by John Banister. By today's standards, it would more likely be called an account book that lists transactions and does not include what would be considered journal entries today.

² Matt T. Roberts and Don Etherington, *Bookbinding and Conservation of Books A Dictionary of Descriptive Terminology* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Publications, 1982), pp. 94, 172, and 264. Rick Stattler, *The Field Guide to Family Papers in their Natural Habitat or How to Identify and Interpret Historical Documents on Examination from the Rhode Island Historical Society Collection*, Rhode Island Historical Society (April 2000). Step one in colonial accounting involved a record of purchases and invoices in a Daybook, also called a Waste Book, from which data was transferred chronologically into a Journal and then into a Ledger by account of trade item or individual. Although the intense focus of research for this paper was the Journal, both the Daybook and a Ledger for 1746-1749 were read, as well as Banister's Letter Books and Memorandum Book.

³ Darius Baker, "The Newport Banisters," *Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society*, no. 43 (Jan. 1923), p. 1. Banister's father, Thomas Banister (ca. 1683-1716) was the author of "An Essay on Trade" published in London (1715). Banister's father-in-law, Edward Pelham Esq. (1682-1740), was the son of Freelove Arnold (1661-1711), youngest daughter of Governor Benedict Arnold (1615-1678). Pelham married Arabella Williams, daughter of Attorney General John Williams.

⁴ George Champlin Mason, *Annals of Trinity Church* (Newport: by the author, 1890), p. 71. By 1760, 50% of Newport's leading merchants (74 out of 150) went to Trinity Church. Not surprisingly this represented nearly thirty out of the top fifty taxpayers. When Pelham died, daughter Hermione and son-in-law Banister received lands west of Spring Street to Thames and lands east of Spring Street to Bellevue including the Old Stone Mill.

⁵ Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: a Biography of the Fish that Changed the World* (New York: Walker and Company, 1977), p. 55.

⁶ Carl R. Woodward, *Plantation in Yankeeland: The Story of Cocumscussoc, Mirror of Colonial Rhode Island* (Guilford, Connecticut: Pequot Press, 1971), p. 139. See also William Douglass, *Summary Historical and Political of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements, and Present State of the British Settlements in North America* (New York: Arno Press, 1972 [reprint of 1751 edition]), vol. 2, p. 100.

⁷ Daniel McIntyre, "Cheesemaking at Cocumscussoc 1641-92" in *Smith Castle Chronicle*, vol. 17 (Winter 2008), pp. 8-13.

⁸ Bruce Bigelow, "The Commerce of Rhode Island with the West Indies Before the American Revolution" (M.A. thesis: Providence, Brown University, 1930), part 1, chapter 3, pp. 7-18. See also Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies 1739-1763* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), p. 43.

⁹ Woodward, *Plantation in Yankeeland*, p. 60-63. Some say that the beginning of the breed can be traced back to an Andalusia stallion from Spain/Portugal brought over by Lieutenant Governor William Robinson to his farm in western Rhode Island, but there is no definitive historical reference to this. See also Deanne Phillips, *Horse Raising in Colonial New England* (Ithaca: Cornell Publications, 1922).

¹⁰ James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 237-40. See also Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness; the First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1938).

¹¹ Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence, MSS 919, John Banister, Ledger B (Aug. 1746-Jan. 1749/50), vol. 2 [hereafter Banister Ledger B], p. 253. Only Ledger B with 373 numbered pages was available; Ledger A and C are considered missing. There is a Ledger (1747-1752) of 136 numbered pages at the Newport Historical Society that includes a number of personal and ship accounts not entered in Ledger B.

¹² John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) pp. 316-17. See also Eleanor Louisa Lord, *Industrial Experiments in the British Colonies of North America* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969 [reprint of 1898 edition]), p. 116. By English law trees with a diameter of twenty-four to thirty inches and twenty feet in height were to be kept for masts on the King's ships.

¹³ Banister Ledger B, p. 208.

¹⁴ Newport Historical Library, Banister Journal (31 August 1746-31 December 1749) [hereafter Banister Journal], p. 66 (28 Feb. 1747). The NHS also owns another Banister Journal (2 Mar. 1749 to 31 Dec. 1758), consisting of 463 numbered pages.

¹⁵ Lynne Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island: Newport and Providence in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 9-10, 13. McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, pp. 177, 283-84, and 293. A very useful source for the textile and metal trade is Maxine Berg, *Age of Manufactures 1700-1820* (Oxford: University Press, 1986).

¹⁶ Sandra Oliver, *Food in Colonial and Federal America* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 71. See Banister Ledger B for specific accounts of various commodities.

¹⁷ Les Cizek and Norma Walkins, "The Age of Mahogany" in *The Eighteenth Century Style: Building Furniture Inspired by the 18th Century Tradition* (Newtown, Connecticut: Taunton Press, 2003), pp. 36-43. See also Michael Moses, *Master Craftsmen of Newport: Townsends and Goddards* (Tenafly, New Jersey: MMI Americana Press, 1984).

¹⁸ Carleton L. Safford and Robert Bishop, *America's Quilts and Coverlets* (New York: Weathervane, 1974), pp. 3-14. See also Douglass, *Summary Historical and Political of the First Planting*, p. 99.

¹⁹ Banister Journal, p. 66 (27 Feb. 1746/47).

²⁰ Banister Ledger B, pp. 5-7. The Merchandise Proper account is recorded prominently on the first few pages. Banister's Account of Retailing, the sale of goods or commodities in small quantities directly to consumers, was £749.2 (p. 213).

²¹ Banister Journal, p. 251 (3 Dec. 1747) and p. 551 (22 Feb. 1749). See Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America: New England and the Middle Colonies*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), vol. 3, pp. 111-42. See also Bruce C. MacGunnigle, *Regimental Book, Rhode Island Regiment for 1781* (Providence: Rhode Island Society for the Sons of the American Revolution, 2011), p. 58. One interesting passage in history revolves around Cato Bannister [surname misspelling noted in official records]. In 1779, he joined Col. Jeremiah Olney's Rhode Island regiment when Rhode Island was trying to fill its enlistments and offered payment to owners for their slaves who enlisted. John Banister Jr. was paid by the R.I. General Assembly for his slave who joined the American cause. Cato Banister was an American hero, listed as killed on the worst day of the war for the First Rhode Island Regiment, as reported in the casualties list in New York State, 14 May 1781. Cato Banister's service was also mentioned

- in Newport City Hall, Probate Records, vol. 2 (1796), p. 430, "Bannister, Cato" (Administration of debts).
- ²² Banister Ledger B, p. 231. Cahoon and Yeates received earnings of £405.13.11 from Mar. 1746 to Jul. 1749 for their painting work. On p. 235 are sums of £4251.8.7 for cannon placed on these same vessels. See Carl E. Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 57-59, for a discussion of types of vessels. Schooners and sloops were fast vessels with fore and aft rigging and small sails. Square rigging was used on brigs, snows, and ships, and they were generally slower and larger than sloops or schooners. A brig was smaller than a snow and a ship was the largest vessel at 180 to 400 tons for long journeys.
- ²³ John Stevens Shop, Newport (owner John Benson), The John Stevens Shop Book (1743-1750) [hereafter Stevens Shop Book], p. 231. Stevens kept a ledger for Banister's debts and credits.
- ²⁴ Penn State University and the National Endowment for the Humanities, "Colonial America's Pre-Industrial Age of Wood and Water," accessed at http://www.engr.psu.edu/mtah/articles/colonial_wood_water.htm. Alice Morse Earle, *Customs and Fashions in Old New England* (Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968 [reprint of ca. 1893 edition]).
- ²⁵ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1993), pp. 123-24.
- ²⁶ Brett Charbeneau, "Cursing the Darkness: Lighting and its Effects on Virginia's Tradesmen," *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* (Spring 2001), accessed at: <http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/Spring01/lighting.cfm>.
- ²⁷ Banister Journal, p. 106 (8 Apr. 1747).
- ²⁸ Banister Journal, p. 84 (18 Mar. 1746/47).
- ²⁹ Alice Morse Earle, *Home Life in Colonial Days* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1898), p. 42.
- ³⁰ Banister Journal, p. 470 (3 Jun. 1749).
- ³¹ The Will of John Banister of Newport, Rhode Island (9 Jul. 1767) and Codicil (17 Oct. 1767), Proved (16 Nov. 1767), in *Genealogies of Rhode Island Families*, from the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register of 1903* (Baltimore: Genealogy Publishing, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 345-51.
- ³² Earle, *Home Life in Colonial Days*, p. 317.
- ³³ James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 237-40. The authors listed the equivalent number of pounds found in barrels of flour, butter, pork, salt, and fish.
- ³⁴ Oliver, *Food in Colonial and Federal America*, p. 186.
- ³⁵ David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 136.
- ³⁶ Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 55-66. See also Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford. *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850* (Manchester: University Press, 1999).
- ³⁷ Banister Journal, p. 222 (7 Oct. 1747).
- ³⁸ Julianne Treme, "Stature, Nutrition, Health and Economic Growth" (Ph.D. diss.: Raleigh, North Carolina State University, 2006), p. 43. By the 1770s, many American families were consuming 153 pounds of pork and seventy-six pounds of beef annually.
- ³⁹ Louis Evan Grivetti and Howard-Yana Shapiro, eds., *Chocolate: History, Culture and Heritage* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley, 2009), pp. 274-77. Although the largest exports of chocolate today are from Africa, the French chocolate plantations in West Africa did not commence until the 19th century. In the 18th century, chocolate arriving in Newport came from the Caribbean.
- ⁴⁰ Banister Journal, p. 458 (25 Apr. 1749). A discussion of the importance of luxurious cloth to consumers of all classes can be found in Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).
- ⁴¹ Banister Journal, p. 463 (18 May 1749).
- ⁴² Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence John Banister Daybook, "Waste Book B", (1 Dec. 1746-27 Feb. 1749/50). The purchase from Townsend is on p. 270 (20 May 1748), and the purchase from Goddard is on p. 288 (20 Jun. 1748). This volume shows transactions chronologically. When entries were copied into the Journal, an "X" was written to the left of the transaction. See Gary Carson, "Teaching about the Consumer Revolution," *Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2001), accessed at: http://research.history.org/Historical_Research/Research_Themes_ThemesRespect/ConsumerRev.cfm.
- ⁴³ Banister Journal, p. 337 (30 Jun. 1748).
- ⁴⁴ Henry W. Foote *Robert Feke: Colonial Portrait Painter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), pp. 164-65. The provenance and paintings were researched and identified correctly as Feke's 1748 portraits of the Banisters by R. Peter Mooz, "The Art of Robert Feke" (Ph.D. diss.: Philadelphia, University of

Pennsylvania, 1970), pp. 146-47, 161, 213, and 229-30. The Newport Historical Society owns two Robert Feke paintings from this period, Captain Isaac Stelle (1714-1763) and his wife Penelope Goodson Stelle (1712-?), a cousin of Hermione Pelham Banister. The portraits currently hang in the Museum of Newport History in the Brick Market, saved for posterity by the sitters' daughter, Christian Stelle Banister (1747-1830), wife of John Banister Jr. (1745-1808).

⁴⁵ Banister Journal, p. 288 (15 Mar. 1747/48) and p. 294 (2 Apr. 1748).

⁴⁶ Antoinette F. Downing, *Early Homes of Rhode Island* (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett & Massie, 1937), p. 138.

⁴⁷ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), pp. 110-11.

⁴⁸ Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, p. 117. Also Downing, *Early Homes of Rhode Island*, p. 125, points out that 17th-century colonial homes typically had five rooms on the first floor with three rooms across the back (kitchen, buttery, and bedroom) and one room on either side of the central chimney in the front. The front rooms were for eating, sleeping and working.

⁴⁹ Harley J. McKee, *Introduction to Early American Masonry: Stone, Brick, Mortar, and Plaster* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1973), p. 77. Wall plaster was made locally by burning shells, in particular oyster shells. See also Stevens Shop Book, pp. 231, 277.

⁵⁰ Bushman, *Refinement of America*, pp. 118-22.

⁵¹ Stevens Shop Book, p. 231. Stevens charged Banister for 2,600 bricks for construction on this home. For a discussion of colonial bricks, see Ed Crews "Making, Baking and Laying Bricks." *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* (Winter 2005-06), accessed at <http://www.history.org/almanack/life/trades/tradebri.cfm>. Bricks may have been transported to Newport from Barrington where brick making began in 1720. See Virginia H. Adams, Richard E. Greenwood, Robert Owen Jones, Pamela A. Kennedy, Elizabeth Sargent Warren, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Barrington, Rhode Island* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1993), p. 15. There were also brickmaking businesses in New Haven and Plymouth dating back to the 1740s. See McKee, *Introduction to Early American Masonry: Stone, Brick, Mortar, and Plaster*, p. 41, for further discussion. A perch was a traditional unit of volume for stone and other masonry. A perch of masonry is the volume of a stone wall sixteen and a half feet long, eighteen inches high, and twelve inches thick. Fourteen perch was equal to 231 running feet of masonry.

⁵² Stevens Shop Book, p. 277.

⁵³ Banister Journal, p. 531 (15 Nov. 1749). See also Newport Historical Society, Banister Memorandum Book (1749-1768), p. 193. On 29 Dec. 1754, Banister hired "Messrs. Melvill, Chapman & Tew" to build a roof on his house "after the Manner of Capt. John Tillinghast house."

⁵⁴ Bushman, *Refinement of America*, p. 134. Gary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America," in Gary Carson, Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: Style and Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), pp. 497-555.

⁵⁵ Banister Journal, p. 451 (6 Apr. 1749).

⁵⁶ Banister Journal, p. 461 (10 May 1749).

⁵⁷ Sheila Skemp, "A Social and Cultural History of Newport, Rhode Island, 1720-1765" (Ph.D. diss.: Iowa City, University of Iowa, 1974), p. 18.

⁵⁸ Newport City Hall, Newport, Rhode Island Land Evidence Records, vol. 16, p. 471 (31 Mar. 1821). The Banister home was finished by 1751. By 1821, the estate was reduced in size to eight tenths of an acre. The bounds were the "northwest corner of Mill Street and Spring Street, easterly 156 ½ feet on Mill Street, running southerly 214 ½ feet to Pelham Street, then running westerly bounded southerly on Pelham Street 142 feet to Spring Street running northerly to Mill 229 feet."