

Mary Christina Martin's Case Before the German Society of Pennsylvania, 1772¹

Philadelphians of German descent founded the German Society of Pennsylvania in 1764 to assist German immigrants. Many Germans came as indentured servants, a particularly vulnerable status. The GSP could be helpful in preventing masters from unfairly extending indentures. Although Christina Martin was Dutch, she too turned to the GSP for help. If she had been German, her hearing would have been conducted in German, but the GSP did all business with non-Germans in English. These are the minutes of the meeting.

Saturday, October 24, 1772

The Officers of the German Society met at Rudolph Burners.

Appeared Mary Christina Martin the Widow of George Martin who with his said Wife and Six Children, embarked at Rotterdam² in the Ship *Minerva*, Captain Johnstone. Her Husband died on his Passage—She says that her Husband agreed for Nine Guineas³ a Freight—and that he had 40 Guineas Hollanish advanced him in Holland by Mssrs. Crauford & Co.—That at her arrival in Philadelphia, three of her Sons were sold at £30 each which is equal to £90 and her two younger Children, a Girl of 8 Years and a Boy of 4 Years old, were delivered to her Sister whose Husband gave a Note of Hand for £10, to Willing and Morris—By which Means She paid for the Freight of her Family £100—That nevertheless she being near 46 years of Age has been sold to John Brown for £22 and 6 shillings to serve him and his Assigns⁴ for 5 Years—In which Account she and her poor Orphans are greatly overcharged and prays the advice and assistance of the German Society.

RESOLVED that Mr. Christopher Ludwick wait upon Messrs Willing & Morris, with a Copy of this entry, and that to desire to know of them whether the Facts alleged by the said Woman are true, And whether the Gentlemen would be pleased to favor us with a Copy of the Amount of that Woman as it stands in their Books.

A true Copy

Ludwick Weiss & Michael Shubart

[After the GSP's representatives met several times with the ship owners, they apparently agreed that Martin had paid the full freight, and she was freed.]

1 From German Society of Pennsylvania Minutes, German American Collection, German Society of Pennsylvania Collections, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In *Interpreting a Continent: Voices from Colonial America*, ed. Kathleen DuVal and John DuVal (Lanham, Md., 2009), 148-9.

2 A city in the Netherlands.

3 A gold coin worth twenty-one shillings. (£1 is twenty shillings.)

4 Heirs.