

# Ivory and Cultural Items in Colonial America

by Jason FitzGerald

"WILLIAMSBURG, November 2, 1779.  
Just imported from Holland and the West  
Indies...China tea cups and saucers, ivory  
and horn combs."

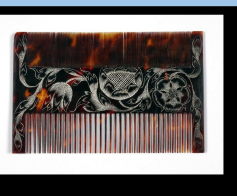
-Virginia Gazette-

"June 17, 1773.  
Just IMPORTED from London...A Fresh  
Assortment of DRUGS AND  
MEDICINES...Figs, Prunes, Gold and  
Silver Leaf, Ivory Syringes."

-Virginia Gazette-

"WILLIAMSBURG, November 6, 1777.  
The subscriber begs Leave to inform the  
Public in general, and her Friends in  
particular, that she has opened a store  
opposite Mr. John Greenhow's, near the  
Market Square...Silver Toothpick Cases,  
Gold and Silver Lace, Pocket Pistols,  
best Ivory Handle Knives and Forks."

-Virginia Gazette-



Decorative comb made in the West Indies from a tortoise shell.



William Bonner was a comb maker in London who specialized in ivory, horn, and tortoise shell combs.

"William Bonner, Comb Maker, at the Three Combs and Powder Flask"



Ivory was mostly exported from West Africa, specifically the ivory coast near Guinea, and often made its way to England and the West Indies by merchant ships.



The ivory exported from Africa was used to make goods like ivory comb found in the Glassford and Henderson Colchester store's Ready Money account. Ivory was very expensive, but a very versatile material for items as shown in the store advertisements.

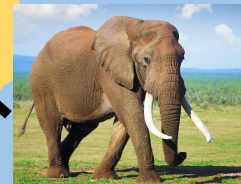


Not all ivory was harvested from elephants. Hippopotamus ivory was used and retained its white color better than elephant ivory.

"Ivory is a commodity sold all the coast over, but, like the slaves, more in some parts than others, and supplied thence to all the western world. The Screvelios are small, from fifteen down to four Pounds weight; among these last are sold us to Windward, the teeth of the Hippopotamus, or Sea horse, caught in the rivers Nunes and Gambia, about 16 Inches long, a white Ivory, but so brittle as not to be casily worked."

-John Atkins, A voyage to Guinea, Brasil, and the West-Indies

Common trade and shipping routes



- Atkins, John. A voyage to Guinea, Brasil, and the West-Indies; in His Majesty's Ships the Swallow and Weymouth. Giving a Genuine Account of the several Islands and Settlements of Madeira, the Canaries, Cape de Vard. Sierraleon, Sesthos, Cape Apollonia, Cabo Corso, and others on the Guinea Shore; Likewise Barbadoes, Jamaica, &c. in the West-Indies. Describing the Colour, Diet, Languages Habits, Manners, Customs, and Religions of the respective Natives and Inhabitants. With Remarks of the Gold, Ivory, and Slave-Trade: and on the Winds, Tides and Currents of the several Coasts. By John Atkins, Gent. Of Plaistow Essex. The second edition. London, [1737]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of Central Florida. 15 Nov 2016.

- Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Database of The Virginia Gazette. Accessed November 21, 2016. <http://www.history.org/history/todayin1770/index.cfm?SelectedMonth=11&SelectedDay=02>

<http://www.history.org/History/todayin1770/index.cfm?SelectedMonth=06&SelectedDay=17>

<http://history.org/History/todayin1770s/index.cfm?SelectedMonth=11&SelectedDay=06>

- Stahl, Ann and Peter Stahl. "Ivory Production and Consumption in Ghana in the Early Second Millennium AD." *Antiquity* 78 (March 2004) 86-101.

- "The 18th Century Material Culture Center," accessed November 21, 2016. <https://www.scribd.com/document/282835312/Grooming-Hair-Dressing-the-Hair>.