

Captain William Kidd

Source: *Valentine's History of New York City* in Abram Wakeman (1914). *History and reminiscences of lower Wall street and vicinity*. New York: The Spice Mill publishing co., pp. 10-12

During the early years of the British colonial era, Great Britain was involved in a series of maritime wars with rival European powers. As part of this conflict, many leading New York City merchants operated as privateers or legally commissioned pirates whose ships attacked and looted Britain's enemies. Benjamin Fletcher, the British governor of the colony, allowed the privateers open access to the port of New York in exchange for 100 Spanish dollars. The list of merchant pirates included Frederick Philipse, Nicholas Bayard (the son-in-law of Peter Stuyvesant), Stephanus Van Cortlandt and Peter Schuyler. Many also were involved in the slave trade. When war broke out between Britain and France in 1688, William Kidd received a commission as a privateer from a British official in the Caribbean. In 1691 he married a wealthy local widow, settled in New York City in a house on Wall Street, and contributed to the construction of Trinity Church. In 1695, Robert Livingston and members of the local elite including Governor Bellomont helped finance a pirating expedition by Kidd to the East coast of Africa. However, by the time Kidd returned to New York in 1699, he had been abandoned by his financial supporters. Kidd was arrested and sent to London where in 1701 he was executed as a pirate. **Source:** Burrows, E. and Wallace, M. (1999). *Gotham, A History of New York City to 1898*. NY: Oxford, 106-107, 112-114.

The slave trade being a legitimate pursuit and followed as a regular branch of foreign trade for many years, both previous and subsequent to the period now referred to, was exceedingly profitable though somewhat hazardous owing to a piratical adventurers who followed them into their remote trading places and often, as in the instance above related, robbed them of their stores and money used in the purchase of the negroes. The practice became so great a pest that efforts were made by influential merchants to induce the English ministry to assist them in fitting out a cruising vessel, properly armed. . . .

Col. Robert Livingston of New York, an active and influential citizen, brought this matter before the English Government and introduced Captain William Kidd of New York as an efficient and well-known commander, whose fitness for such service was well understood in New York. He was a man of family and had resided in this city for several years. It was proposed to engage in this enterprise on the footing of a private adventure, although it was desirable for some purposes that the scheme should receive the official countenance of the Government. The King, Lord Somers, the Earl of Romney, the Duke of Shrewsbury, the Earl of Oxford and Lord Bellamont joined in making up the necessary expenses of a proper vessel, Col. Livingston also contributing a proportion. The profits were to be divided among the owners of the ship, allowing a liberal share to Kidd.

A commission was issued December 11, 1695, under the great seal of England, directed 'to the trusty and well beloved Captain William Kidd, commander of the ship Adventure Galley.' He set sail from Plymouth in April, 1696, and arrived on the American coast, where he continued for some time, occasionally entering the harbor of New York and visiting his family in the city. He was considered useful in protecting our commerce, for which he received much applause, and the assembly of the province voted him the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds as a complimentary return for his services. Soon after he left this vicinity for more active operations on the coast of Africa and it was not long ere the astounding news arrived that Kidd had commenced the trade which he had been engaged to subvert and had committed several piracies.

The report of these facts coming to the public knowledge in England, the circumstance was made the subject of a violent attack upon the Government by the opposition party, and in the excess of party zeal it was alleged that the King himself and those concerned in the expedition were privy to the piratical adventure and shares in its profits. This charge having some color of foundation from the actual circumstances of the case, made the question a subject of State inquiry, and thus the name of Kidd, though perhaps personally less obnoxious to the odious characteristics of his profession than many others in history became from its association with a partisan warfare between the great men of the State, the most famous among the pirates of the world. The noblemen engaged in the enterprise underwent the form of a trial for their lives, but were acquitted. The principal scenes of Kidd's piracies were on the eastern coast of Africa, at Madagascar and the vicinity, where he captured and rifled several vessels, without, however, so far as we have been informed by history committing extreme cruelties upon his captives, the only

person proven to have been killed by him being a seaman of his own named William Moore, whom he accidentally slew by hitting him with a bucket for insubordination.

Kidd having amassed a fortune by this cruise, shaped his course homeward, seeming with a strange fatuity to have supposed that no information of his depredations in those remote parts of the world had reached the scenes of his home. It brought his vessel into Long Island Sound in the year 1699 and went ashore at Gardiner's Island, then owned and occupied by Mr. John Gardiner, to whom, from some undiscoverable motive, he made known his desire to bury a quantity of treasure on the island, and did, accordingly, deposit in the ground a considerable quantity of gold, silver and precious stones in the presence of Mr. Gardiner, but under strict injunctions of secrecy. This deposit consisted of eleven hundred and eleven ounces of coined silver, two thousand three hundred and fifty ounces of silver, seventeen ounces of jewels and precious stones, sixty-nine precious stones, fifty-seven bags of sugar, forty-one bales of merchandise, seventeen pieces of canvas, one large loadstone, etc. Having thus disburdened his ship, he departed for Boston, with the desire, it is supposed, of selling his vessel. While there, however, he was recognized in the street and apprehended. He was sent to England for trial and indicted for the murder of William Moore, before spoken of, and, being convicted, was hanged in chains at Execution Dock, May 12, 1701. The wife of Kidd continued her residence in this city after his death, herself and daughter living in seclusion in a habitation on the east side of the town.