

## William Vassall. Letter Books: 1769-1800

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### Content List: 4 January 1790 – 3 April 1792

Page	Correspondents	Date	Location (Origin to Destination)	Summary
50	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	January 4, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England to Mesopotamia, Westmorland, Jamaica	Vassall writes of a new method of boiling sugar and clarifying liquor through the use of copper and a syphon. A friend from Jamaica informs him that this new method is “vastly preferable to the old way.” Vassall’s “worthy friend” James Webster, Esquire also passed away on February 28 <sup>th</sup> . He concludes by informing Graham that he is anxious for the enslaved people on his estate to birth more children.
51-52	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	January 5, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall requests Wedderburn to purchase “six prim young Negro women” as well as “10 more young Ibo women” which he hopes will “breed” and produce children. Vassall remains confused as to why so few children have been born on his Jamaican estate. He informs Wedderburn of a shipment of candles, soap, tallow, salt, and temper-lime sailing from Bristol to Jamaica. Vassall recommends that Wedderburn purchase a piece of land to rent free of charge to a white family for tax purposes. John Graham has informed Vassall of an epidemic of the “rot” causing sores on the enslaved people of his estate. Vassall discusses the advantages and disadvantages of ratooning sugarcane and then once again refers to a new method of cooking sugar in copper. He concludes by mentioning last year’s French vintage, which he describes as “very bad”, informing

				Wedderburn that the prices of brandy and rum have increased as a consequence.
52-53	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	January 6, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	James Webster was interred on a Friday. Vassall suspects that his sugars are being pilfered and therefore requests that Wedderburn to carefully weigh and document his products. He remains anxious regarding the sores afflicting the enslaved people and lack of children being born on his estate. Vassall's letter includes a table of weights of his sugars in Jamaica, London, and Bristol in 1789.
53	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	January 6, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall reports of an unspecified business between him, Mr. Spraggs, and Mr. Jeffrey. He had recently received a letter from Jeffrey in which he denied affiliation with Vassall's business. Vassall confesses great dissatisfaction with Mr. Lowell's "inattention" to his business and the prolonged difficulties resulting from it.
53-54	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	February 2, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall ones again convenes with his friend James Wedderburn regarding the intricacies of cooking and clarifying sugar in copper vessels. He also informs him of plans to build "snug stone or brick house for my Negroes". Still, he remains worried about the potentially high costs of stone and brick brought from London or Bristol, which he believes to make the best quality bricks. He also wishes to order "a full supply of coal" to Jamaica as well as bushels of bamboo to plant on his estate.
54-55	William Vassall, John Graham, Esquire	February 2, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	John Graham has informed Vassall that he plans to plant 16 acres worth of sugarcane on Vassall's plantation, an endeavour in which he "highly approve[s]" of. Complaining about last year's poor wine vintage, Vassall writes that the prices of rum and brandy have "risen greatly in price". Wishing to settle his investigation into cooking sugar in copper, Vassall also writes a set of eleven questions pertaining to the intricacies and utility of the practice. He explains he is being so thorough because

				initial costs would amount between £100 and £150 sterling. “I am sorry,” writes Vassall, “that the influenza has been so rife at my estate & that I have lost a fine field Negro woman by it.” Quickly changing the subject, he concludes his letter by discussing shipments of sugar and coal, as well as the vessels in which they will be carried by.
55	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	February 3, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall discusses potential trading routes of coals and sugar to his estate in Jamaica. He wonders if it would be best “after she had delivered her load of sugar in London, she should go to Newcastle for a load of coals to carry to Jamaica, or go to America for a load of lumber to carry to Jamaica.” Vassall wishes to send a large shipment of coals to his estate, “as many coals in Jamaica as my estate will want for crop 1791.” He has also been informed by an unspecified individual that bamboo stocks may make “very good hoops for hogsheads” (a hogshead is a barrel size used to store goods like sugar and coal).
55	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	February 3, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall commences his letter by referencing “three or four vessels” which have arrived in London from Boston, “by neither of which I have received a line that I am in total darkness respecting my affairs there.” Vassall also intends to send Dr. Lloyd “a special power of attorney” to settle business with the elusive Mr. Jeffrey. Vassall’s wife “Mrs. Vassall” has apparently “greatly recovered her health; and hope by the blessing of God she will enjoy a perfect state of health next summer.”
55	William Vassall to Mr. Samuel Borland	February 3, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England to Mount Eagle,	Vassall thanks Mr. Borland for informing him of the new method of clarifying sugar in copper vessels. Vassall believes it would “give me great pleasure to receive letters from you.”

			Westmorland, Jamaica	
56	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	March 2, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Writing to James Lloyd, Vassall complains of not being “favored with a line from you or any other person” resulting in him being “in total darkness respecting the situation of my affairs in Massachusetts.” According to Vassall, Mr. Lowell “has hitherto been extremely inattentive to my business.” Vassall plans to pursue legal action if Mr. Lowell does not complete this business within a fortnight, “(Indeed I do not believe he has done one single thing towards it).” Vassall recommends hiring the legal expertise of either Gore Young, Harrison Gray Otis, or “Gwen of H. G. Otis”. According to Vassall, Mr. Jeffrey has been “playing fast and loose”, living in Vassall’s own house without paying rent or endeavoring to purchase the estate. Vassall also informs Dr. Lloyd that he has “endeavoured (but in vain) to promote the acts of the Federal Congress or legislature passed in 1789.” He also wishes to be sent six barrels of the “best Indian corn.”
57	William Vassall to John Lowell, Esquire	March 2, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall informs Mr. Lowell of his disappointment with the state of affairs regarding his business agreement. Vassall’s “astonishment is greatly increased by the following passage in a note from Mr. Spraggs.” The passage is written as follows: “Mr Vassall’s business does not rest with me, but wholly with the agent here. Dr. Lloyd is expected by Capt. Callahan who probably will be empowered to bring it to a close.” It seems as if Lowell had deferred the business agreement to another “agent here.” The confusion was “vexatious and distressing” to put it in Vassall’s own words.
57	William Vassall to Leonard Vassall Borland	March 2, 1790	Clapham Common,	Vassall explains that he had sold his Boston house back in May of 1789 to Mr. Jeffrey, proven by a deed of sale held by Dr. Lloyd. Borland had not sent Vassall a letter

			London, England	regarding the matter in quite some time, causing him to be “extremely sorry and greatly disappointed.”
57	William Vassall to Patrick Jeffrey, Esquire	March 2, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall explains that he had advised Mr. Patrick Jeffrey regarding the purchase of his house in Boston, referring him to Mr. Spraggs for the particulars. He had informed him in a letter from May 2, 1789 that two years’ rent was to be paid on April 1 <sup>st</sup> , 1789. A letter from Mr. Spraggs confirmed that Mr. Patrick Jeffrey had received said letter and that he had planned to write back “in a week from the 18 <sup>th</sup> of July last. Noticeably angered, Vassall writes that he has not received a “[foray] of paper or a single dash of a pen from you to me... But, perhaps, were I possessed of one of Herchills [sic] new invented telescopes, I might by an accurate observation discover your letter to me in the moon, very drolly wafted there in a balloon.”
57-58	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	March 3, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	William Vassall is “greatly disappointed in not receiving a line from you or Dr. Graham.” Mr. Graham had apparently previously informed him that “the influenza had almost passed through my estate, and I had lost a fine field Negro woman by it.” Vassall also asks Wedderburn to begin “digging round the plantains after they have been cut and putting some manure round the roots.” He concludes by stating that he hopes “that my Negroes are all well without any further loss and that lot all make a good crop.”
57-58	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	March 3, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall is once again greatly disappointed that he has not recently received letters from either John Graham or James Wedderburn. He also references the same influenza as before and prays his estate procures a good crop.
58	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	March 3, 1789 [sic]	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall informs James Lloyd that he sent him two special powers of attorney by Captain Hubbard.

58	William Vasall to John Graham, Esquire	March 19, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall writes that he has conversed with his friend Joseph Royal, Esquire, “who lived many years in Jamaica and had a number of estates under his care” regarding the benefits of ratooning sugarcane. At Trelawney, he says, every year they dig around the roots of their sugarcane “with wonderful success.” The process, which includes laying manure around the canes, supposedly causes the canes “to stand well on the stock for many years”, greatly reducing “the hard labour of the estate... & these will be a very great if not a total saving of hired labour.”
58-59	William Vasall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	March 19, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall is relieved that Wedderburn’s previous letter informed him “that my [Vassall’s] Negroes were all got well of the influenza only with the loss of some labour, & some additional expenses.” Wedderburn was also in the process of “planting a new piece of land” to increase crop outcomes. “It is a planter’s interest,” writes Vassall, “to make a good crop, & at the least expense possible. In order to do this he must consider in what manner he can improve his land so as to make the same quantity of sugar with the least labour, and with the smallest expense.” Once again, Vassall discusses the benefits of the “Trelawney method” of ratooning sugar cane and spreading manure near the roots.
59	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	March 20, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	This letter was never sent and was instead replaced with the following letter.
59-60	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	March 20, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	A “Mr. Smith” has loaned Vassall all of the acts passed by the Federal Congress since 1789. He is most concerned with the passing of acts respecting “confiscated estates absentees & aliens.” The same Mr. Smith had informed Vassall that the General Assembly of Rhode Island “had ordered a convention some time... to determine whether

				they will accede to the new Constitution or not.” Vassall believes that he is a “greatly injured person both by Massachusetts & Rhode Island states” and plans to employ the “most able counsel to commence actions at the Supreme Federal Court at New York against Oliver Wendell, Esq for unjustly and illegally seizing and selling my household goods... & mortgaging my mansion have in Boston, and against the Treasurer or State of Rhode Island for illegally seizing and selling my Tavern at Bristol.”
60	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	April 7, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Recent legal advances in Rhode Island have spurred on Vassall to “write up a state of my case respecting my Bristol farm, which has been confiscated and sold by said state contrary to every principle of Law & Justice.” He wishes to know if Rhode Island has adopted the new constitution so as to allow him to commence legal action for the return of his farm.
60	William Vassall to Mr. Nathaniel “Natty” Vassall	April 7, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England to [?], Jamaica	Here Vassall responds to two letters sent to him by his son Natty from Jamaica. He explains that he would have written sooner “had not your mothers ill state of health obliged me to ride about the country with her.” He explains that “since my return I have been extremely afflicted with [?] complaints and to that degree as to be unfit for business.” William’s wife and Natty’s mother “has recovered her health vastly beyond her friends expectations.” He tells his son that their friend James Webster had passed away last 28 <sup>th</sup> of December. Vassall writes that he is “in a good deal of pain at present, though vastly less than I have suffered for the last three months.” He tells his son that his brothers and sisters are well and wish Natty health and happiness.
60-61	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	May 2, 1790	Clapham Common,	William Vassall writes that he intends to “bring an action against Oliver Wendell, Esq for illegally seizing and selling my household goods.” He also wishes to know who

			London, England	is in possession of his “coach, old chariot, one of my [caisson] and the harnesses belonging to them.” Vassall begs to know “How they came by them, if they bought them, of whom did they buy them and how much did they give for them.” He also has several question pertaining to his home that was sold in Boston, Massachusetts.
61	William Vassall to Jonathan Bowman, Esquire	May 2, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall informs Bowman that Dr. James Lloyd had recently left London to pay Bowman £15 for his services.
61	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	May 5, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	William Vassall requests to know which vessels Wedderburn had “engaged” to ship his recent crops of sugar. Vassall concludes by writing that “I hope you have bought six young Negro Women for my estate though you do not mention a word about buying any in any of your late letters.”
61	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	June 2, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall relays information that he had received via Mr. Spraggs. Spraggs writes that the delay in Vassall’s business respecting a set of deeds is not his fault, and that he will pursue the business as soon as he receives said deeds. Vassall had recently written Mr. Lowell, to which he was left in silence.
61-62	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	June 2, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Captain Slaton has not arrived in London for “about a month” longer than expected, and Vassall therefore fears “some accident has happened to her.” He writes that “since preparations making for war both by Great Britain & Spain, sugars have risen from 8/ to 10/ P [?] and rum now sells from 3/3 to 3/6 P gallon. The “Roehampton” has recently arrived with “10 hogsheads of sugar & 10 [?] of my rum” which he expects to sell well.
62	William Vassall to Nathaniel “Natty” Vassall	June 2, 1790	Clapham Common,	Vassall complains that he has not received a letter from his son Natty since April 7 <sup>th</sup> . William Vassall has recently received three bills totalling £50 from expenditures left



			London, England	unpaid by his son, even though his allowance was only £40 per annum. Vassall brings this up in order “that you may be a prudent good economist, & careful in your expenses so as not to exceed the £40 per annum.” Vassall writes that “your mother through divine goodness has recovered for heath, to the great comfort of the family & all her friends.” He also leaves a postscript, asking his son Natty to “inform me how Admiral Affleck behaves towards you, and what prospect you have of being made a lieutenant.”
62	William Vassall to John Lowell, Esquire	June 12, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Mr. Vassall is incapable of releasing his “mansion house in Boston” to Mr. Jeffrey. However, Jeffrey has “fulfilled Mr. Spraggs, his attorney’s agreement with me for my said mansion house.” Vassall still needs to write up and execute a deed of release which he will give to Mr. Spraggs to forward to Mr. Jeffrey.
62	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	June 12, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall begs James Lloyd to send copies of the deeds for his real estate in Massachusetts as soon as possible so that the “troublesome business with Mr. Jeffrey is finished.”
62-63	William Vassall to James Wedderburn & John Graham, Esquire	July 7, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall writes that he has recently received letters from Wedderburn and Graham regarding the recent shipment of his crops. Wedderburn has recently travelled to Scotland but is expected to once again arrive in London “about this day month.” Recent shipments of sugar have sold well. Vassall is “sorry you have had such continual heavy rains through the crop, but am very thankful that, though my crop will not be to [sic] good as it would have been had the seasons been more favourable, I shall fare so well.” He writes that “all the windward island are burnt up, except Grenada & St. Vincent, which will make middling crops.” The French Island also seem to be making bad crops, “that whether there is peace or war sugars will sell at good prices.” Vassall remains sorry that Wedderburn and

				Graham were incapable of purchasing “the six young Negro women when you wrote last, but I hope before this reaches you that you will have bought them.” Vassall further wishes the two men to “buy six more choice young Negroes about 17 or 18 years of age, men or women as you shall think best.”
63	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	July 17, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall once again asks for Dr. Lloyd to send copies of his deeds to Mr. Borland in order to settle his business in Massachusetts. Clearly agitated, Vassall says that “I think Mr. Jeffrey & Mr. Lowell are the two compleatest [sic] push pin players in the world, they have played so long at blind man’s bluff and hide and go seek so long as that my patience is exhausted. I am too old to be pleased with children... I hope by this time they have done with their childish foolerie, and finished the business.” Vassall concludes his letter by writing that he has received £337.10 via Mr. Spraggs to pay for 3 years rent at his Boston home.
63-64	William Vassall to Oliver Wendell, Esquire	July 17, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall posits that Wendell is “determined not to settle the business with me.” “It would be folly in the extreme,” writes Vassall, “to make any further remonstrates to you on the subject. I am fully convinced, that it would be highly ridiculous in me to expect, that I shall ever receive from you the lowest consideration for said money.” Noticeably angered, Vassall writes the following: “Now sir, as I was not indebted one farthing to you, I presume, that you, as an honest man, thought you had full & just authority to invade & by force to seize & sell my said property in manner as aforesaid, & that you are willing to inform me by what authority you acted.”
64	William Vassall to John Lowell, Esquire	July 31, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Writing to John Sewell, Vassall says that Mr. Jeffrey has “behaved just as I expected. His whole conduct in this business has been one continued scene of [tergiversation?]... & meanness, I will not say unbecoming

				a gentleman, but would be unbecoming a chimney... scraper.” In order to deal with his estate in Boston, William Vassall says that Mrs. Vassall has relinquished her “right of Dower & of all demands on my said mansion house.”
64	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	July 31, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall plans to send a copy of his estate to Mr. John Lowell, Junior, which he has recently drawn up. He requests that Lowell see “that the business with Mr. Jeffrey is immediately finished and you will greatly oblige.”
64	William Vassall to Patrick Jeffrey, Esquire	July 31, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	In order to finish the business regarding his Boston mansion, Vassall attaches a copy of his wife’s release of her right to the property to Mr. Jeffrey.
65	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	July 31, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Dr. Lloyd recently sent a letter to William Vassall which Mr. Jeffrey said included payment for the business in Massachusetts. “I find you do not know him,” writes Vassall about Mr. Jeffrey, “He is the most shuffling fair promising and non performing animal in the world.” Jeffrey has apparently refused to perform the sad business. Writing to his friend, Vassall says “it gives great pleasure to the whole family to learn, that Mr. Lloyd has mended so greatly in her health.”
65-66	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	August 3, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall and his lawyers are as of yet unsure that the case will conclude in their favour, although they believe that “no future confiscations shall be made.” Discussing United States law, Vassall contends that “because the federal government had been established with great opposition, & was yet, and, you feared, will long continue very feeble, and that to give a remedy in cases of confiscation, though oppressive would be a kind of retrospective justice, & would be branded with the odious name of ex post facto determination. This appears to me to be a most noble character of your state law & new Federal Constitution.” Vassall remains confident that “your [Lowell Junior’s]

				<p>observations do not apply to them. For in the state of my case in Massachusetts I do not complain of said state, having confiscated any part of my estate prior to the ratification of the treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States ratified by Congress on the 14 January 1784.” He also makes reference to a confiscated farm in Bristol, Rhode Island which was confiscated ten years prior in 1780: “That though I am truly sensible and with the greatest reason bitterly complain of the cruelty wickedness &amp; injustice of confiscating an innocent man’s property.” He believes such a confiscation to be “diametrically contrary to common sense &amp; every principle of the laws of the United States.” Vassall also informs Lowell that he has left a collection of notes detailing all of the amounts and interest rates of people indebted to him with Dr. Lloyd. Since Vassall’s friend John Lowell Senior remains a judge on the District Court, Vassall plans to instead turn to the Supreme Federal Court, since they hold original jurisdiction in all matters belonging to “foreigners and aliens.”</p>
66-67	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	August 4, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	<p>Recent heavy rains in Jamaica have shortened Vassall’s crop, and thus to prevent further damage, he recommends “to draw the earth as high as possible round the canes to support and strengthen the canes so as to withstand the force of the wind.” Vassall’s nephew Sam Borland has recently arrived in London from Jamaica, to which Vassall asks several questions regarding the affairs at his estate and plantation, “especially concerning Mr. Napier the overseer.” Vassall believes Napier to be “an exceedingly good planter and attentive to his business and kind to the sick Negroes.” His inquiry is provided in full as follows: “I asked him whether he kept much company, drank freely, or corrected idle Negroes much by whipping. He hesitated, on</p>

				<p>which I earnestly pressed him, &amp; after much arguing, he reluctantly told me, that in his opinion Mr. Napier was not a good natured man, &amp; when in company drank freely and the day after he had drank freely he was very morose and punished the Negroes for slight faults with severity. This account of Mr. Napier has given me great uneasiness. I earnestly beg the favour of you to make particular inquiry into these matters. Do not let anyone know that I have wrote this to you, and see whether Mr. Borland has formed a right opinion respecting Mr. Napier, or not. For I would not on any account have a man of a severe cruel disposition, and who severely whipped the Negroes if he was the best overseer in the island in other respects, live on my estate and I think it is unpardonable in an overseer to be hard punisher. I earnestly beg of you sir to inquire critically into the matters and see, that my Negroes are treated with the greatest kindness &amp; humanity [?] and that both sick and well have every thing that is necessary to make them comfortable &amp; happy, and that they are not overworked. Mr. Borland says, that a short time before he left the island, you interrogated him on these matters that he hesitated in his answers, and did not speak so freely to you as he did to me.”</p>
67	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	August 7, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall requests Lloyd to send “twelve pounds each of best pickled green bell peppers & two half barrels of finest cranberries.”
67	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	August 24, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall briefly asks for any potential advice in bringing his case to the Federal Court of Judication.
67	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	September 1, 1790	Clapham Common,	Vassall has recently received a list of “Negroes” from his estate and stock since January 1 <sup>st</sup> , 1790. It was to his “great

			London, England	sorrow, that the ship Prudence was totally lost, vessels & cargo.” Mr. Nabb therefore offered to send “one of his vessels to take in a load of coal” to supply his estates in Jamaica.
68	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	October 6, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall writes that he has only recently returned “from a long journey on account of my health.” Wedderburn has informed him that he was incapable of buying the “Negroes” he had ordered for his plantation. A shipment of bricks and lime has been shipped from Bristol.
68	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	November 3, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall requests that 30 hogsheads of sugar be shipped aboard the “Juno.” If the crop was as good as last year’s, he requests 20 hogsheads of sugar be shipped to Bristol; if not, “please to ship only ten hogsheads to Bristol.” The price of rum is currently 3/8 to 4/4 per gallon, the price of which will rise if war breaks out and fall if not. He requests that Wedderburn and Graham sell his rum from within the island of Jamaica. Finally, Vassall asks that 30 gallons of molasses as well as “a barrel of fine Spanish yams” be sent to him to be used by his family.
69	William Vassall to Nathaniel “Natty” Vassall	December 1, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall congratulates his son Nathaniel on being made a Lieutenant in the Navy. He advises Nathaniel to ask Admiral Affleck to grant him passage aboard a Man of War destined for England.
69	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	December 1, 1790	Clapham Common, London, England	Wedderburn recently purchased “4 young Negro women & 2 men boys,” and has also planted 17 acres of “fall plant.” A hurricane from September 1 <sup>st</sup> has ravaged Vassall’s estate and he therefore requests an assessment of the damages. Due to the hurricane, he wonders if it would be prudent to wait until spring before purchasing more “Negroes.”
69	William Vassall to Patrick Jeffrey, Esquire	January 15, 1791	Clapham Common, London,	Lowell recently sent Vassall his bill for “two thousand four hundred pounds sterling” as well as a sum of £88.14.4. Vassall informs Jeffrey that he purchased two houses next

			England to Boston, Massachusetts	to his mansion in Boston “to prevent a nuisance, that is, to prevent any persons from building new high houses to obstruct the view of the harbour.” He offers Jeffrey the first chance to purchase these houses before he sells them to a larger market. While it is clear that Vassall and Jeffrey have not always seen eye to eye, Vassall writes that he “sincerely wish[es] that you & your lady may enjoy many years of happiness in your newly purchased habitation.”
70	William Vassall to John Lowell, Esquire	January 15, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall informs Lowell that he has received payment for his house in Boston.
70	William Vassall to Samuel Bush, Esquire	January 31, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to Greenwich, Connecticut	Vassall says that the price of a certain number of stocks continues to fall, a result that he believes has been caused by a potential war with Spain. He must leave town and enter the country “with Mrs. Vassall & two of my daughters on account of their ill state of health. To sort out his stocks, Vassall has hired a “Mr. Cole, an eminent stock broker for the Bank of England” to advise him whether or not “to sell Mrs. Hubbard’s annuity.” He then states that annuity was sold for £245.19.
70	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	February 2, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall is sorry that the wet season negatively impacted “the Negroes in their health. I hope dry seasonable weather had succeeded, and the Negroes have all got well.” Vassall has recently recovered from ill health and requests a large supply of yams, cassada, corn, and “other ground provisions” in case of a sudden storm. He also requests that Graham buy a “strong iron bound cask made of American white oak” that can store “about 35 or 36 gallons” and store within it the best rum and pineapples from his estate.
71	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	February 2, 1791	Clapham Common, London,	William Vassall shares his father’s opinion that Lowell Junior ought to write a petition that asks the court to order Oliver Wendell, Esquire to pay Vassall’s attorney “the

			England to Boston, Massachusetts	money he has in his hands arriving from the sale of my household goods, library.”
71-72	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	February 12, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to Boston, Massachusetts	Vassall’s letter includes a full petition of his case against the American government for confiscating his property during the revolutionary war. Vassall contends that the American government had no legal right to confiscate his property, “only mere power which they unjustly & tyrannically exercised against me.” One of Vassall’s friend’s recently “gave a very high character of the judges of the Supreme Judicial Court for abilities, knowledge of the law, probity & impartiality.” He wishes that Lowell sends him a copy of “the whole of the Agency Act of 1777.” Explaining his harsh language, Vassall writes that he believes “losers have a right to complain. That I have always been a friend to the United States. That I never offended against any of the laws of Massachusetts.” He asks Lowell and his fellow Americans to imagine his own situation: “Now, sir, if you will seriously consider all these things and put yourself in my situation, a man of 75 years with a wife & ten children depending on you for bread... perhaps you may be so far from thinking that I have used too harsh epitaph.”
72-75	William Vassall to Oliver Wendell, Esquire	February 18, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall is shocked that Wendell had stated he had been treated “unworthily and ungratefully.” Vassall disputes his claim, writing that he had “always had the greatest personal regard.” He therefore sets out to write a “long recital of facts” pertaining to his land confiscation case in order to exculpate himself. It seems as if the letter that offended Wendell was Vassall’s own from July 17 <sup>th</sup> . Vassall contends that he had written that letter “being in a gay humour.” Seeing that Wendell had “taken it in a different light,” Vassall apologizes for making such an “unworthy threat.”



				To back up his case, Vassall argues that the “harsh epithets” that he used in his letters are also present in a number of authoritative articles in the United States, to which he lists several.
75-76	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	February 26, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to Boston, Massachusetts	Vassall’s letter details the intricacies of the laws and acts at play in the confiscation of his estate. He writes that “no part of my personal estate was confiscated by the Agency Act, & no part of my real estate was confiscated by same resolve.”
76	William Vassall to John Lowell, Esquire	March 2, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall describes a series of letters sent between him and John Lowell’s son, John Lowell Junior, in which Lowell Junior “says that you thought I had better try the fate of a petition before I commenced an action against Oliver Wendell, Esq, as it would not produce a future action.”
76	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	March 2, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall writes the following: “I intended to have wrote Mr. Wedderburn by this opportunity, but having been very closely engaged the last month with some friends, who will shortly embark for America, about proper measures for recovering a considerable property which had been confiscated... I must defer writing to him in the next post.” Vassall states that Wedderburn had purchased “18 new Negroes for my estate,” and Vassall therefore asks for him to purchase six more as soon as possible.
76	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	March 4, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall informs Lloyd that Mr. Jeffrey will convene with him if he wishes to purchase the nearby houses owned by Vassall next to his former Boston estate. He also discusses payment with Lloyd, as he had been unable to compensate him last time they had met due to unforeseen circumstances. Lloyd’s previous letters from 1788 stated that he had sold a piece of Vassall’s land for £445 and rent for £56, as well as another tract of land for £201, to which

				Vassall requests the earnings be sent to him by Lloyd's convenience.
77	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	March 16, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall requests that Lowell Junior favour him "with a full & particulars account of what you have done respecting them, as soon as possible."
77	William Vassall to Oliver Wendell, Esquire	March 17, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Someone named Captain Davis was "unfortunately cast away and any letters by him lost." Vassall informs Wendell that "if the General Court should refuse to grant my petition, I shall bring an action against you, as state agent to the Supreme Judicial Court... for same money and interest thereon... Because I have no other way or means to Recover my Rights of property, wrongfully taken & kept from me."
77	William Vassall to Leonard Hubbard, Esquire	April 11, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, United States	Mrs. Vassall has informed Vassall that Hubbard is interested in disposing of his "Eastern Lands." Vassall assures Hubbard that he has "my free & full consent to dispose of all your Eastern Lands, and that I never will ask or receive one farthing from you, for or on account of any money I may have advanced."
77	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	April 11, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall requests that Lloyd forward Leonard Hubbard, Esq "Ten pounds lawful money" and pay Henry Marchant, Esq "Fifteen pounds lawful money."
77	William Vassall to Henry Marchant, Esquire	April 11, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to Newport, Rhode Island, United States	Vassall informs Marchant of the payment he has sent by James Lloyd for the sum of £15.

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<b>Page</b>	<b>Correspondents</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location (Origin to Destination)</b>	<b>Summary</b>
1	William Vassall to Colonel William S. Smith	May 2, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to New York, United States	Vassall has received yet another update respecting his case in Rhode Island, in which his farm in Bristol was confiscated by the newly formed United States government. He plans on writing to the Supreme Court to reverse a previous decision by the Superior Court of Rhode Island.
1	William Vassall to Colonel William S. Smith, Marshal of New York District	May 4, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to New York, United States	Vassall encloses a petition signed by Henry Marchant, now District Judge of Rhode Island. Vassall, as always, is determined to have his lands either returned to him or compensated by the United States government.
2-3	William Vassall to Colonel William S. Smith	May 10, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to New York, United States	Vassall is informed that it is unlikely he will receive compensation for his farm because he is considered an "alien" in the United States. Defending himself, Vassall states that he was "an inhabitant in Massachusetts State & had been so for forty years." In May of 1775, Vassall left his home in Boston (where he had lived for 31 years) and went to Nantucket with his family. In 1774 he was appointed a mandamus counsellor in Massachusetts, which he refused. Vassall believes that he had "never offended against any of the laws of any one of the United States" and that he "never bore arms in my life in any shape." He remained in Nantucket until August 12 <sup>th</sup> , 1775, when all communications between the United States and Jamaica, his "native place" were "cut off." He therefore embarked for England, "not from choice, but from necessity." He

				arrived in England on September 16 <sup>th</sup> , 1775 and has never left Great Britain since then. His petition continues as a protracted argument in favour of being compensated for his confiscated farm.
4	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	August 3, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	This letter concerns a handful of shipments carrying sugar and rum from Vassall's plantation, the prices at which they were sold, and the vessels in which they were shipped.
4	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	August 3, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall has recently received a letter from Graham stating that "the Negroes were well and amply supplied with provisions & had made such a plant of sugars & plantanes [sic] as would be a supply in case of a storm; but by reason of the wet season, last year the stock had suffered so much that you were obliged to bury one spell of cattle, & were looking out for another." Wedderburn has been advised to buy "12 Negroes" on top of the 12 he had originally purchased.
4	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	August 5, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Lloyd previously told Vassall that his "Eastern Lands" had suffered from "depredations" made by some "delinquents." Vassall's petition had also been recently exhibited to the General Court, "praying, Judge Wendell might pay the money in his hands to me or my attorney." The rest of the letter consists of deals pertaining to his lands and homes surrounding his previously owned Boston mansion.
5	William Vassall to Colonel William Smith	August 8, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to New York	Vassall writes that "the whole family, through divine fervor, enjoy good health." He looks forward to hearing Smith's opinion on the state of his case pertaining to his Bristol farm.
5	William Vassall to John Waldron, Esquire	August 8, 1791	Clapham Common, London,	Vassall begs "the favour of you to inform me, who they were that seized my horses... and who has seized or taken any other part of my property by force unjustly." An unnamed amount of grain and hay had also been taken

			England to Bristol	from his farm at Poppasquash in Bristol. Vassall also requests that Waldron inform him if anyone he knew from Bristol had died since his absence.
5	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	August 8, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall writes a short letter to tell Lloyd he has received the 8 barrels of corn that he recently shipped.
5	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	August 8, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall says that a petition “has been exhibited to the General Court praying, that Judge Wendell might pay me the money in his hands for the state of my household goods.” He also requests that he ask Dr. Lloyd to send him an “exact copy of the mortgage of my mansion in Boston.”
6	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	September 3, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall requests information regarding the planting and harvesting seasons in Jamaica. He has not heard from Wedderburn or Graham in some time.
6	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	September 4, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Ibid.
6	William Vassall to James Wedderburn	October 5, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Ibid.
6	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	October 5, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Ibid.
6	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	November 2, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	The first half of the letter discusses several bills of sale paid by Vassall and company. Wedderburn’s letter from July 27 <sup>th</sup> , mentions the purchase of “12 Negroes,” to which Vassall hopes he has by now purchased twelve more. Vassall requests that (if he has made a good crop)

				Wedderburn send 20 hogsheads of sugar to Bristol, “consigned by John Gordon Junior, Esq.” If the crop was poor, Vassall would prefer he send only 10 hogsheads. He also requests that the sugars be shipped on “upper tier,” rather than the “ground tier” of the ship.
6-8	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	November 2, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall has determined that if his estate is “confiscated by [the declaratory act of November 10, 1784] that affair is finished.” However, if the court were to determine it was not confiscated under that act, it “cannot possibly give the act of 1777 the force to confiscate my personal estate.” He also writes that “Act No. 1... does not apply to my case” since it can “by no means bind, or can possibly have the least force against an absentee.” Still, Lowell does not expect a judgement in favour of Vassall, at either the federal or state level. Vassall requests that Lowell sends him two complete copies of the “whole Act of 1777.”
8-9	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	November 9, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall discusses the shipment of his plantation’s rum, as well as the prices it is expected to sell at. He is not sure whether it would sell better in London or Jamaica.
9	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	November 16, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	Since they last exchanged letters, Wedderburn had purchased “eight fine young Ebo women & four fine young Ebo men” which cost a total of £593.11.5. Vassall plans to purchase twelve more enslaved people within a year.
9	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	December 1, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England to Mesopotamia, Westmorland, Jamaica	Vassall once again debates the merits between boiling sugar in “coch coppers or with skimming coppers.” He has heard that coch copper requires more fuel to operate, produces sugar at a slower rate, produces sugar of a lesser quality, and is more difficult to operate. On the other hand, others argued that the amount of extra fuel needed for using coch copper is negligible, that the other complaints were simply untrue, and that using coch copper actually produced more sugar than skimming copper. Vassall

				requests Graham's opinion on whether or not he should switch over to using coch copper. The rest of the letter concerns the sale and prices of his plantation's rum.
10-11	William Vassall to John Lowell Junior, Esquire	December 2, 1791	Clapham Common, London, England	This letter pertains to the intricacies of Vassall's case against the United States for the confiscation of his land. Vassall argues that "the question in my case is not whether the States had a Right to make laws of confiscation, but whether in fact my personal estate, which O. Wendell Esq seized & sold had on 14 January 1784 been confiscated either by an Act of the Legislature or a judgment of court."
11	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	January 3, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England	John Graham recently stored "between 60 & 70 hogsheads of coals," oatmeal, pears, and beans in case of emergency. Vassall approves of his efforts, writing that it is useful to have "some on the estate to give to the Negroes for a change of diet, to give to weakly & sick Negroes, & to children, and to guard against illness." He also plans on sending a puncheon of oatmeal, two puncheons of peas, and a puncheon of split beans, which will arrive "sometime in March." Mr. Morrison, "an eminent surgeon," "highly approves" of Graham using "oatmeal poultices for sores." The poultices used for the sores were then "to be buried under Ground to prevent any improper use being made of them."
11-12	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	January 4, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall's letter deals with recent shipments from his Jamaican plantation. He plans on selling some of his rum in Jamaica while sending the rest to London to maximize profits. Vassall writes that "it is apprehended by the West India planters... that when the parliament meets on the 31 <sup>st</sup> , instant it will, from the great clamour... pass an act to lower the drawback on the exportation of sugars." He expects this to cause a sudden drop in the price of sugar. Vassall also writes that "some people apprehend, that something will be done as to the abolishing of the African

				Trade. If this should be the case, it will greatly distress the planters. Whether parliament will abolish the slave trade. I cannot say, but in the present situation of things, as I intend to purchase some Negroes for my estate in the [?] of the present year, I think it will be prudent to buy them immediately, therefore beg the favor of you to buy Twelve fine young Negroes. Get these 12 new Negroes, be men boys or women girls from 15 to 17 years of age, or part men boys and part women girls, as you shall Judge will be most suitable for my estate: and beg the favor of you to order proper houses and convenient and suitable food to be provided for them.”
12	William Vassall to John Graham, Esquire	February 1, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall writes that he has “escaped” the hurricane season and that his crops have all fared well. He asks Graham what he thinks “is the reason that my Negroes on Green river Estate are so much more afflicted with sores than on any other estate.”
12	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	February 1, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall asks that Wedderburn ship “10 or 12 puncheons of my Rum by a vessel” that would arrive at Bristol by June.
13	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	February 22, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall recently met and conversed with Dr. Lloyd’s son, who he describes as “a very agreeable young gentleman, & he is highly esteemed by the whole family, and by all who have the pleasure of being acquainted with him.” Vassall tells Lloyd that John Lowell Junior, Esquire recently informed him that his petition had been rejected by the General Court. Vassall also attaches a set of four questions to his letter dealing with a set of promissory notes in Lloyd’s possession.
13-15	William Vassall to Edmund Randolph, Esquire, Attorney	March 3, 1792	Clapham Common,	The bulk of Vassall’s letter consists of details and rantings pertaining to his confiscated property. He posits that the General Court has charged him of “notorious falsehoods,



	General to the United States of America		London, England	as positively charging me with having done somethings which I never had done.” Vassall writes that “you [Randolph] think that the only chance I have to receive any compensation for my farm which was confiscated by an erroneous judgement of court is to petition the General Assembly of the state of Rhode Island. Alas! How little do you sir know of what sort of men said assembly is composed?” He also includes a register of supposed damages against him, which he estimates is £86,000.
15	William Vassall to Colonel William S. Smith	March 3, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England to New York	Vassall writes that Randolph’s opinion on his property is “conclusive,” and will therefore “not bring an action to recover said farm or compensation for it.” He wonders “that if I bring our action against Oliver Wendell Esq and an action against the committee, that said state will be a party to both of them.”
15	William Vassall to Colonel William S. Smith	March 9, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England to New York	Vassall encloses a rough copy of his previous letter in case the original is lost during travel.
16	William Vassall to Dr. James Lloyd	March 13, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall asks Lloyd a series of three questions pertaining to a set of “small notes I left with you... First, whether or not any of said notes have been paid in full of principle & interest... Secondly, if any has been paid in past specify which, the part that has been paid, and when the remainder will be paid. Thirdly, specify which, if any, are bad & will not be paid.” The rest of the letter pertains to Vassall’s “Eastern lands,” to which he is advised by a “Robert Hallowell Esq.”
16-17	William Vassall to Jonathan Bowman, Esquire	March 13, 1792	Clapham Common, London,	Vassall is advised on his “Eastern lands on Kennebeck River” by Mr. Robert Hallowell. He was told that “the extent of the Kennebeck Company’s patent up the river was greatly certified; whereby the proprietors will lose a

			England to Pownalborough	number of their lots which has been set off to them.” Vassall wishes to know which lots will be lost, how much they might be worth, which are owned by himself, and if it would be advisable to sell them. Hallowell thinks it would be best to sell all of his land on Kennebeck if he can do so for a moderate profit.
17	William Vassall to Mrs. Anna Knight	March 15, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England to Portsmouth, New Hampshire	Vassall apologizes for not responding to his sister’s letters sooner. He writes of his and his wife’s ill health, and his recent legal battles in the United States. He believes he will lose £5000 because of the entire process. He also asks if his sister’s husband has procured any salt pork recently, since Mrs. Vassall’s family are “very fond” of it.
17	William Vassall to James Wedderburn, Esquire	April 3, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England	Vassall writes a short letter, meant to be carried by his grandson William Syme, asking Wedderburn for “any kind assistance you will give him.”
17	William Vassall to William Syme	April 3, 1792	Clapham Common, London, England to Vale Royal Estate, Trelawney, Jamaica	Another short letter written to Vassall’s grandson William Syme. He asks William to act with “the greatest propriety” while working for Wedderburn.