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# Profile of Runaway Servant Women Based on Fugitive Notices in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1729 - 1760

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Profile of runaway servant women based on fugitive notices in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*,

1729 - 1760

Kelsey Toms

HIST 4460-1

Trinity University

11 December 2014

Virginia, Lancaster County, Sept. 22, 1752.  
**R**UN away from the subscriber, at the Glebe of the said county, on the 4th of May, A convict servant woman, named Sarah Knox (alias Howard, alias Wilcox) of a middle size, brown complexion, short nose, talks broad, and said she was born in Yorkshire, had been in the army for several years, with the camp in Flanders, and at the battle of Colloden, where she lost her husband. She may pretend to be a dancing mistress; will make a great many courtesies, and is a very deceitful, bold, insinuating woman, and a great liar.  
In reading of the Virginia Gazette, No. 87, I find an extract of a letter from Chester, in Pennsylvania, July 13, 1752, mentioning a quack Doctor, by the name of Charles Hamilton, pretending to be brought up under Dr. Green, a noted Mountebank in England, who turns out to be a woman in mens' cloaths, and now assumes the name of Charlotte Hamilton, and calls herself about 28 years of age, tho' seems to be about 40: Thus much of the letter; and if she talks broad, I have reason to believe that she is the very servant who belongs to me. Whoever apprehends my said servant, and has her convey'd to me, shall have Two Pistoles, besides what the law allows, paid by  
DAVID CURRIE.  
N. B. This Sarah Knox was imported from Whitehaven, in the Duke of Cumberland, with other convicts, among whom was one William Forrester, who, I have heard her say, was sometime with the above Dr. Green.

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Whitney Fournier for always making herself available as a sounding board, despite the hour, and for her consistent support. The author would also like to thank Professor Linda Salvucci for her invaluable guidance.

<sup>2</sup> David Currie. *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 20, 1753.

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## **Fugitive Notices and the *Pennsylvania Gazette***

During the first half of the eighteenth century, there were many documented instances of indentured servants in Pennsylvania running from their contracts. Newspapers were the primary method of communication between authorities and masters whose servants had run away.<sup>3</sup> In an effort to secure the capture and return of their servants, masters would post fugitive notices. One such newspaper was the weekly *Pennsylvania Gazette*. It was one of the few publications to print advertisements, an important source of commercial and political news at that time. Almost all of the editions of the *Gazette* have been preserved which makes it an invaluable source of consistent information. During the eighteenth century, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* was one of the longest surviving and widest circulating newspapers. Each edition usually had two to four pages of news and two to six pages of advertisements.<sup>4</sup>

These newspaper advertisements were aimed at exactness.<sup>5</sup> In order to ensure the return of their servants, the masters had to provide an accurate description for the local colonists to picture and identify. Just as they were able to describe runaway servants effectively, so too can historians utilize these fugitive notices to create a profile. If the masters attempted to deceive the readers, then their quest to find their escaped servant would probably be fruitless.

It is important to note that the advertisements were weapons to keep servants in their contracts, a by-product of the struggle to capture them and reclaim them as property.<sup>6</sup> In this

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<sup>3</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia; John Joseph McVey, 1926), 220.

<sup>4</sup> Farley Ward Grubb, *Runaway servants, convicts, and apprentices advertised in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1796* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1992), i.

<sup>5</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude*, 227.

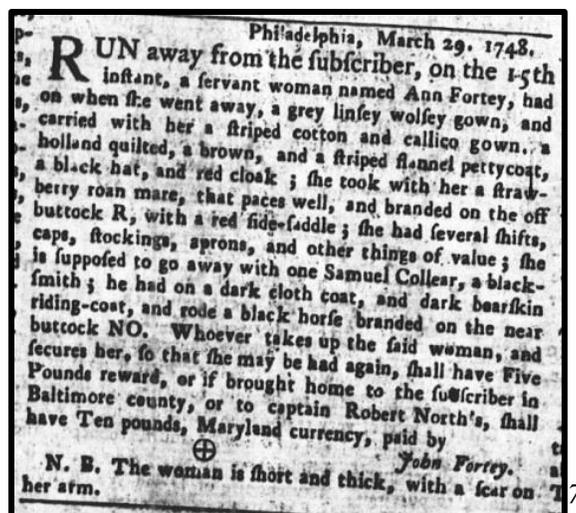
<sup>6</sup> *Eighteenth-century white slaves: fugitive notices*, compiled by Daniel Meaders (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), xii. This is the source from which the fugitive notices were studied. Meaders and his team typed out all of the

way, fugitive notices are a fairly accurate representation of the runaway servant population through the perspective of the masters who wrote them. However, the advertisements are limiting in a way because they are written through the lens of the master.

The fugitive notices cannot give insight into what the runaways were thinking, or identify their motivations. They can, however, help shed light on who the runaways were based on the information provided in the notices. The image following this paragraph is a prime example of what a typical advertisement contains. This is a fugitive notice for a woman named Ann Fortey that was published on March 29, 1748 in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. To begin, the typical advertisement tells when the servant ran away and provides their name. If known, the masters will list the servant's country of origin as well as their age. They also include what the servant was wearing when they left and anything they took with them. If the servant ran away with another person or a group of people they are usually listed along with any expected plans. Usually there is a reward offered from the master and where to take the servant if apprehended. Sometimes the servant comes with an interesting backstory such as that of Sara Knox whose advertisement is on the cover page of this paper. In addition to the statistics that can be approximated from the advertisements, they can also reveal more qualitative information. The language used to describe the servants can sometimes help to show the types of behavior and relationships in which the masters and servants engaged. Patterns of behavior derived from a series of notices may also be used in conjunction with previously determined context to shed light on historians' perspectives of time periods.

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advertisements and put them in a book. Hereafter advertisements from this source are referred to as "*Pennsylvania Gazette*, date, in Meaders, p#."



The difficulty of writing in a detailed manner on this subject is due to the seemingly minimal collection of resources. There are few primary sources that give valuable information on the female servants in this period to begin with, aside from the fugitive notices. Regardless of their status as poor immigrants that were treated as property and thus left few records, the women themselves were not as needed in Pennsylvania as men. There was limited demand for domestic laborers so there was a limited demand for “troublesome” female indentured servants.<sup>8</sup> There have also been only a few academic works published on this topic during the nineteenth century, and seemingly none published in the twentieth century. The most recent notable work is from Sharon Salinger in 1987 who investigated Pennsylvania indentured servitude so thoroughly that no other publications have given any additional insights.<sup>9</sup> The lack of context for these women creates difficulty when trying to understand their motivations and perspectives. It is a challenge to fill the holes statistics cannot explain with certainty. In this paper, the information

<sup>7</sup> John Fortey, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 29, 1748.

<sup>8</sup> Sharon Salinger, *“To serve well and faithfully”: Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 97.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

found in the fugitive notices posted in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* between 1729 and 1760 will be used to help construct a profile of the 140 servant women who ran away from this area in conjunction with previous historiography.<sup>10</sup>

## White Slavery

The American colonies were a magnet for immigration in the eighteenth century. Of the numerous white migrants from Europe at that time, between one-half and two-thirds came as indentured servants.<sup>11</sup> Most of these immigrants were very poor, so they entered into an indenture contract to work off the cost of their passage, which was footed by their master.<sup>12</sup> These indenture contracts were usually an agreement to work for three to four years. At the end of the term of service, the servants could take advantage of the opportunities in the New World.<sup>13</sup> Indentured servants were sometimes people who immigrated on their own or were born in the American colonies and, for one reason or another, needed to work off a debt. Occasionally, convicts from England were transported to the American colonies and forced to work as indentured servants for their sentence. Because of their low economic status, these immigrants were less likely to leave behind personal written records.<sup>14</sup> Thus, very little is known about this

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<sup>10</sup> For a list of the names in the advertisements along with the dates each was published, see Table 1 of the Appendices.

<sup>11</sup> Sharon Salinger, *“To serve well and faithfully”: Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Farley Ward Grubb, *Runaway servants, convicts, and apprentices advertised in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1796* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1992) i.

<sup>13</sup> Sharon Salinger, *“To serve well and faithfully”*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Farley Ward Grubb, *Runaway servants*, i.

population of people. In northern colonies such as Pennsylvania, these large numbers of indentured servants were an integral part of the labor force and of society.

Immigrants came to the New World from many different areas but mainly from Great Britain and Germany. Those from Great Britain usually entered into highly specific and regulated indentures as immigrants or convicts. Nine women were listed as convicts in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in this time period. The Germans were bound by looser, and sometimes cultural, contracts which means that their indenture was usually more of a verbal agreement that was adhered to out of honor.<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to determine exactly how many indentured servants were living in Pennsylvania during this time. However, historian Sharon Salinger compiled time series tables which show that, for Irish and German immigrants, between 20 and 400 new indentured servants were contracted to Pennsylvanians between the years of 1729 and 1760, except for the wartime period of the Seven Years War.<sup>16</sup>

### **Challenges of Indentured Servitude**

Serving through an entire indenture was probably no easy task. It was an institution that essentially enslaved some of the white colonists. African American slavery, the other popular form of non-free labor at this time, and indentured servitude were similar in that there was a lack of freedom; however the psychological reality was different. An indenture occurred for a finite, predetermined amount of time rather than an entire life of servitude.<sup>17</sup> This means that the servants were property but not less than human because one day they would be free and equal.

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<sup>15</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia; John Joseph McVey, 1926), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Sharon Salinger, *"To serve well and faithfully": Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 172-176.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

Therefore, escaping was not out of the realm of possibilities. The servants would be free eventually, so she could theoretically be equal at any time if she managed to escape her indenture.

There is some speculation regarding possible reasons for indentured servants to run away. Sometimes desertion was a reaction to feelings of insecurity if the servants were sold and resold.<sup>18</sup> Those women servants in rural areas were more likely to escape because the overwhelming isolation of the countryside took its toll mentally and emotionally. City servants could rely on a social network of other women servants that was produced by the concentrated population.<sup>19</sup> Some servants may have decided to run away because they resented the indenture arrangement.<sup>20</sup> In some cases, the servants were brought to the new world against their will. For example, “spirits,” people who made this their living, captured children and adults, in countries such as England, and lured them onto boats bound for the New World. When they arrived, the immigrants would be sold into a contract, or would have so little money that they had no choice but to seek an indenture.<sup>21</sup> In the words of historian Cheesman A. Herrick, “If a servant had been intoxicated and led to sign an indenture without knowing what he signed, he could hardly be blamed for breaking it.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sharon Salinger, *“To serve well and faithfully”: Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 103.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>20</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia; John Joseph McVey, 1926), 230.

<sup>21</sup> Sharon Salinger, *“To serve well and faithfully”*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania*, 230.

Treatment by masters was another challenge faced by indentured women, some of whom decided to run away to avoid a conflict as an inferior.<sup>23</sup> The most common form of tension was ill treatment. Masters may have goaded their women servants into running away toward the end of the agreed indenture period, a beneficial situation for them regardless of the outcome. If the servant was apprehended, the master would force her to serve more time and sometimes pay the expenses of her capture. If the servants were not caught, the masters would not have to pay the servants their freedom fees that often accompanied the end of the contract.<sup>24</sup>

While studying the fugitive notices in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, it is difficult to ignore the number of advertisements that are riddled with condescending descriptions of the female servants. A derogatory perspective toward the women likely strengthened the inferior position of the servants. This authority complex was communicated to the servants and sometimes they respond by running away.<sup>25</sup> Many of the women are referred to as having poor dispositions, such as “distemper,” a “surly temper,” and a “sour” temper.<sup>26</sup> Others are criticized for their talkativeness, loudness, and hysterics.<sup>27</sup> The women are also negatively described in their appearance and accused of having a tendency to swear.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the masters call out some

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<sup>23</sup> Sharon Salinger, *“To serve well and faithfully”*: Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 104.

<sup>24</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia: John Joseph McVey, 1926), 230.

<sup>25</sup> Sharon Salinger, *“To serve well and faithfully”*, 109.

<sup>26</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 4/4/1743, in Meaders, 133; 10/28/1749, 225; 7/8/1756, 458; 7/7/1757, 465; 10/23/1755, 438. These are just a few examples, as a great number of the notices were derogatory. For a good example of this language, refer to the advertisement on the cover page for Sarah Knox.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 12/10/1747, in Meaders, 193; 1/5/1748, 195; 1/7/1755, 407.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 3/27/1760, in Meaders, 488; 6/25/1747, 184; 10/13/1757, 469.

women for their fondness of drink and tobacco.<sup>29</sup> The masters quite often describe their runaway servants in this negative light; however, these descriptions must be taken lightly.

Having a trade was beneficial for a servant, however trades were not often mentioned in the notices- only four times in this time period: two women were listed as a mantua-maker, one woman supposedly tells fortunes, and one woman was a cook. The servants probably had more skills and trades. What use would they be as laborers if they did not have some skills to contribute? But typically the master neglected to mention the skills and validate their servant's usefulness.<sup>30</sup> Some masters designed their notices to show the runaways in a negative light, as though they were useless or hard to manage. Perhaps they were trying to discourage others from keeping the servant; or maybe their frustrations were getting the best of them. It was probably embarrassing to post a fugitive notice for a runaway servant, as though the master did not know how to handle their estate. These strong emotions from some of the masters result in notices for the female servants where they are displayed as not good or pleasant people; but the women were probably more productive members of society than the masters cared to admit. Masters would impose their superiority onto the servants through their language and actions.

### **Punishments under Law**

If the women were apprehended after running from their indentures, they faced a great deal of consequences upon their return. One can only imagine what was waiting upon their return

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<sup>29</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 7/6/1758, in Meaders, 475; 10/24/1754, 399; 1/19/1758, 473; 10/11/50, 255; 3/5/1751, 264; 6/1/1749, 215; 6/28/1757, 465.

<sup>30</sup> *Eighteenth-century white slaves: fugitive notices*, compiled by Daniel Meaders (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), xi.

to likely wrathful masters.<sup>31</sup> In addition, colonial development in the eighteenth century allowed for regulation of the indenture system. When servants were captured, the masters submitted a claim of loss, expenses suffered, and days lost to the courts.<sup>32</sup> The law itself dealt severe punishments to those who fled. This usually took the form of additional time added to their contract and sometimes required a monetary refund.<sup>33</sup> The law required runaways to work five additional days for every one day absent and to reimburse their master for all costs resulting from their capture and money lost when they were gone. If the servant could not pay these costs it would often be paid through even more time added to their contract.<sup>34</sup> Runaways in Pennsylvania were occasionally made to wear iron collars, which sometimes had the master's initials engraved.<sup>35</sup> The regulation of law at this time gave colonists the ability to effectively deal with servants who fled for any myriad of reasons.

### **Trends over Time**

The number of runaway servants whose masters thought it necessary to post fugitive notices in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* between 1729 and 1760 varied over the course of a year.<sup>36</sup> The least common month for notices to be published was February, with only six fugitive notices posted in this time period. The most common month was October, with 21 fugitive notices

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<sup>31</sup> Sharon Salinger, *"To serve well and faithfully": Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 108.

<sup>32</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia; John Joseph McVey, 1926), 217.

<sup>33</sup> Sharon Salinger, *"To serve well and faithfully"*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>35</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania*, 231.

<sup>36</sup> For a table of the monthly and yearly trends of runaways, see Table 5 in the Appendices.

posted. The least frequent part of the year was in the early portion in January, February, and March. This is also one of the coldest parts of the year, when perhaps servants did not want to run away into the Pennsylvania winter. In addition, commercial production was limited by the weather. In the cold of winter the rivers would freeze and supplies would be marooned on their vessels while the agricultural laborers lay idle or occupied by other tasks.<sup>37</sup> The winter was harsh and sometimes masters would be forced to sell their servants when the winter lasted too long.<sup>38</sup> Suffice to say, it would be difficult to survive a Pennsylvania winter if a servant decided to run away in this season.

By April, May, and June the number of notices rose to about 10 or 11. It is important to note that most crops were harvested in the spring. Wheat, for example, was harvested in June and July.<sup>39</sup> One may guess that these servants may have been running just before harvest season started, and all of the laborious work that came with it. From July to October the numbers stay high, probably because the weather is nicer and thus an easier time to escape. However, in November and December the number decreases again to 11. Although there is sometimes a delay between when the servant runs away and when the advertisement is posted, the frequency of absconding generally follows seasonal changes. These trends indicate that perhaps these women planned their run for freedom at a time that benefited their cause, instead of impulsive escapes as a reaction to particular ill treatment. The servant women tended to run away when the weather was nice enough to survive on their own which happens to coincide with harvest season.

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<sup>37</sup> Sharon Salinger, *"To serve well and faithfully": Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 99.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>39</sup> John G. Gagliardo, "Germans and Agriculture in Colonial Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 83, no. 2 (April 1959): 209.

There was a sharp rise in the number of runaways starting in 1748. The incidences continued at a higher rate through 1760. The highest number of runaways in a year was 14, which occurred in 1753 and 1754. However, it is difficult to determine why, exactly, the rates increased so dramatically at this time. The Seven Years War did seem to impact the rate of runaways to an extent. During wartime, the rates were the highest of any time. However, women could not enlist in the British Army so their reasons for absconding at this time are less clear than they would be for men who went to join the military. Perhaps the increased rate of escape was a reaction to the social and political turmoil during this time resulting from the war.

Historian Sharon Salinger claims that this surge of runaways and the increase in the complexity of the legal and social structures of indentured servitude reveal heightened societal tensions. The Anglo-French War saw its end in 1748 and there was fluctuating prosperity during the 1740s and 1750s.<sup>40</sup> In addition, there was a high demand for indentured servants between 1748 and 1752 but masters were having difficulty paying their unfree laborers.<sup>41</sup> These tensions, only stoked by the varied ethnic composition of the servant population, saw the masters become more abusive, driving off even more servants.<sup>42</sup> Servants may have been reacting to the cultural chaos of this period by running away, as there was undoubtable a rise in runaways past 1748.

During pre-Revolutionary War Pennsylvania, society operated on a hierarchical system of paternalism which governed the master-servant relationship as well.<sup>43</sup> In this system of

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<sup>40</sup> Sharon Salinger, *"To serve well and faithfully": Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 51.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991), 43.

reliance, colonists became acutely aware of their dependence, and therefore lack of freedom.<sup>44</sup> It is commonly believed that the colonists began to reject this hierarchical system during their revolution in the later mid-century. However, instead of adhering to their familial-like bonds with their masters that were necessarily commonplace and significant, these women sought independence. These indentured servant women possibly indicate a surge in rebellious spirit in their rejection of authority by escaping decades before talk of revolution began to circulate in the colonies.

### **Goods Stolen and Company in Escape**

Technically speaking, these women servant who ran away stole themselves and their labor from their master. Although at a lesser rate than the male runaways, women did steal from the masters they were running from. Women almost always took clothing, at the very least the clothes on their back. On a few occasions they were noted as stealing their indentures. One woman stole a dog named Bellanamony; another woman and her husband took a feather bed; a woman and her husband also took some bedclothes and Dutch books; another woman and her two male companions stole a large pettiauger and some silver plates; and one woman also stole some money.<sup>45</sup> These items do raise some unanswerable questions, such as why the couple thought a feather bed was important enough to steal and how they managed to take it, and why taking valuable objects and money was not more commonplace among escaped servants. Another other common thing to steal was a horse. A horse would provide transportation and could be sold for a good amount of money if needed. Seven female servants were noted as

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<sup>44</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991), 54.

<sup>45</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 12/1/1748, in Meaders, 206; 8/12/1756, 460; 7/8/1756, 458; 10/28/1749, 225; 1/2/1753, 330.

stealing a horse as they ran. Based on the notices posted in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, some women did steal from their masters as they ran off.

Sometimes servants ran away together, which may have aided in their escape. Fifteen women ran away with their husbands; twelve ran with a man who was not their husband; five women escaped with multiple men; and four women ran away with other women.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes, runaways would play different roles to be less suspicious. Some would pretend to be husband and wife or cousins.<sup>47</sup> Women were also more likely to steal if they were running in the company of one or more men. When it came to stealing horses, which was not uncommon for male fugitives to do, only two of those seven women stole the horse by themselves. One was in the company of multiple men and four were in the company of a man who was not their husband. For some reason, the men were more likely to commandeer a horse, and it seems as though the women simply benefited from it if they were traveling with them. Company was not only expected to help the women contradict the descriptions in their fugitive notices by deception, travelling with at least one other man seems to have encouraged them to steal more things as they ran away.

### Age Groups

Only 86 of the fugitive notices listed an approximate age for the runaway, and 54 do not.<sup>48</sup> It is assumed that the notices where no age was listed described a servant over the age of

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<sup>46</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 9/12/1754, in Meaders, 396; 11/8/59, 484.

<sup>47</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia; John Joseph McVey, 1926), 224.

<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that the data found from the ages of runaways only represents 61.43% of the population in these advertisements. Any assumptions or conclusions from this data are derived from a majority portion that is presumed to be a representation of the whole. It should also be noted that if a servant was listed as being between the ages of two numbers, the smallest number was chosen.

18, as it is more probable that the masters would have listed their young age if that was so. With that in mind, there were 130 adult women who ran away that were age 18 and over. There were an additional 10 younger women who ran away under the age of 18.<sup>49</sup> The most common age at which women ran was 30 years old at 12 instances. Although 30 was the most common age, this is probably because it was the easiest round number for masters to guess for their older servants.<sup>50</sup> Most of the runaways were in their 20s, when they were physically prepared for the strain of escaping.

### **Pregnancy and Children**

Masters often claimed pregnancy was the most common reason for women to run away. In fact, masters usually assumed they were pregnant if they tried to escape at all. Servants who had a baby while indentured paid a steep price.<sup>51</sup> Pennsylvania lawmakers saw pregnancy as “trouble” and implemented laws against bastardry and fornication to try and prevent it which dealt harsh punishments.<sup>52</sup> Sometimes servants were asked for monetary compensation for work lost while out of service to have the baby, such as a contractual extension of service or monetary reimbursement.<sup>53</sup> It is impossible to fully assess the relationship between servant pregnancies

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<sup>49</sup> Three ran that were under fifteen years of age. Thirty were between 16 and 20. Twenty-seven were between 21 and 25. Nineteen were between 26 and 30. Two were between 31 and 35. Four were between 36 and 40. One was over 40 years old.

<sup>50</sup> For a graph of the ages found in these fugitive notices, see Table 3 of the Appendices.

<sup>51</sup> Sharon Salinger, *“To serve well and faithfully”: Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 109.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>53</sup> Salinger also claims that any children born from a servant were also bound to serve, but this sounds awfully similar to actual life-long slavery and there is little evidence to support this procedure. If this was, in fact, commonplace then it may have been an incentive to escape with one’s child to save them from servitude. *Ibid*, 109.

and sexual abuse by masters because there are no records on the topic.<sup>54</sup> No cases have been found where servants prosecuted their master for sexual assault.<sup>55</sup> However, the probability that there were some occurrences of sexual assault is high because the female servants were usually younger, under the masters' control, lived under the same roof as their masters, and were considered essentially their property. If assault resulted in pregnancy, then the master was rewarded with the mother serving more time to make up for her unavoidable maternity leave and paying compensation for the work lost while on leave.<sup>56</sup> Only six of the 140 female fugitives in this time period were noted as being "with child."<sup>57</sup> Pregnancy was not as common an excuse as the masters declared; however some women did run away while pregnant.

If a woman did have a child while in servitude, it was not uncommon for them to run away together. Nine servants were advertised as escaping with their children during this time period. The children were all still babies and toddlers; the youngest was 6 weeks old and the eldest was 2 years old.<sup>58</sup> Of these women, over half ran away with a man, only one of which was not her husband. The advertisements did not offer rewards for the children, only the mothers. It

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<sup>54</sup> Sharon Salinger, *"To serve well and faithfully": Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 111.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>57</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 10/28/1749, in Meaders, 225; 9/6/1753, 354; 8/12/1756, 460; 7/7/1757, 466; 10/13/1757, 469; 3/8/1759, 477.

<sup>58</sup> Rachel Pickerin, age 30, ran with her six month old son. Mary Welsh and her husband escaped with their 2 month old baby. Philip Carter and his wife, age 22, ran with their child who was 6 weeks. Catherine Diel fled with her 6 month old son William. Catherine Read ran with another servant man who was not her husband and her 14 month old boy. Magdalen Haliver, age 30, and her husband took off with Michael, their 5 month old. Christiana Fathergale, age 23, and her husband escaped with their two year old daughter. Anna Catherina Michelin, age 25, ran off with her daughter who was one year and 10 months old. Susannah Jackson escaped with her two year old daughter who was suffering from small-pox. *Ibid*, 12/30/1746, in Meaders, 176; 11/22/1750, 256; 5/29/1755, 418; 10/23/1755, 438; 12/5/1756, 446; 7/8/1756, 458; 8/12/1756, 460; 11/3/1757, 470; 11/6/1760, 503.

seems that some women did attempt to escape with their offspring who were usually babies or toddlers.

### **Culture of Suspicion**

Sometimes the masters provided as much information as they could in order to help others identify their servant, other than facts of appearance and manor, including ways in which the servants may attempt to escape capture. The most common information that the masters provided was possible aliases. Twenty-three servants were mentioned as likely to change their name, or had at least one alias named. Occasionally, the servants switched clothes to contradict their advertisement.<sup>59</sup>

Twelve fugitive notices recall the past of the runaway in the hopes of providing more information. This can take the form of when they arrived in the colonies and who brought them there, or where they served past indenture contracts. Sometimes they tell a story about the runaway in the hopes of providing context. A notice posted on February 20, 1753 tells a tale of Sarah Knox, who was thought to be dressing up in men's clothing as a doctor, and calling herself Charlotte Hamilton. She was a convict and the notice reveals where she was imported and by whom, as well as some known associates.<sup>60</sup> Another notice posted on November 20, 1755 is for the return of Catherine Elizabeth Ochlier who was between 13 and 14 years old. She was given permission to go see her father but the master believes the father took off with her.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, seventeen fugitive notices suggest what the runaways' future plans might be. This is logically a

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<sup>59</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia; John Joseph McVey, 1926), 223.

<sup>60</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 2/20/1753, in Meaders, 333. A picture of this fugitive notice is located on the cover page.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 11/20/1755, in Meaders, 438.

beneficial maneuver as the readership will be trying to figure out where the servant will likely go so that they may be caught. These notices usually name a likely town they will be headed toward and the possible location of their family and friends.

By providing background information and future plans in this way, the master gave vital information and context for the recapture of their servant, such as who they might be with, where they might go back to, and how they may try to deceive everyone. Some women had colorful pasts, and some were expected to escape to family and friends by any means necessary, especially by changing their name and clothes. By commonly including all of this information, masters were making it more and more difficult for women to run away as the colonists were given more clues to help capture runaways.

One way to help identify escaped servants was by noting any health issues. It is possible to assume that the master would probably not mention maladies that were not noticeable and directly helpful for recapture as it would likely be embarrassing to show one's servants were in bad health, as though the master was neglecting them. Servants were still seen as people, unlike slaves who were seen as property, and usually received due process of law. There are some cases where females did take their masters to court for physical, not sexual, assault, and won.<sup>62</sup> Although there were only about 24 notices that mention health issues, some of the servants had dangerous afflictions or severe complications. Twelve of the servants were said to have, or have the scars of, small-pox. Three servants had the "King's evil", which was a "tubercular infection of the lymph nodes."<sup>63</sup> Other health issues mentioned include a scabbed head, blindness, rotted

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<sup>62</sup> Sharon Salinger, *"To serve well and faithfully": Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 112.

<sup>63</sup> Frank Barlow, "The King's Evil," *The English Historical Review* 95, no. 374 (January 1980): 3.

teeth, and ringworm.<sup>64</sup> The health issues themselves may have made it more difficult for the women to run. Helping the public identify runaways based on health issues probably also made it more difficult to run away.

Additionally, masters sometimes described distinguishing marks on the women. There were seven servants who were described as having pocks, or being pock marked. Six servants were noted as having scars. One woman lost the forefinger on her right hand and another woman had lost the end of her thumb.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, a woman was said to have a burnt hand.<sup>66</sup> The unhealthy and disfigured women were not in the majority, but they were not uncommon. Masters used these noticeable features and health problems to identify and help catch the fugitives which were yet another thing for the colonists to look for to catch escapees.

It was not just servants who were running away at this time: slaves and apprentices were also trying to escape north.<sup>67</sup> Male and female fugitives alike were faced with a culture of suspicion, as eighty-six percent of the runaways whose masters posted an advertisement for their return were male; and common people were on the lookout for runaways and would report them if identified.<sup>68</sup> This was a face-to-face society, where a person knew who their neighbors were and who was a stranger in town. It was a culture that would be able to spot a newcomer to town without much difficulty. Even Benjamin Franklin experienced this attitude when he ran away

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<sup>64</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 9/26/1784, in Meaders, 397; 8/9/1753, 349; 4/17/1755, 414; 10/11/1750, 256; 3/5/51, 264; 10/24/1754, 401.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 5/25/1749, in Meaders, 215; 5/10/1753, 340.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 10/28/1749, in Meaders, 225.

<sup>67</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia; John Joseph McVey, 1926), 227.

<sup>68</sup> *Eighteenth-century white slaves: fugitive notices*, compiled by Daniel Meaders (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), xi.

from his apprenticeship. As he travelled he was “suspected to be some runaway Servant, and in danger of being taken up on the Suspicion.”<sup>69</sup> Servants were running north because there were many more freedmen there, so less scrutiny was given to “suspicious” looking people.<sup>70</sup> Looking “suspicious” was subjective; anyone who looked the least bit like a runaway, be it ragged clothing or loitering, would be under scrutiny. When a woman servant ran away she ran the risk of being apprehended for looking suspicious or if someone recognized her from a fugitive notice. If she was seized because she were recognized she was probably returned to her master. However, if a servant was held because of suspicion, she had to show proof that she was a free person. If she could not procure the necessary documents, the sheriff would advertise her in the local newspaper. If the master came to claim her then the master would pay her apprehension fees. However, if no one came to claim the servant, she was forced to pay her own fees. Usually the servants could not come up with the money and were thus resold back into servitude to pay off the fines.<sup>71</sup> Close scrutiny was given to those at large.<sup>72</sup> Runaway servant women were faced with fugitive notices that gave everyone around them a detailed image of what they looked like and where they might go; which probably only added to the culture of suspicion at this time.

### **Countries of Origin**

Of the advertisements posted in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, there were a total of 107 fugitive notices for women that listed a country of origin. This is 76.43% of the total 140

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<sup>69</sup> David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 5.

<sup>70</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia; John Joseph McVey, 1926), 227.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

advertisements. The most common nationality of a runaway woman was Irish, with 60 instances.<sup>73</sup> This is 56.07% of the fugitives whose countries of origin are listed and 42.86% of the total advertisements. Yet there was only one German woman listed, only 0.93%.<sup>74</sup> The majority of runaways were Irish for a few reasons. It was easier for English speakers to run away because they could communicate with the general population. Therefore, the Irish, English, and Scottish servants had a natural advantage, although they could be recognized by their accents. The language barrier created difficulties for non-English speakers, such as the Germans. In addition, there was anti-Irish sentiment in Pennsylvania and they received more overt abuse than any other group, which may have encouraged them to run away. Germans usually came in family units, which often discouraged escape.<sup>75</sup> Historian Cheesman Herrick argued that Germans did not tend to run away as often as the Irish because they were less impulsive and adventuresome by nature, as well as adjusting more effectively to the hard labor. The Germans were also discouraged from trying to escape because they lacked familiarity with the country and its laws, which decreased their chance of escape dramatically.<sup>76</sup> For these reasons, Irish tended to run

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<sup>73</sup> In the prints of the fugitive notices in Meaders, many women were listed as Dutch. It is possible that, instead of referring to the Netherlands, Dutch was meant as Deutsch, referring to Germans who were more plentiful than those from the Netherlands in Pennsylvania at this time. However, there was someone listed as a German so this data is created under the assumption that Dutch referred to the Netherlands.

<sup>74</sup> For a list of the countries of origin found in these fugitive notices, see Table 2 of the Appendices. The rest of these percentages will be out of the 107 notices with a country identified. Assuming that the other 33 fugitives will represent approximately the same rates of nationalities as the 107, using the 107 for the percentages will be less skewed than using 140. There were also 27 Dutch women, which is 25.23% of the total. There were 12 English women, which is 11.21% of the total. The four Welsh women are 3.74% of the total. The one Scottish woman and one German woman are each 0.93% of the total. In addition there were two women who were described as being “of this country,” meaning they were born on the soil of the American colonies, which is 1.87% of the total.

<sup>75</sup> Sharon Salinger, *“To serve well and faithfully”: Labor and Indentured servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 112.

<sup>76</sup> Cheesman Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia; John Joseph McVey, 1926), 230.

away more often than Germans even though they both constituted the majority of the indentured labor workforce.

### **Rewards for Capture**

Often times, masters would post rewards for the capture and return of runaway indentured servants. Listing a reward seems to be an important and common component of the fugitive notices as 129 advertisements included one, which is 92.14% of the total.<sup>77</sup> Twelve masters were willing to give more reward if the runaway was caught further from home. Rewards varied greatly depending on the particular fugitive notice. The rewards began at 15 shillings and went up to five pounds. There was also one case where the reward was four dollars.<sup>78</sup> There was wide variety in the types of rewards offered.<sup>79</sup> Most of the rewards were in shillings and pounds, which is not surprising as it was the currency at the time of Great Britain. But pistols were also used as a form of payment, especially among the male fugitives. The important reward to note is that of the four dollars, because the use of the dollar is an indication of a deviation from the currency of England, even before the Revolution. One may speculate on factors that may have been considered when creating an appropriate reward, but it is difficult to know for sure. For example, if the servant was recently purchased perhaps the master would be keener to have the servant returned to finish the contract and make their purchase value

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<sup>77</sup> For a list of the rewards for women, see Table 4 in the Appendices.

<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that when there was one reward offered for multiple people, the total reward was divided by number of runaways to determine the likely reward for just a single runaway. This is noticeable in the rewards given in pounds, where a half is a result of a split reward.

<sup>79</sup> There were four rewards of 15 shillings, 39 rewards of 20 shillings, one reward of 25 shillings, 27 rewards of 30 shillings, 25 rewards of 40 shillings, and four rewards of 50 shillings. Twenty-one rewards were in pounds. There was one reward of one pound, four rewards of one and a half pounds, two rewards of two pounds, two rewards of two and a half pounds, nine rewards of three pounds, one reward of four pounds, and two rewards of five pounds. Seven rewards were given in pistols. There were six rewards given as one pistol and one reward given as two pistols. One reward was in the form of four dollars.

worthwhile, as compared to a servant who ran away at the end of the contract and would be freed soon anyway. However, the variety in the value given for the return of a runaway servant woman seems to show that there was no real regulation or standard for rewards at this time.

One might assume that the women's value as a servant would be reflected in the reward offered for her return, but this does not seem to be the case. The five pounds reward is on the higher end of what was noted but there was nothing particularly remarkable about the women for which it was offered. Anna Maria Norman was a Low Dutchwoman pitted with small-pox and spoke English badly.<sup>80</sup> Ann Fortey took a strawberry roan mare with her which may account for the large reward; however the mare was not mentioned as necessary to receive the five pounds reward.<sup>81</sup> Both of these rewards were offered during the late 1740s, before much of the turmoil that occurred socially and politically in the next couple of decades. Mary McCormick, a 16 year old girl, had the four dollar reward. The only significant part about her notice is that she pretends to be the daughter of a great man. However, her advertisement was published on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, 1760 which was during the Seven Years War and in the midst of some social change, which may account for the change in currency.<sup>82</sup> Rewards seemed to be determined by how much each specific master wanted to offer; but there does not seem to be a correlation to the worth of the servant. However, varying rewards gave an incentive for other colonists to capture the servants, and seemed to be a common tactic for masters to use in their notices.

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<sup>80</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 12/30/1746, in Meaders, 176.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 3/29/1748, in Meaders, 196.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 9/18/1760, in Meaders, 499.

## Conclusions

In studying the 140 fugitive notices, patterns of behavior became apparent and previous theories were reinforced. The slavery-like system of indentured servitude is clearly supported through the master's condescending and authoritative approach to runaway servants. In addition, runaways experienced court regulated punishments for their crimes. Occasionally servants stole goods, ran in company with others, and ran while pregnant or with young children. The Irish and servants in their 20s were the most common culprits of escape.

However, there were a few notable finds that arose from an in-depth analysis of the fugitive notices. To begin, servants usually ran away during seasons of good weather and did not venture out as often in the harsh winters of Pennsylvania. Yearly patterns indicate a rebellious spirit that rejected the authority of paternalism and hierarchy mid-century, decades before ideas of revolution and independence arose in popular political society. In addition, servants faced an imposing culture of suspicion that was greatly fueled by detailed fugitive notices that were designed to identify and recapture escaped subjects of un-free labor. Lastly, the system of rewards reveals a surprising randomness and lack of correlation to the worth of servants.

There are certain limitations to this research because of the lack of sources available. One may study the fugitive notices to an extent but then there are questions that cannot be answered yet, even with previous historiography. This only emphasizes the necessity of further researching these women who were often overlooked by society and who are often ignored by historians. Indeed, more study of these women who dared to escape the confines of their dependency through their indenture may yet reveal important and indicative patterns of behavior that occurred just before the dawn of the rebellion for independence itself.

## Appendices

*Table 1: List of Runaway Women*

1/13/1729	Mary Wilson
1/6/1730	Jane Machelomen
3/19/1730	Anstis Downing
7/1/1731	Mary Davis
5/27/1736	Griffel Miller
4/20/1738	Mary Aloan
3/12/1740	Elizabeth Price
3/27/1740	Catherine Roach
5/14/1741	Margaret Dampsey
10/2/1741	Mary Cullen
10/8/1741	Hannah Tompson
3/17/1742	Ann Boyd
4/4/1743	Sara Brookman
6/30/1743	Elenor Burk
2/2/1744	Catherine Vernon
2/2/1744	Eleanor Cavenaugh
8/14/1746	Anne Fetcham
10/9/1746	Mary Brown
12/30/1746	Rachel Pickerin
12/30/1746	Anna Maria Norman
6/25/1747	Catherine O Hana
10/1/1747	Catherine Dunn
12/10/1747	Elizabeth Cowren
1/5/1748	Margaret Barnes
3/29/1748	Ann Fortey
4/14/1748	Mary Muckleroy
4/21/1748	Grace M'Swain
5/12/1748	Margaret Kane
9/1/1748	Catherine Deyerman
10/6/1748	Mary Burk
11/20/1748	Hannah Swainy
12/1/1748	Margaret Philips
5/25/1749	Mary O Donnel
6/1/1749	Margaret Brown
7/6/1749	Frances Duffy
8/7/1749	Catherine M'Clue
10/19/1749	Regina Hausse
10/28/1749	Rebecca Wooley
2/13/1750	Catherine Davidson
5/24/1750	Catherine O Bryan
6/7/1750	Mary Crosby
7/19/1750	Mary M'Creary
10/11/1750	Elizabeth Morris
11/22/1750	Mary Welsh

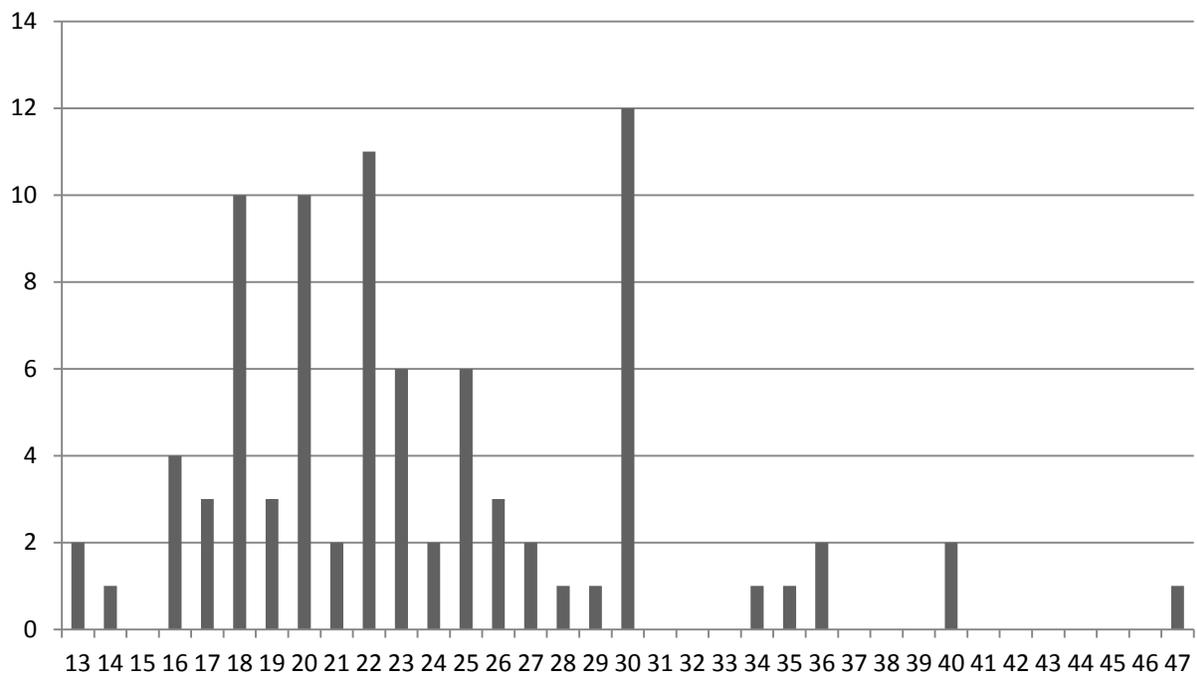
11/22/1750	Joannah Griffin
11/29/1750	Christiana Treasury
12/11/1750	Margaret Henley
3/5/1751	Elizabeth Morris
10/10/1751	Mary Newel
7/2/1752	Mary Baker
10/12/1752	Hannah Meldrum
12/14/1752	Rachel Mahorne
1/2/1753	Eleanor Morris
2/20/1753	Sarah Knox
5/10/1753	Elizabeth Neason
6/14/1753	Elizabeth Gollin
7/5/1753	Elizabeth Humphreys
7/26/1753	Anne Deboly
8/9/1753	Eleanor Connor
8/16/1753	Anne Atkins
8/30/1753	Jean McClellan
9/6/1753	Margaret Willey
9/6/1753	Catherine
10/23/1753	Martha James
11/22/1753	Mary Brady
1/29/1754	Agnes Fee
4/11/1754	Maria Kummersfield
4/18/1754	Martha Southward
4/22/1754	Mary Chambers
8/8/1754	Mary Neal
8/22/1754	Anna Catherina
9/5/1754	Mary Smith
9/12/1754	Mary Smith
9/12/1754	Elizabeth Roach
9/26/1754	Margaret Ashcroft
10/24/1754	Jane Colgon
10/24/1754	Anne Jones
10/24/1754	Ann Crotey
10/24/1754	Catherine Dunsey
10/31/1754	Maria Kelcon
1/7/1755	Margaret Llewelin
4/10/1755	Mary Levetro
4/10/1755	Christina Bernhard
4/17/1755	Lusina Granger
5/29/1755	wife of Philip Carter
9/25/1755	Elizabeth Catherine Petters
10/23/1755	Catherine Diel
11/20/1755	Catherine Elizabeth Ochlier
2/5/1756	Catherine Read
4/15/1756	Maria Suffyah
5/27/1756	Frances Mercer
6/3/1756	Elizabeth Burk
7/1/1756	Betty Dawson

7/8/1756	Rebecca Catherine Pepper
7/8/1756	Magda Len Haliver
8/12/1756	Christina Fathergale
8/19/1756	Mary Comel
9/9/1756	Mary Roach
9/9/1756	Elizabeth Sampford
12/2/1756	Elizabeth Huston
6/28/1757	Diana Lawson
6/30/1757	Catherine Plimlen
7/7/1757	Catherine Fisken
7/4/1757	Grace Flannegan
8/11/1757	Jane Dagnon
9/22/1757	Catherine Preden
10/13/1757	Anne Sawyer
11/3/1757	Anna Catherina Michelin
12/15/1757	Nelly Griffiths
12/19/1757	Mary Clarke
12/29/1757	Unity Boddin
1/19/1758	Barbarys Ager
7/6/1758	Peggy Mallen
8/3/1758	Diana Lawson
8/10/1758	Mary Gilgin
3/8/1759	Elizabeth Slomage
5/31/1759	Ann White
7/5/1759	Elizabeth Burnet
7/12/1759	Elizabeth Maddock
7/12/1759	Mary Armstrong
9/6/1759	Alice Briscoe
9/20/1759	Eleanor Donohoge
9/20/1759	Grace Rogers
10/25/1759	Polly Curtis
11/8/1759	Mary Campbell
11/8/1759	Jane Cowerden
12/6/1759	Barbara Charlton
2/28/1760	Mary Connell
3/27/1760	Latis Baris
5/22/1760	Eleanor Leech
6/12/1760	Grace Rogers
6/26/1760	Ann Brooks
7/24/1760	Jane Rattlife
7/31/1760	Catherine Burhhart
9/18/1760	Mary McCormick
10/9/1760	Ann Smith
10/30/1760	Katherine Hickelson
11/6/1760	Susannah Jackson
11/27/1760	Katherine Alrig

*Table 2: Countries of Origin of Runaway Women*

Irish	60
Dutch	27
English	12
Welsh	4
Colonial	2
Scottish	1
German	1

*Table 3: Ages of Runaway Women*



*Table 4: Rewards for Runaway Women*

15 shillings	4	1 pound	1	1 pistol	6	4 dollars	1
20 shillings	39	1.5 pounds	4	2 pistols	1		
25 shillings	1	2 pounds	2				
30 shillings	27	2.5 pounds	2				
40 shillings	25	3 pounds	9				
50 shillings	4	4 pounds	1				
		5 pounds	2				

Table 5: Monthly and Yearly Trends of Women Runaways

Year	Total/Year	Jan (1)	Feb (2)	Mar (3)	Apr (4)	May (5)	June (6)	July (7)	Aug (8)	Sept (9)	Oct (10)	Nov (11)	Dec (12)
1729	1	1											
1730	2	1		1									
1731	1							1					
1732	0												
1733	0												
1734	0												
1735	0												
1736	1					1							
1737	0												
1738	1				1								
1739	0												
1740	2			2									
1741	3					1					2		
1742	1			1									
1743	2				1		1						
1744	2		2										
1745	0												
1746	4								1		1		2
1747	4						2				1		1
1748	9	1		1	2	1				1	1	1	1
1749	6					1	1	1	1		2		
1750	9		1			1	1	1			1	3	1
1751	2			1							1		
1752	3							1			1		1
1753	14	1	1			1	1	2	3	3	1	1	
1754	14	1			3				2	3	5		
1755	8	1			3	1				1	1	1	
1756	12		1		1	1	1	3	2	2			1
1757	11						2	2	1	1	1	1	3
1758	4	1						1	2				
1759	12			1		1		3		3	1	2	1
1760	12		1	1		1	2	2		1	2	2	
	Monthly totals:	7	6	8	11	10	11	17	12	15	21	11	11

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