

## What We Know

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Underneath each primary source quotation or object, write down what the source reveals about James Forten, his business, or how others perceived him.

1. *"This letter is preserved because it was from a Negro-gentleman.... He was in possession of a fortune made by his own industry."*

- Notation on reverse of James Forten to Samuel Breck, July 22, 1828, Breck Papers, HSP.

2. *"He paid \$10,000 a year in wages...he informed me that he had at one time the sails for ninety-five vessels engaged."*

- North Star, 10 Mar. 1848

3. *"[H]e never had, as I have often heard him declare, been guilty of that genteel kind of swindling, which all sorts of professedly good people practice under the gloss of the name of note-shaving."*

- Robert Purvis, remarks (year unknown)

4. *"My father bids me tell you that white and colored men have worked with him from his first commencement in business. One man (a white) has been with him nearly thirty seven years; very few of his hired men have been foreigners; nearly all are natives of this country; the greatest harmony and good feeling exists between them; he has usually 10 or twenty journeymen, one of half of whom are white; but I am not aware of any white sailmaker who employs colored men; I think it should be reciprocal — do not you?"*

- Sarah L. Forten to Angeline Grimké in April 1837

5. *"His workmen, twenty or thirty in number, were industriously at work...All was order and harmony...My friend took great delight in pointing out to me various improvements that he had introduced...and spoke very kindly of his workmen. Here was one who had been in his employ twenty years, who owned not a brick when he came, but now was the possessor of a good brick house; here was another who had been rescued from ruin. These were white men, but not so all. As far as I can recollect, about one-half of them were colored. My friend remarked to me that both colors had thus been employed together for more... than 20 years, and always with the same peace and harmony which I then saw. 'Here' said he [Forten], 'you see what may be done and ought to be done in our country at large.'"*

- Anti-Slavery Record, December 1835

6. "For many years until his death...the leading sailmaker in the city" - Obituary in the North American, March 5, 1842

7. "In Philadelphia, where the emancipation of the Blacks originated, there are more free people of that colour than in any other place in the union. Most of them are degraded & vicious but there are many useful and respectable individuals...a rich sail maker, having many journeymen & apprentices under him"

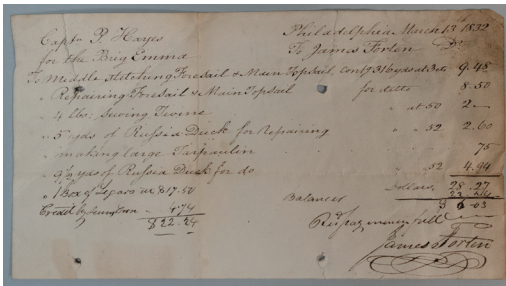
- Artist William Dunlap to his wife, Elizabeth Woolsey in 1806

8. "As a tribute due to merit, it may be stated, that there is now resident at Philadelphia, James Forten (sp) a man of colour, who received an education at the school established by the Society of Friends in that city, where he carries on the sail-making business with reputation to himself and satisfaction to his employers, and is engaged in that branch more extensively than any other person in Philadelphia. He possesses considerable property, acquired by his own industry...and is very much respected by the citizens generally."

- Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature, London 1807

9. Receipt from the Brig Emma, March 1832

(Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia. Barry Hayes Collection, Gift of Florence, Austin, and William Hepburn)



10. Girard's Bank Check, Signed by James Forten (Girard College)



Based on the above sources, what do we know about James Forten's business?