This stop is one of our object highlights!

This ledger is a record of the men held aboard a British prison ship, the Jersey. The British captured many Revolutionary privateers, transported these sailors to New York as prisoners-of-war, and confined them aboard a floating prison made from an old ship. After his ship was captured, James Forten spent seven months imprisoned aboard the Jersey.

These pages document the names of the American prisoners held alongside Forten. His name (accidentally spelled “Fortune”) is recorded just below the middle of the page, listed after his ship’s name, the Royal Louis. Records like this helped to keep track of prisoners and how long they had been imprisoned. They mattered to James Forten: both sides frequently exchanged prisoners, trading and releasing captured sailors. The muster book helped the British determine who would be released first. After seven months, and only after sailors from the Continental and state navies had been freed, Forten was released from the Jersey.

The ledger eventually returned with other British military records to Great Britain. The pages here have not been back to America since 1783.