

This Month in Clay History: Zephaniah Kingsley - Slave Trader, Planter, Writer, Merchant

By Archives Specialist Vishni Garig, a service of Clerk of Court and Comptroller Tara S. Green

Zephaniah Kingsley was a bit of an enigma. He was raised a Quaker but he chose to be a slave trader. He considered himself married to one of his own slaves. He was a slaveholder but believed he was performing a humanitarian service. No one knows what he looked like because there are no surviving portraits of him. It was said that he was a small man who always rode a big white horse. Most importantly of all, he didn't seem to care what other people thought.

"Some people hide things which they think other people won't like. I never concealed anything," said Kingsley.

Born on December 4, 1766, in Bristol, England, Zephaniah was the son of Zephaniah Kingsley Sr. and Isabella Johnston. Zephaniah Kingsley Sr. was a wealthy British merchant, a loyalist during the American Revolution and one of the founders of the University of New Brunswick, Canada's oldest English language university. Kingsley Sr. was the grandfather of Anna McNeill Whistler, famously referred to as "Whistler's Mother" in the painting *Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1* by her son (and Kingsley Sr.'s great-grandson) James McNeill Whistler.



We do know that when Zephaniah Kingsley, Jr. came to Spanish Florida in 1803 he was already a wealthy man. He had done well in South Carolina, but being part of a Loyalist family in the new nation of America was not a very comfortable situation. So, he struck out instead for Florida, which was still under Spanish control. He originally lived in a townhouse in St. Augustine. He brought sixty slaves with him and had farms in Duval, Clay and Nassau counties.



Laurel Grove Plantation; Watercolor by Elsbeth Geiger

At the beginning, Laurel Grove (Orange Park) was Zephaniah's most important holding. He moved there in 1803. The plantation grew Sea Island cotton, which was in great demand, and he had a nine-acre orange grove. There was a large vegetable garden to feed the inhabitants of Laurel Grove. Slaves at Laurel Grove were taught trades and then leased out to other plantation owners.

Kingsley's wife was unique. Anna Madgigine Jai (Anta Majigeen Ndiaye) was reportedly born an African princess. She was from the Wolof Tribe of Senegal, West Africa. The Wolof people bought and sold slaves and raided other tribes for slaves. Perhaps this is how Anna was sold into slavery. Nonetheless, she was captured in 1806 and sent to Cuba,

where Kingsley bought her. She was about 14 years old when captured. Kingsley called her his wife though no proof exists that they ever legally married. He was proud of her and eventually manumitted (released from slavery) Anna and all their children. He also had children with three other women; Flora H Kingsley, Munlisa McGundo and Sara Murphy. Zephaniah recognized all of his children from these three women as well. Kingsley lived a very different lifestyle than that of a Quaker or his other contemporaries. He didn't seem to care what people thought of his way of life.

One of the biggest events in Zephaniah and Anna's' lives was the Patriots Rebellion. During the war of 1812 local rebels, supported by the United States, took up arms against Spain. One of Kinglsey's neighbors, John Houston McIntosh, was particularly active. However, Kingsley had prospered under Spanish rule. He wasn't about to throw away all his hard work to support a lost cause. He always had his own mind. One day, Anna rowed across the St. Johns River from her Mandarin plantation to Laurel Grove. In order to keep it from the hands of the rebels, she set fire to the main house/trading post and burned it down.

In 1817, Kingsley bought the Fort George Island property from John Houston McIntosh and moved there with Anna. In turn, McIntosh got Laurel Grove.

Kingsley was a prolific writer, though reportedly a bad speller. This wasn't due to lack of education, but more evidence of him doing things his own way. He is famous for his 1828 treatise on slavery, *The Patriarchal System of Society*. He paradoxically wrote, "Slavery need not be suppressive". His promoted the idea that "humanely treated slaves" would be more productive, therefore, enhance profits. He taught his slaves trade skills which made them even more valuable in his eyes. Slaves could also buy their freedom from him, a practice he encouraged. He also emancipated slaves for meritorious service. He was not an abolitionist, he was a self-serving businessman.

When Florida became an American territory in 1822, this spelled the end of tolerance for people like Kingsley and his unique family. He moved the family to Haiti in 1835. While in Haiti, he wrote extensively about life there.

While visiting his sister in New York, Zephaniah died in 1843. True to form, he directed he wanted no ceremony but just "bury me somewhere convenient". His family promptly ignored the request and buried him in a Quaker cemetery. Kingsley left his estate to his main wife Anna, all his children, and their mothers.



MANIFEST OF SLAVES on board the Schooner *Thorn* of Pensacola burden 48 ⁵⁵/₉₅ tons, whereof *Ignacio Maura* is at present Master, bound from the Port of Pensacola for the Port of *New Orleans*

NAMES.	SEX.	AGE.	STATURE.		CLASS.	SHIPPERS OR OWNERS.	RESIDENCE.
			FEET.	INCHES.			
<i>Tanopa</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4 1/4</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Zephaniah Kingsley</i>	<i>East Florida</i>
<i>Rose</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>7 3/4</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>

Bapt. Carver Inspected the above Slaves and find them to agree with *Govt M. John* 25th Augt 1826
Inspector of Florida agrees.
M. Kingsley Inspr

DISTRICT OF WEST FLORIDA—PORT OF PENSACOLA, THE 17th DAY OF August 1826:

Z. Kingsley, Shaffer of the Slaves named and particularly described in the above Manifest, and *Ignacio Maura* Master of the Schooner *Thorn* do solemnly, sincerely and truly swear according to the best of our knowledge and belief, that the persons above described were not imported into the United States since the first day of January 1808, and that under the laws of the Territory they are held to service and labour

SO HELP us GOD.
Z. Kingsley
Ignacio Maura

R. Mitchell Collector
Permit the slaves above named to be landed
A. DeChurand

New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S., Slave Manifests, 1807-1860 for Zephaniah Kingsley

Arrivals (Inward Manifests)

Printed for Bagges & Carrol, Ship and Custom House Brokers, No. 119 South Second Street, Philadelphia, by J. Young.

REPORT OR MANIFEST of all the Passengers taken on board the Schooner *Laetitia* whereof *A. H. Hester* is Master, from *Port au Prince* burden 137 ^{5/8} Tons, and owned by *Thomas Weston* of *Philadelphia* and bound *Philadelphia*

NAMES.	AGE.	SEX.	OCCUPATION.	To what Country belonging.	Country of which it is their intention to become Inhabitants.	Number and Names of Passengers who have died on the voyage.
<i>Z. Kingsley</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>N. State</i>	<i>N. State</i>	

Passenger manifest from Port Au Prince Haiti