

The Whitney Library
New Haven Colony Historical Society

Manuscript Register

MSS # 262

THE AMISTAD COMMITTEE, INC.

Arranged and described

by

George Fishman

1996

Additions, 2012

Introduction

The revolt in the summer of 1830 of the kidnaped Mendenian Africans led by Joseph Cinque aboard the slave ship La Amistad bound for Cuba, had a strong impact on New Haven.

As a consequence of the revolt, forty-five Africans from the slave ship came to be held in the New Haven jail, a location which is immediately in front of today's New Haven City Hall. It is therefore fitting that the three-paneled statue by sculptor Ed Hamilton of the Cinque-led revolt and subsequent freedom also stands at this location.

The jailing of the Africans gave New Haven residents an opportunity to come face to face with them. So many residents visited the Jail that the jailer turned commercial and began to charge admission. Others were concerned not only with viewing the jailed Africans, but with freeing them and meeting their demand to be returned to their African homeland. Justice for the imprisoned became a *cause celebre* in New Haven and nationally. A Boston artist painted a large portrait of them, which was exhibited at New Haven and Hartford. In New York a play on the theme of the Amistad Revolt had a long run. In 1840, John W. Barber published a historical account of the saga. Clifton Johnson of the present-day Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, in an authoritative article on the Revolt states: "During the long months of their captivity, the Africans became well known to a large segment of the American people, particularly to abolitionist and religious communities ..."¹

A New Haven committee was active on behalf of the jailed Africans, in danger of being turned over to Spanish slave-trading claimants. Not until February, 1841 did the U.S. Supreme Court hear the Africans' claim for freedom. Thanks to a powerful defense of the Africans by former President and Congressman at the time, John Q. Adams, and much public support, Cinque and his fellow Africans were set free.

The campaign on their behalf, however, did not end at this point. An abolitionist committee known formally as the Amistad Committee, led by New Yorkers Joshua Leavitt, Simeon S. Jocelyn and Lewis Tappan, was active in raising funds to cover the costs of transportation to Africa. The Africans were able to embark on November 27, 1841.

While the Amistad decision did not end slavery, it was a spur to the abolitionist movement that contributed importantly to its ending.

Through the efforts of James W.C. Pennington, pastor of the First Colored Congregational Church at Hartford, a Union Missionary Society was formed in 1841. This Society absorbed the Amistad Committee to become the American Missionary Association. According to Johnson,

¹ Clifton H. Johnson, "The Amistad Case and the Consequences in U.S. History" Journal of the New Haven Colony Historical Society. v. 36, no. 2 (Spring 1990), p. 18.

“the A.M.A. ... became the largest and best organized abolitionist society in America ...”²
The Amistad legacy has continued in New Haven public and cultural affairs. As the 150th anniversary of the Amistad Revolt approached, New Haven’s Mayor, Biagio DiLieto, appointed a committee of 100 to organize a year of activities in commemoration.

The immediate mission of the Committee was to organize activities for the year 1989. However, the Committee considered that the commemoration was the beginning, not the end, of their mission. They organized on a permanent basis, taking the name of their abolitionist predecessors - the Amistad Committee. It continues to be active to the present day, combining historical and cultural presentations of the legacy with equality issues of today, under the name The Amistad Committee, Inc.

The founders of the present Amistad Committee were the Rev. Peter Ives, Al Marder, and the Rev. Edmund Edwards. In a telephone conversation on July 30, 1996, Al Marder recalled the highlights of the Amistad Committee’s activities since 1989 and its plans.

Among its activities have been the commissioning of the Cinque statue alluded to previously, which was dedicated on September 20, 1992 as part of a weekend of celebration.

The Committee has conducted seminars for teachers throughout Connecticut. It has brought the Amistad story to schools and universities in most states of the Union. It has produced a video tape on the Amistad theme which has been presented frequently on television and in classrooms. It has made arrangements with the Lyric Opera Company for staging of an opera based on the Amistad Revolt to be staged in Chicago in 1997. A book on the ramifications of the Amistad Revolt is projected for publication by Yale University Press in the same year, while a full length movie is expected for the following year. The Committee and the State are sponsoring and organizing a Connecticut Freedom Trail of the Underground Railroad to be activated in September 1996.

Early in 1996, the Committee turned over its papers to the New Haven Colony Historical Society.

² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Description of the Papers

The papers are mainly organization. This collection consists of correspondence and miscellaneous records. These include minutes, materials concerning the commissioning, sculpting and dedication of the Cinque statue, materials relating to other agencies involved or interested in the Amistad theme, equality developments since the dedication of 1992, and financial records. In addition, there is a box of unsorted photographs and two boxes of unsorted video and audio tapes on Amistad and related matters.

The collection is organized numerically by box. Boxes 1-14 are also organized alphabetically by folder. Box 15 contains photographs and boxes 16 and 17 contain tapes. Correspondence in boxes 1 and 2 is undated in part. There are also dated folders for the years 1986-1996 in these boxes. Minutes and other miscellaneous papers are in box 3. Miscellaneous papers are also found in box 4 but in this box they are dated from 1989 through 1996. Materials concerning affairs (such as the Dyson testimonial, and a Paul Robeson play and forum) are in box 5. Limited materials on the Amistad celebration 1989-1991 are in box 6. A major portion of the collection - boxes 7-10 - concerns the memorable Cinque statue: the commissioning, sculpting, the 1992 public dedication and celebration. Box 11 has educational materials on the Amistad story. Box 12 is also mainly about the Amistad story, but in relation to other agencies. Materials since the 1992 dedication are in box 13. These concern current equality activities that are Amistad related and/or Amistad inspired, including the Freedom Trail, a demonstration for affirmative action in front of the Cinque statue, and participation by Jesse Jackson in New Haven and the State on behalf of affirmative action. Financial records are in box 14.

THE AMISTAD COMMITTEE, INC.
MSS #262

1

<u>Box/Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
	<u>Correspondence</u>
1/A	No date
1/B	1976-89
1/C	1990
1/D	1991
1/E	1991 (cont.)
1/F	1992
1/G	1993
2/A	1994
2/B	1995
2/C	1995 (cont.)
2/D	1995 (cont.)
2/E	1996
4/A	1997
4/B	1998
4/C	1999
4/D	2000
4/E	2001
4/F	Regarding Sierra Leone, 1997-2001
4/G	Harlan H. Griswold Award, 1998

THE AMISTAD COMMITTEE, INC.
MSS #262

2

Box/Folder Contents

Miscellaneous Committee Records

3/A	Minutes 1989-1995 (including organizational meeting, 1989, Certificate of Incorporation, and By-Laws)
3/B	No date
3/C	No date
3/D	No date
3/E	No date
5/A	Dyson Testimonial
5/B	Dyson Testimonial (cont.)
5/C	Paul Robeson: Forum
5/D	Paul Robeson: Play (Avery Brooks)
6/A	Amistad Celebrations, 1989-1992
6/B	Photographs, Talladega College, 1951

Cinque Statue

7/A	Selection
7/B	The Sculpting
7/C	The Structure
8/A	The Statue
8/B	The Statue (cont.)
8/C	The Inscription
8/D	The Inscription (cont.)

THE AMISTAD COMMITTEE, INC.
MSS #262

3

Box/Folder Contents

8/E Reproduction

8/F Reproduction (cont.)

Dedication of the Cinque Statue, 1992

9/A Correspondence

9/B Physical Make-up

9/C The Dedication

9/D The Dedication (cont.)

9/E The Dedication (cont.)

9/F The Dedication (cont.)

10/A The Dedication (cont.)

10/B The Dedication (cont.)

10/C The Celebration Program

10/D The Celebration

10/E The Celebration (cont.)

10/F "Sweet Hone in the Rock" Concert

Miscellaneous Cinque Information

11/A Cinque Images

11/B Video

11/C Teaching Materials

11/D Teaching Materials (cont.)

THE AMISTAD COMMITTEE, INC.
MSS #262

4

Box/Folder Contents

11/E Historiography

11/F Other Aspects

Amistad America

12/A Board Meeting Minutes, 1996-2000

12/B Correspondence, 1992-2000

12/C Financial Statements, 1997-1999

12/D Amistad Affiliates Newsletter, 1992-2000

12/E Building

12/F Launching

Post-Dedication Period (1992-1995)

13/A Clippings

13/B Clippings (cont.)

13/C Freedom Trail (to 2001)

13/D Amistad and Affirmative Action (Jessie Jackson protest at the Statue)

Committee Financial Matters

14/A Correspondence, 1991-1996

14/B Grant Requests

14/C Tax Returns, 1989-1997

14/D Budget and Financial Reports, 1989-1996

14/E Budget and Financial Reports, 1997-2000

THE AMISTAD COMMITTEE, INC.
MSS #262

5

Box/Folder Contents

14/B Audits, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1996

Photographs

15

Video & Audio Tapes

16 & 17