

An Apprentice's Indenture Contract (1718)

Many English settlers arrived in the colonies as indentured servants. Because poor men and women could not afford the cost of travel to North America, they bound themselves for four to seven years' labor in return for passage across the Atlantic. Masters legally owned the labor of indentured servants. Servants who ran away and were caught had to serve longer as punishment. But servants also had legal rights including the right to petition and the right to testify in court. Often a young person agreed to serve a master as an apprentice and be trained in a skill. By signing indenture contracts, such as the one below, masters and servants agreed to specific terms and obligations.

THIS INDENTURE WITNESSES that I, William Mathews... of the city of New York... does voluntarily and of his own free will... put himself as an apprentice cordwainer to Thomas Windover...

He will live and (after the manner of an apprentice) serve from August 15, 1718, until the full term of seven years be completed and ended. During all of this term, the said apprentice shall faithfully serve his master, shall faithfully keep his secrets, and gladly obey his lawful commands everywhere. He shall do no damage to his said master, nor see any done by others without giving notice to his said master. He shall not waste his said master's goods nor lend them unlawfully to any. He shall not commit fornication nor contract matrimony within the said term.

At cards, dice, or any other unlawful game, he shall not play... with his own goods or the goods of others. Without a license from his master he shall neither buy nor sell during the said term. He shall not absent himself day or night from his master's service without his leave, not haunt alehouses, but in all things he shall behave himself as a faithful apprentice toward his master all during his said term.

The master shall, by the best means or methods, teach or cause the apprentice to be taught the art or mystery of a cordwainer. He shall find and provide unto the said apprentice sufficient meat, drink, apparel, lodging, and washing fit for an apprentice. During the said term, every night in winter he shall give the apprentice one quarter of schooling. At the expiration of the said term he shall provide him with a sufficient new suit of apparel, four shirts, and two necklets [scarves].

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