

James Forten

James Forten was born in Philadelphia, in 1766. His father worked in a sail loft (a place where they made sails for ships). Both his father, Thomas Forten, and his mother were free.

Thomas Forten took his son, James, to work with him at the sail loft while James was still very young.

James got to know a lot of people, while working with his father, but his father died unexpectedly when James was just 7 years old.

This made him have to work to help his family, when he was only a teenager.

He volunteered, during the Revolutionary War, to go on a private ship to attack and capture British war ships. He was only 14 years old, but he joined a private ship and they had several successful missions—bringing back British supplies to Philadelphia in support of the American cause.

Eventually, after the war was over, James came back to Philadelphia and approached his father's old employer, Robert Bridges. Robert brought James on as an apprentice in his sailmaking business—and the rest was history!

Robert Bridges retired in 1798 and, instead of leaving the business to his sons, he left the business to James Forten. At the age of 32, James Forten found himself in charge of one of the most visible businesses in Philadelphia. The business was worth thousands of dollars per year and had an integrated workforce (of Black and white workers) of about 30 people. Forten faced many challenges, including the War of 1812, while running his business, but he never lost his sense of **leadership** and he became one of the **richest African Americans in Philadelphia in the 1800s**.



What if you were rich?

He Used His Money to Support His Passions

James Forten used his money to advocate for the end of slavery, to support the education of African Americans in Philadelphia, to help other anti-slavery ventures such as William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*, and to fight against racist policies and laws in Pennsylvania.

He was passionate about equality and raised children who were also active in the anti-slavery movement. James Forten died in 1842, just before his 76th birthday.



What if you had a lot of money? Answer the questions below.

What are you passionate about?

If you had a lot of money, what would you do with it and how would you use money to support your passion?

References: *Black Founders: The Forten Family of Philadelphia*, Museum of the American Revolution, 2023, <https://www.amrevmuseum.org/exhibits/black-founders-the-forten-family-of-philadelphia>, accessed online June 2023. Image: James Forten Wiki Commons