

Powers of attorney

Related Collections

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania holds two volumes of Wharton & Lewis business records (Coll. 2001): a receipt book, 1787-1792, and account of policies underwritten, 1795-1801.

Biographical/Historical Notes

David Lewis (1766-1840) was born in Philadelphia, the eldest son of Ellis Lewis, who came to Pennsylvania from Wales in 1708, and his wife Mary, the daughter of David Deshler (1712-1792). Lewis received his only formal education from the noted educator and historian Robert Proud (1728-1813), and his professional training by working in the office of Philadelphia merchants Isaac and Samuel Wharton.

In 1786, the Whartons ended their partnership, and Isaac Wharton (1745-1808) took Lewis as a partner. The new firm, Wharton & Lewis, remained in business for twenty years. They appear to have been involved in the triangle trade, and offered imported rum, molasses, sugar, wines, indigo, sherry, coffee, and tea for sale in their store at 109 South Water Street (through 1795) and 115 South Front Street. Their advertisements, however, also mentioned that they “continue to keep an office for the insurance of shipping,” and by 1793, they were advertising a series of brigantines for sale or charter. In July 1807, the Wharton & Lewis firm was, according to a notice placed in the *United States Gazette*, “dissolved by mutual consent.” Wharton died the following spring; his newspaper obituary described him as “for many years, one of the most eminent merchants of this city, and highly respected for his talents and information.”

Isaac Wharton and David Lewis were two of the founders of the Phoenix Insurance Company of Philadelphia, which was organized at a December 1, 1803, meeting of subscribers at the Wharton & Lewis store. Wharton was elected the company’s first president and Lewis its vice president, offices they held until Wharton resigned in November 1805. At that point, Lewis became president, and retained the position until his death in 1840. The Phoenix Insurance Company was incorporated by a law passed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on February 6, 1804. Its directors were Isaac Wharton, David Lewis, Rumford Dawes, Robert E. Griffith, Joshua Gilpin, Joseph Snowden, Paul Beck Jr., Paschal Hollingsworth, and Joseph Curwen. Its purpose was “making insurances upon maritime risques, to alleviate the misfortunes and losses of commerce and navigation,” a field in which Wharton and Lewis already had more than a decade of experience.

After the Wharton & Lewis partnership ended, and concurrently with his Phoenix position, David Lewis continued in business as a merchant, importer, and carrier. For a few years in the early 1810s, his nephew Lawrence Lewis was a partner. Little is known of him, except for a mention by Bristol merchant Charles Harvey, in an August 1815 letter in the collection, that he