

Browne, Dinah Hope

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(c. 1815-?) ,

escaped slave, was named Dinah, but was better known as Di. She was born on a plantation near Petersburg, Virginia, to Priscilla, a house servant, and Henry Hope, a slave owner, planter, and a partner in a clothing warehouse. Hope—a pseudonym provided by Browne in her dictated narrative—was understood to be Browne's father. He also fathered another child with Priscilla who died before Dinah's birth. Although Browne did not know her date of birth, researchers place Browne's birth year around 1815. After the death of Browne's mother from consumption when Browne was only six months, she was raised by her grandparents. Little is known about Browne's childhood; she started working at her slave owner's house when she was ten. Browne was repeatedly beaten for the slightest offense. For example, when Browne did not retrieve Hope's boots in a satisfactory period, he kicked her on her right thigh.

When Browne was thirteen, she decided to make her escape. With freedom in her grasp, she made her way into the night and found shelter at the bottom of a tree in July or August. On her second night away from the plantation when she experienced a frightening thunderstorm, she wished she had never left the plantation. In the days following the storm, she heard the sound of horses and chains rattling. To her dismay, Wildshaw, the overseer, and Hope captured her and immediately threw her into jail.

Browne spent one night in prison and received twenty-four lashes on her naked back for escaping from the plantation. Afterwards, she was jailed for five weeks. Upon her release, Browne was taken to Hope and branded on her right shoulder and on the instep of her left foot. She witnessed the abuse of others, who were enslaved, such as her friend Jessie flogged to death and a toddler choked to death.

Hope decided that Browne would marry Jem Browne, so after they jumped the broom, they were declared husband and wife. Together they had fifteen children, including four sets of twins; the majority of the children died. Their three children: Priscilla, who was sold at age ten; an unnamed girl, who died from a sickness; and Charlie, who died shortly after being told he was to be sold, are the only children who are known to have survived past infancy. In 1855, after twenty years of marriage, Jem Browne died after never recovering from being hit on the collar bone with a hammer by Wildshaw.

In 1860, Hope told Browne that because his children were grown and she refused to marry Jones, she was not useful to him. Therefore, she decided to escape that night. Browne faced many obstacles but managed to reach Pennsylvania where a white family took her in for four months. Afterwards, Browne stayed with a white clergyman for another four months until March 1861, which was near the start of the American Civil War. In order for Browne to remain free, she went to London, England, by ship in March 1863. In London, she stayed at the house of an unidentified woman. To earn a living, Browne did needlework; however, due to the beatings she endured for the greater part of her life, it was

difficult for her to work because of the intense pain from the eleven scars she bore on her body. It was at this house that Browne dictated her story to John Hawkins Simpson, the author of her biography. No additional details surrounding Browne's life, including her death, have surfaced.

Horrors of the Virginia Slave Trade ... The True Story of Dinah, an Escaped Virginian Slave (1863) shows the humanity of Browne and other enslaved African Americans. The narrative also depicts how the system of slavery was contrary to Christianity, social equality, and the Declaration of Independence (1776). Despite its significance, Browne's biography has not gained much attention during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In more recent years, its importance has increased with the narrative being referenced in *A Bibliography of the Negro* (1928) by Monroe N. Work and in *The Timetables of African-American History* (1995) by historian Sharon Harley as an important piece of literature and history. A condensed version of the story appears in *Don't Carry Me Back! Narratives by Former Virginia Slaves* (1995), an anthology by Maurice Duke. Although copies of the biography are scarce, an online copy can be found on the Documenting the South website by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Further Reading

Jordan, Jr. Ervin L. "Queen Victoria's Refugees: Afro-Virginians and Anglo-Confederate Diplomacy." *Virginia's Civil War*. Edited by Peter Wallenstein and Bertram Wyatt-Brown (2005).

Simpson, John Hawkins. *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade and of the Slave-Rearing Plantations. The True Story of Dinah, an Escaped Virginian Slave, Now in London, on Whose Body Are Eleven Scars Left by Tortures Which Were Inflicted by Her Master, Her Own Father. Together with Extracts from the Laws of Virginia, Showing That Against These Barbarities the Law Gives Not the Smallest Protection to the Slave, But the Reverse*. 1863. Accessed November 15, 2011. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/simpson/simpson.html> <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/simpson/simpson.html>>

See also

Slavery <<https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-45025>>

Virginia <<https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-45086>>

Work, Monroe Nathan <<https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-34808>>