

Enslaved | Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation

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Editor's Introduction

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It is no longer a shocking revelation that the Founding Fathers of the United States were slaveholders, but scholars are still in the early stages of assembling the archive to provide a robust account of this facet of the founders' livelihoods and legacies. The pioneering works of Annette Gordon Reed on the slaveholding of Thomas Jefferson have inspired subsequent studies, some of which we publish here in the *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation*. Taken together, the datasets in this issue show the extent to which three founders—James Monroe, Patrick Henry, and John Marshall—maintained their families' wealth and power by buying, selling, and extracting labor from people they enslaved. By piecing together fragmentary information gleaned from a variety of sources, these datasets expand our knowledge of the enslaved, giving us a better understanding of life in late colonial North America and in the early republic. These datasets make clear that for many of the founding generation revolutionary politics was possible because of the leisure afforded to statesmen by enslaved people who were forced to labor for them. These datasets also reveal stark contradictions between in the Founding Fathers' words, which espoused liberty for all, and actions, which for generations normalized the enslavement of people of African descent by people of European descent.

This issue features two datasets focused on enslaved people held by James Monroe and his family, assembled by the Black History Committee of the Friends of Thomas Balch Library and the staff at James Monroe's Highland. These datasets, along with the "Take Them in Families" dataset published in a previous issue of JSDP, expand our understanding of the lives of the enslaved held the fifth president of the United States, who was also a delegate to the Continental Congress, U.S. Senator, minister to France, multiple-term Governor of Virginia, ambassador to Great Britain, Secretary of War, and Secretary of State. Most of those Monroe held in bondage resided on his plantations in Albemarle and Loudoun Counties in Virginia. The datasets make clear that enslaved people were a central part of Monroe's wealth and elevated his status. Monroe used enslaved people as collateral for loans, bought them when he had a need for labor or saw an investment opportunity, and sold them when he needed liquid assets.

In 1830, Monroe held 66 enslaved people on his Loudoun estate, making him the largest holder of enslaved people in the county at the time. And at various times he claimed more than 100 enslaved people at other locations in Albemarle, New York, and Washington, D.C.

Both datasets provide insights into the lives of the enslaved Monroe claimed. Notably, in 1794 Monroe purchased Thenia Hemings and five of her children (Betsy, Lucy, Mary, Sally, and Susan) from Thomas Jefferson. Thenia was Sally Hemings's elder full sister. Sally is among the best known enslaved people in history because Jefferson, who enslaved her, was the father of at least six of her children. Both Thenia and Sally became the property of Jefferson and his wife, Martha, after her father, John Wayles, died in 1773. Wayles was also the father of Thenia, Sally, and several of their siblings—the result of his persistent sexual assault of their mother, Elizabeth Hemings. Monroe purchased Thenia Hemings and her children after an independent appraisal, which led to an agreed upon price of £174. Evidence from the datasets indicates that Hemings died a short time after Monroe purchased her. Through these and other bits of evidence from the past, a great deal more about the lives of these and other enslaved people is revealed through these datasets.

Like Monroe, John Marshall also had considerable holdings in enslaved people, regularly buying, selling, and gifting them and using them to expand his sizable fortune. Marshall was Chief Justice of the United States from 1801 to 1835, the longest serving Chief Justice in history. He utilized slave labor at his Court End home in Richmond, Virginia, and his holdings outside the city. Among the more than 100 enslaved people who Marshall owned was Israel, who Marshall purchased in 1787 for £55 and sold sometime during or before 1792 to Moses Austin, one of the pioneers of the American lead mining industry. Israel's disdain for grueling work under Austin is evidenced by the fact Austin posted two advertisements for Israel's return after he fled, mentioning in each that he had purchased Israel from Marshall. Marshall held other enslaved people for a much longer period. This was particularly true of "house slaves" who he found useful. Thus Henry, who Marshall called "my cook," appears in several records and in Marshall's will in 1834. The dataset, then, indicates how the lives of the enslaved varied under Marshall and in urban settings generally. Some stayed with their enslavers for long periods of time and were dubbed "faithful servants." Others were bought and then quickly sold. For Marshall and other elites, enslaved people were investment opportunities—assets in the short and long term.

Two more datasets focus on the enslaved held by Patrick Henry and his family. One from the team at Preservation Virginia focuses on Henry's Scotchtown property and the other from Sasha Erpenbach focuses on Red Hill. Henry was an attorney and planter who was a delegate to the First Continental Congress and served as governor of Virginia from 1776 to 1779 and 1784 to 1786. The Red Hill dataset contains information about the 209 enslaved people who were claimed by the Henry family. The Scotchtown dataset explores the lives of a more modest number of enslaved people whom Henry held earlier in his life. The datasets make clear that enslaved people were a central part of Henry's largely inherited wealth. Like Marshall, Henry used enslaved people as collateral, labor, and a store of capital, which could be liquidated for currency when needed. He held some enslaved people for a long period of time and bought and

resold others quickly. The great irony, of course, is that Henry is best known today for the fiery speech he gave in 1775 at the Second Virginia Convention at St. John's Church in Richmond. There he stood to defend the revolution and declared, "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" Yet, just four years earlier he had sold Hannah and Lucy, whom he enslaved, for £90 to cover a debt. Others like Jessee continued as his property from 1770 through at least 1799. Clearly Henry, like other founders, thought that liberty was not for all.

Finally, in the Library of Virginia's *Virginia Untold* collection of petitions to remain, we see the direct consequences of founders like Henry, Marshall, and Monroe failing to confront the contradictions between their revolutionary ideals and their deep investment, socially and financially, in race-based chattel slavery. Datasets published in the volume reveal that elites sometimes selectively manumitted "faithful servants." But, as the dataset derived from *Virginia Untold* makes clear, elites, including revolutionary founders, refused to tolerate a growing free Black population. Hence, the Virginia legislature entertained petitions from free Blacks to remain in the state after manumission or self-purchase on a case-by-case basis. Several founders (or their estates after this passing) manumitted select individuals but forced them into the precarious position of petitioning the state to remain near their enslaved families and loved ones or leave them behind. William Henry Fitzhugh, a wealthy veteran of the War of 1812, member of the Virginia House of Delegates and Senate, and vice president of the American Colonization Society, is known to have freed the enslaved people that he owned. He did so in his will, stating that the over 200 people he enslaved should be freed after 1850. His death came in 1830, and after 1850, those liberated had to petition the state to be allowed to remain. Hence, in 1851, Charles Ward filed to remain in Virginia. Then in 1852, Sally Dixon did the same. John Burke followed in 1853. Each had been liberated a full twenty years after their enslaver's death, but had to ask permission as "free" Blacks to remain with family and in their communities. Burke and Dixon were granted permission to remain in Virginia. The fate of Ward's petition is unknown. Others were not so fortunate; they were denied the right to remain and forced to risk punishment for violating the law or leave the state. The petitions reveal that because of an ideology put in place by the founders, freedom was defined differently for Black and white Virginians.

We look forward to publishing data regarding the slaveholding of additional members of Virginia's founding generation, and for other states/colonies, in subsequent issues.

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