

# Historical Black Experiences at Cherry Hill Collection

## 9-12 Teaching Unit



### **Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, N.Y.**

**An Exploration of the True Cherry Hill Mystery:**

***Why did Dinah Jackson stay at Cherry Hill after Emancipation?***

#### *Credit Statement:*

*Shawna Reilly researched and created this teaching unit, with interpretive and editorial support from Kori Graves, PhD, Frederick Schrock, and classroom teacher Robert Naeher, PhD. LaReina Torain and Lindsay Kesten assisted with the digitization and metadata creation of the primary sources. Grant funding for the project was awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy Demands Wisdom.*

# Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, New York

**Overview:** This lesson explores the experiences of enslaved people at Cherry Hill and in other aristocratic Albany County households from the founding of New Netherlands in the 1620s, through British colonization, the American Revolution and Emancipation in 1827.

These experiences will help answer the Cherry Hill mystery: *Why did Dinah Jackson-- a woman who was enslaved-- stay at Cherry Hill after Emancipation?*

**Materials:** Stories of enslaved people will be examined through bills of sale, an 18th century ledger, maps, photographs, and other primary sources from the Historic Cherry Hill collection.

**Content Warning:** Some of the primary source documents contain words that were used during the 18th & 19th centuries that are not acceptable today. Those words include “negro,” “slave,” and “coloured” in reference to people of African descent who were enslaved. The word “wench” is also used in one of the primary source documents to describe an enslaved woman.

**Objectives:** Students will:

- Experience first-hand how primary sources help us to understand the human experience in the Albany, New York area from the mid 1700s through 1827.
- Realize that slavery was a major economic institution in Albany, New York, persisting on aristocratic farms and in the city even after the American Revolution.
- Think about what it was like for individuals and their families to be enslaved in Albany, and their limited choices-- but choices nonetheless-- upon emancipation.



## Essential Questions:

- *What was life like for men, women, and children who were enslaved in Albany, New York before emancipation in 1827?*
- *Consider the laws in Albany that restricted everyday life for enslaved and free people of color...What kinds of decisions did people make in order to have a better life?*

# Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, New York

## Vocabulary

**aristocratic-** a person who belongs to the ruling class, or aristocracy, and is "noble" just by being in the family line of rulers — whether they have done anything noble or not.

**chattel slavery-** when one person claims total ownership of another person, as if they were property. In the United States, this system was racialized.

**cooper-** a highly skilled craftsperson who makes and repairs wooden barrels.

**indentured servant-** worker in a contract with an employer for a certain length of time. Usually a laborer or craftsperson would have to work a certain number of years in exchange for the cost of transportation across the ocean, food, clothing, land, a place to live and other things they needed to live or work during their contract. This kind of contract was called "indenture." Indentures were quite common in Colonial America in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**manumit/manumission-** a legal process when an enslaver gives the person that they enslaved freedom.

**mariner-** Philip Van Rensselaer is called a *mariner* (sailor) in one of the 18th century documents. Actually, he was a *merchant* who owned *sloops*; He and his agents traded farm goods from Albany, sailed them down the Hudson River to New York City, and traded them for goods from all over the world which they sold back in Albany. It does not appear that Philip did the actual sailing.

**manor farms-** In 1624, merchants in the Dutch West India Company received *patroonships* --large pieces of land--to start and populate settlements in the colony. This started a feudal system in New Netherlands, under which families like the Van Rensselaers gained power and wealth by renting land to farmers. Visit [www.historiccherryhill.org/history/](http://www.historiccherryhill.org/history/) to learn more about the patroonship.

**sloop-** a simple wind powered sailboat used for travel on the Hudson River during the 1700s.



**Check** the definitions for any vocabulary words that you don't know.

**Record and define** any additional vocabulary words you find in the empty space.

## Mystery #1: “Why did Dinah Jackson stay at Cherry Hill after Emancipation?”



Dinah Jackson was the last person enslaved at Cherry Hill; She became emancipated on July 4, 1827. It is believed that she continued to live and work for the Cherry Hill family who had enslaved her for the rest of her life.

Ms. Jackson was the family's cook. This was her bedroom, through a doorway in the back of the basement kitchen.

In the front partition (right), she stored and managed a supply of food, such as grains and potatoes.

She slept in the back partition, often joined by one or more of the Van Rensselaer children she looked after.



**Look** at the room of Dinah Jackson.

**Read** the description.

**Think**...did she have privacy?

What do you think the room was like in winter, or in spring?

**List** some words that describe this room.

**Brainstorm:**

Why do you think Dinah Jackson stayed at Cherry Hill after Emancipation?

**Primary Source:**

Photograph by Historic Cherry Hill

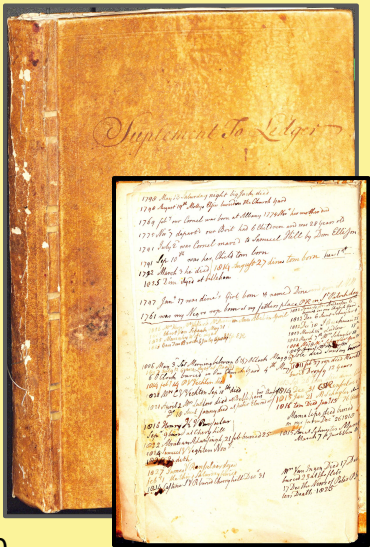


# Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, New York

## Introduction

- “1798...Saturday night big Jack died
- 1798...Molly’s Elsie buried in the church yard
- 1769...our Cornel was born at Albany 1775...her mother died
- 1775...depart our Brit had 6 Children and was 28 years old
- 1791...Cornel marid to Samuel Hill by Dom Ellison
- 1791...her Child tom born
- 1792...he died/ 1814...dines tom born her 1st ~.
- 1825 Dine dyed at belleham [Bethlehem]
- 1797 Jan’y [January]...dine’s Girl born & named Dine and gave it MM
- 1761 was my Negro vos born at my fathers place PVR on St Patrick day”

Cover & excerpt from a page in “Suplement To Ledger,” a record of events kept by Philip K., Maria and Arriet Van Rensselaer, spanning from 1761 to 1830.



**Background:** Philip K. and Maria Van Rensselaer and their daughter, Arriet, recorded important events- including in the lives of the people they enslaved- in a ledger. They lived at Cherry Hill, built for them in 1787, on a 900 acre farm just south of the city of Albany, N.Y.

Wealthy, aristocratic Dutch-American families like the Van Rensselaers enslaved between 10 and 30 people on their farms. Smaller households in Albany enslaved 1 or 2 people. Working alongside free and indentured servants, enslaved Albanians had specific roles and were often trained in skilled work. Men worked as craftsmen, river porters, on farms and in mills. Women cooked, cleaned and reared their enslavers’ children.

**Read** the excerpt from the Cherry Hill ledger.

**Brainstorm:**  
What types of events did the Van Rensselaers record?

What do you notice about their entries?

Does anything surprise you?

**Primary Source:**  
[2 6 ledger MSVR](#)

**Citations:** Williams, Oscar, “Slavery in Albany, New York, 1624-1827,” Afro-Americans in New York Life & History



# Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, New York



## Primary sources:

Van Rensselaer ledger;  
1835 “Map of C. Hill” ; 1799  
Court Order; 1797 Bill of  
Sale (Mary & Peter); 1774  
Bill of Sale (Andrew)

## Citations:

Williams, Oscar, “Slavery in Albany,  
New York, 1624-1827,”  
Afro-Americans in New York Life &  
History

Davis, Thomas J. “Three Dark  
Centuries Around Albany: A Survey  
of Black Life in New York’s Capital  
City Area Before World War I,”  
Afro-Americans in New York Life  
and History (Jan. 1983)

[Information about the 1790  
census on census.gov.](https://www.census.gov/hist/1790/states/ny.html)

## Part A: A way of Life

**Background:** From 1624 through 1827, slavery was a part of every aspect of life in Albany and surrounding counties. Merchants, craftsmen, and aristocrats became wealthy through the unpaid work of thousands of enslaved Africans and their descendents.

By 1790, more people were enslaved in Albany county than anywhere else in New York State. Many of the nearly 4,000 people enslaved in the county lived on *manor farms* like Cherry Hill. Of the almost 600 people of African descent living in the city of Albany, only 26 were free. Many enslaved people held specific positions on farms and in city households, including skilled jobs as craftsmen, millworkers, cooks and in managing animals.

## Essential Question:

***What was life like for men, women, and children who were enslaved in Albany, New York before emancipation in 1827?***

# Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, New York

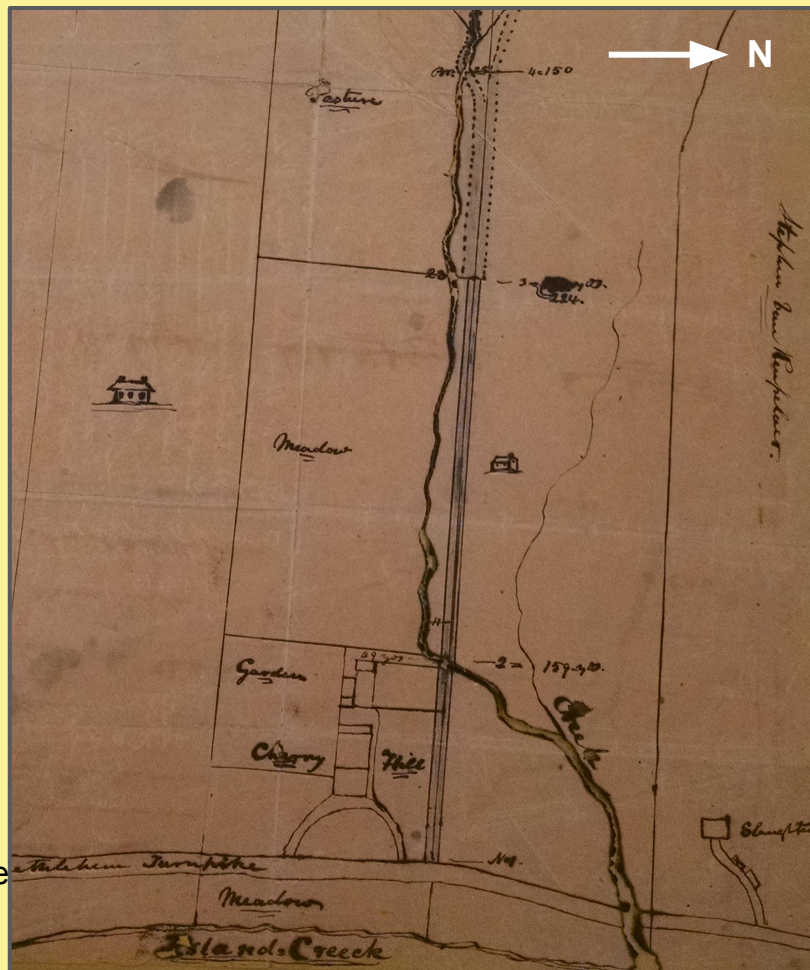
## A Way of Life Activity 1

**"Map of C. Hill":** A semicircular carriage drive led from "Albany-Bethlehem Turnpike"—now South Pearl Street—up the hill to "Cherry Hill" mansion.

At the top of the hill a narrow lane connected the carriage drive along the north (right) side of the house to the farmyard west (above) of the house. Outbuildings are represented on the map—the horse shed, the wood house, and the large Dutch barn, which functioned as barn, stable, and carriage house.

South (left) of the house was a three-acre kitchen "garden." Beyond the garden and farmyard lay a "Meadow," possibly the field used for haying; and "Pasture" for grazing.

North (right) of the house, beyond the "Creek" was a "slaughter" house, another feature of farm life.



**Look** at the map of Cherry Hill in 1835. (An 1827 description of the house and farm before emancipation is similar to what you see on this map.)

**Read** the description. Note the *cardinal directions* (North, South, East & West).

**Imagine** the spaces in which people who were enslaved lived and worked.

**Brainstorm** what life was like.

Where do you think Dinah Jackson would have been able to travel on this property?

Could she ever leave?

**Primary Source:**

[50529 Map of C. Hill, HCH Collection](#)



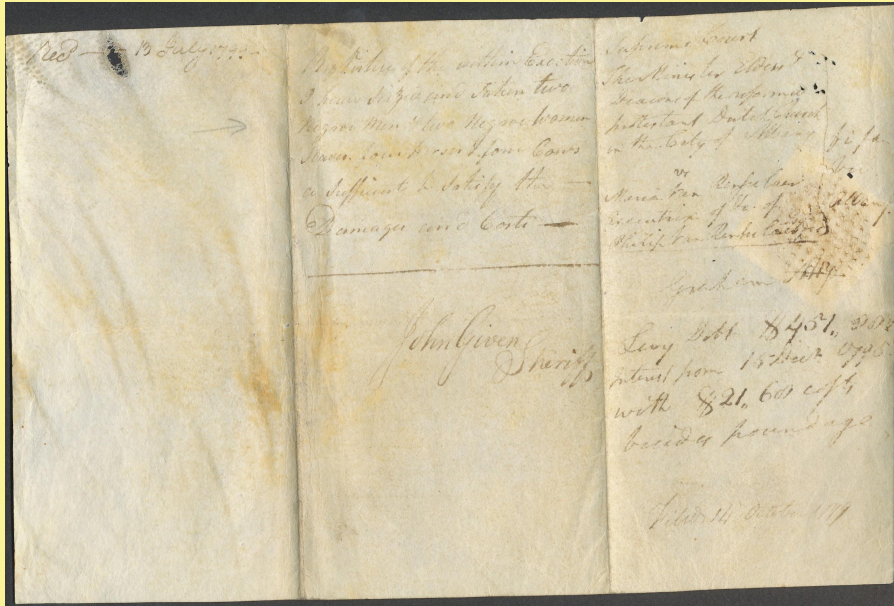
# Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, New York



## A Way of Life

## Activity 2

**“...I have seized and taken two Negroe Men & two Negroe women Slaves four horses & four cows As sufficient to satisfy the Damages and Costs...John Given Sheriff” - July 13, 1799**



**Read** the excerpt and description for the court order.

Note: *Execution* in this case means the carrying out or putting into effect of a plan, order, or course of action.

**Think** about it from the perspectives of the people who are enslaved.

How are the enslaved people treated?

**Primary Source:**

[24 April 23 1799 Order MSVR](#)

Description: “Property” taken from Maria Sanders Van Rensselaer to pay a debt owed by her deceased husband to the Minister Elders & Deacons of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in the City of Albany.

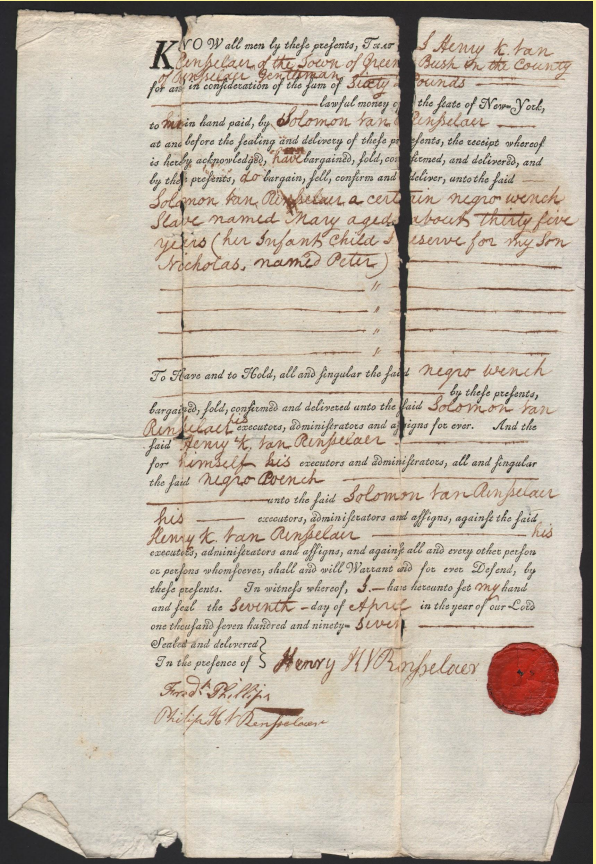




# Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, New York

## A Way of Life

## Activity 3



**“...I Henry K. Van Rensselaer...Gentleman for...the sum of Sixty Pounds...to me in hand paid, by Solomon Van Rensselaer -----do bargain, sell, confirm and deliver...a certain negro wench Slave named Mary aged about thirty five years (her infant child I reserve for my son Nicholas, named Peter)...” April 7, 1797**

**Read** the excerpt from the bill of sale of Mary.

An *infant* is a child who is under the age of one.

**Think** about it from the perspectives of the people who are enslaved.

What happens to the mother and child in the bill of sale?

**Primary Source:**

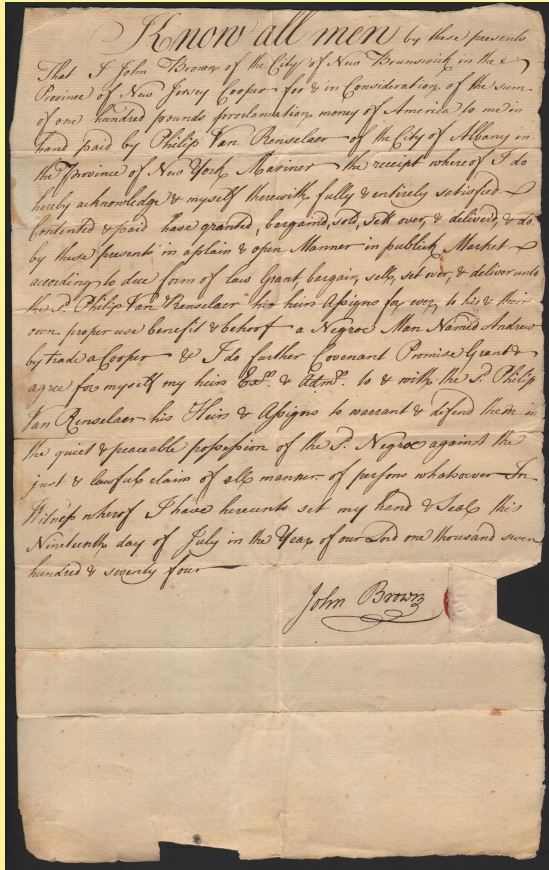
[3 1 April 7 1797 Bill of Sale HKVR to SVR](#)



# Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, New York

## A Way of Life

## Activity 4



**“I John Brown of the City of New Brunswick in the Province of New Jersey Cooper for...one hundred pounds... paid by Philip Van Rensselaer of the City of Albany in the province of New York Mariner the receipt whereof I do...in publick Market...deliver...a Negroe Man Named Andrew by trade a Cooper...” July 19, 1774**

**Read** the excerpt from the bill of sale of Andrew.

**Think...**what does the bill of sale say about Andrew?

What is a cooper?

Do you think that Andrew's job important? Why or why not?

*Hint: how much did Philip pay for him compared to other people he enslaved?*

**Brainstorm:** What do you think his experience was like?

**Primary Source:**

[2 4 July 19 1774 Bill of Sale J B to PVR](#)



# Lesson 1: Slavery in Albany, New York

## Part A: A way of life

## Conclusion

### Essential Question:

- *What was life like for men, women, and children who were enslaved in Albany, New York before emancipation in 1827?*

*How were they treated by the people who enslaved them? How were their families treated? What were their living conditions?*

Think about the primary sources you've seen in Part A--

Dinah's room;  
The map of Cherry Hill farm; the court order; the bill of sale of Mary and her infant child; &  
The bill of sale of Andrew.



# Lesson 1: Slavery at Cherry Hill & in Albany



## Materials

### Primary documents:

1808 & 1809 Bills of Sale (Dublin);

1812 Manumission document (Bet);

testimony of Dinah Jackson

**Secondary sources:** 1790 census chart

### Dig Deeper:

[Defining Slavery | People Not Property](#)

[How Dutch Holiday “Pinkster” Became an African-American Cultural Celebration | New York State Parks and Historic Sites Blog](#)

## Part B: For a Better Life

**Background:** Chattel slavery began in New Netherlands (today’s New York) in 1626. People were kidnapped from western and central Africa and brought to New Amsterdam (today’s New York City). Colonists and their descendants enslaved people and their descendents for 200 years, until 1827. During that time, they made laws restricting the rights of enslaved people and people of color in general.

Manumission was discouraged-- enslavers who freed people were fined. Enslaved people could not legally marry, nor could they earn money by selling or trading goods. All people of color were banned from owning property, selling produce or visiting taverns. They could not travel farther north than Saratoga, for fear that enslaved people would escape to Canada.

After a 1712 slave rebellion in New York City, Albanians gradually passed more laws: Banning all people of color in Albany from owning weapons, from fetching water on Sundays, and from staying out past 9 p.m. Enslaved people could not gather in groups larger than 3. Pinkster, a Christian holiday during which people of color could travel to reconnect with their separated families was banned in 1811.

Even after Emancipation Day on July 4, 1827, life for people of African descent remained difficult. Only those with wealth and substantial property could vote. Most public areas, such as schools, were segregated. Families remained apart as children born between 1799 and 1827 were legally indentured as servants to their mother’s enslavers until their twenties.

### Essential Question:

*Consider the laws in Albany that restricted everyday life for enslaved and free people of color. What decisions did people make in order to have a better life?*

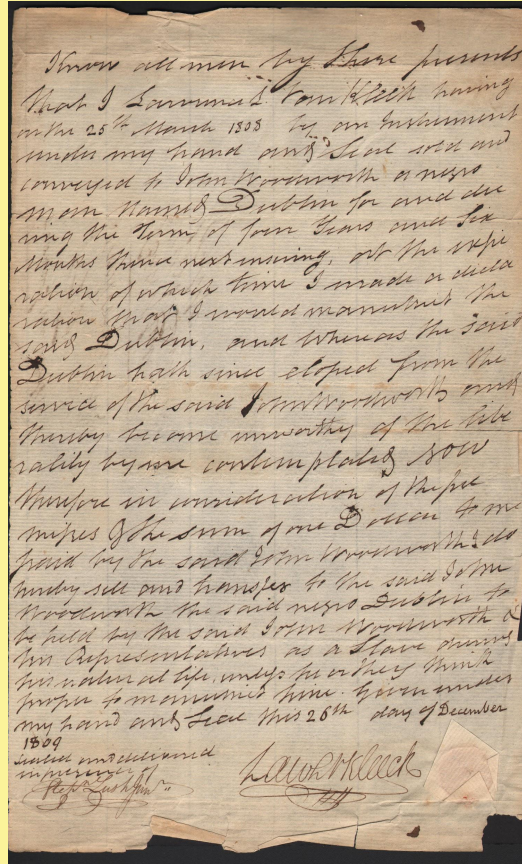
# Lesson 1: Slavery at Cherry Hill & in Albany

## For a Better Life      Activity 1

**Background:** On March 25, 1807, Lawrence Van Kleeck purchased an enslaved man named Dublin in the town of Clinton in Dutchess County (over 60 miles south of Albany, more than a day's journey by horse). On the same document, Van Kleeck transferred Dublin's enslavement to John Woodworth of Albany.

A year and a half later, Van Kleeck made a second document, canceling Dublin's scheduled manumission.

**"I...having on the 25th March 1808...sold...to John Woodworth a negro man named Dublin for...Four Years and Six months...at the expiration of which time I made a declaration that I would manumit the said Dublin, and whereas the said Dublin hath since eloped...thereby become unworthy of the liberality...I do hereby sell and transfer to the said John Woolworth the said negro Dublin to be held...as a Slave during his natural life, unless he...think proper to manumit him."** Lawrence Van Kleeck, December 26, 1809



Know all men by these presents  
That I Lawrence Van Kleeck having  
on the 25th March 1808 by an instrument  
under my hand and Seal sold and  
conveyed to John Woodworth a negro  
man named Dublin for and during  
the term of four years and six  
months from the expiration of which  
time I made a declaration that I would manumit the  
said Dublin, and whereas the said  
Dublin hath since eloped from the  
service of the said John Woodworth and  
thereby become unworthy of the libe-  
rality before contemplated I do  
hereby in consideration of the sum  
of one dollar to me  
paid by the said John Woodworth do  
sell and transfer to the said John  
Woodworth the said negro Dublin to  
be held by the said John Woodworth &  
his Representatives as a Slave during  
his natural life, unless he or they think  
proper to manumit him. Given under  
my hand and Seal this 26th day of December  
1809  
Lawrence Van Kleeck  
John Woodworth

**Read** the background and excerpt of the document about Dublin.



Note: *Elope* in this case means to escape.

Why was Dublin's manumission canceled?

**Think** about Dublin's decision.

Why did he do it?

Where do you think he went? With whom?

**Primary Sources:**

[5 10 1 December 26 1809 Bill of Sale LVK to JW](#)

[5 10 1 March 25 1807 Bill of Sale ML to LVK](#)

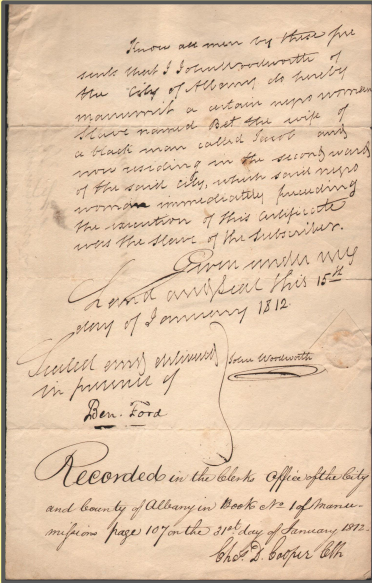
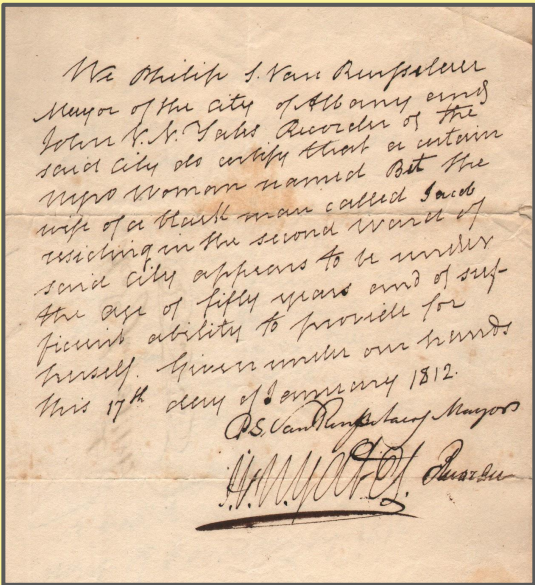
# Lesson 1: Slavery at Cherry Hill & in Albany

## For a Better Life      Activity 2

Transcription, page 1:      →

**“...I John Woodworth of the city of Albany do hereby manumit a certain negro woman Slave named Bet...”**

-January 31, 1812



← Transcription, page 2: **“We Philip S. Van Rensselaer Mayor of the city of Albany and John N.N. Yates Recorder of the said city do certify that a certain negro woman named Bet the wife of a black man called Jacob residing in the second ward of said city appears to be under the age of fifty years and of sufficient ability to provide for herself...”**

-January 31, 1812



**Read** the excerpt and of the Manumission of Bet.

**List** some facts about Bet that are described in the document.

Where will she live?

With whom?

**Think...**Why do you think witnesses needed to testify that Bet was under the age of 50 and able to support herself?

What might have happened to elderly people who had no home or family to care for them?

**Primary Source:**

[5 10 1 January 31 1812 Manumission JW to PSVR](#)

# Lesson 1: Slavery at Cherry Hill & in Albany

## For a Better Life

## Activity 3

| Town.       | Number of heads of families. | Free white males of 16 years & upward including heads of families. | Free white males under 16 years. | Free white females, including heads of families. | All other free persons. | Slaves. | Total. |
|-------------|------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------|---------|--------|
| Albany city | 573                          | 804  | 653                              | 1,443  | 26                      | 572     | 3,498  |
| First ward  | 267                          | 392  | 329                              | 672  | 5                       | 214     | 1,612  |
| Second ward | 160                          | 206  | 171                              | 383  | 18                      | 100     | 878    |
| Third ward  | 146                          | 205  | 152                              | 387  | 3                       | 257     | 1,004  |

Above: a section of the 1790 census showing population distribution in the city of Albany, N.Y.

**Background:** During the 1700s, the second ward was located in the northwestern part of the city of Albany. Within its boundaries was the prison, several churches, the barracks, and the “Negro Burial Grounds.” According to her manumission papers, Bet joined her husband Jacob who lived in the second ward.

**Look** at a section of the 1790 census record.



**Read** the First, Second & Third ward statistics for each column.

**Record:** Which ward had the most free people of color?

Which ward(s) had the most enslaved people? Which had the fewest?

**Find** the three wards on this 1794 map: [\[1794\] A Plan of the City of Albany Surveyed at the Request of the Mayor Aldermen and Commonalty by Simeon DeWitt](#), NYS Museum Flickr

**Think...**why did most free people of color live in the same ward?

**Primary Source:**  
1790 census, census.gov:

[Introduction - Albany County](#)

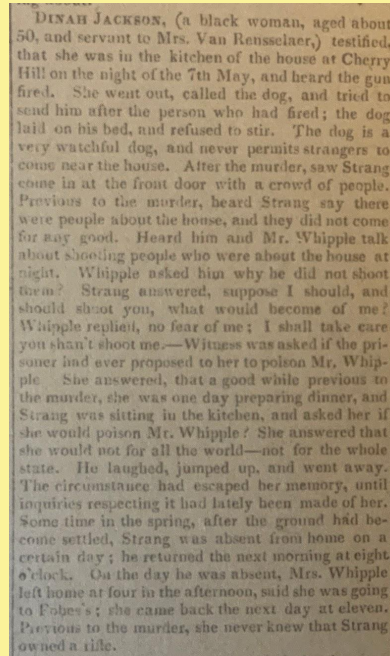


# Lesson 1: Slavery at Cherry Hill & in Albany

## For a Better Life      Activity 4

**Background:** Slavery ended in New York on July 4, 1827. Emancipation made it possible for Dinah Jackson to testify as a star witness in a murder trial later that month. Her words were recorded and printed in newspapers around the country. Dinah Jackson's testimony is the only known oral history record of a person who was enslaved at Cherry Hill.

***“DINAH JACKSON, (a black woman, aged about 50, and servant to Mrs. Van Rensselaer)...Witness was asked if the prisoner had ever proposed to her to poison Mr. Whipple. She answered, that a good while previous to the murder, she was one day preparing dinner, and Strang was sitting in the kitchen, and asked her if she would poison Mr. Whipple? She answered that she would not for all the world-- not for the whole state...The circumstance had escaped her memory, until inquiries respecting it had lately been made of her...”*** --Testimony of D. Jackson, July 1827



DINAH JACKSON, (a black woman, aged about 50, and servant to Mrs. Van Rensselaer,) testified, that she was in the kitchen of the house at Cherry Hill on the night of the 7th May, and heard the gun fired. She went out, called the dog, and tried to send him after the person who had fired; the dog laid on his bed, and refused to stir. The dog is a very watchful dog, and never permits strangers to come near the house. After the murder, saw Strang come in at the front door with a crowd of people. Previous to the murder, heard Strang say there were people about the house, and they did not come for any good. Heard him and Mr. Whipple talk about shooting people who were about the house at night. Whipple asked him why he did not shoot them? Strang answered, suppose I should, and should shoot you, what would become of me? Whipple replied, no fear of me; I shall take care you shan't shoot me.—Witness was asked if the prisoner had ever proposed to her to poison Mr. Whipple. She answered, that a good while previous to the murder, she was one day preparing dinner, and Strang was sitting in the kitchen, and asked her if she would poison Mr. Whipple? She answered that she would not for all the world—not for the whole state. He laughed, jumped up, and went away. The circumstance had escaped her memory, until inquiries respecting it had lately been made of her. Some time in the spring, after the ground had become settled, Strang was absent from home on a certain day; he returned the next morning at eight o'clock. On the day he was absent, Mrs. Whipple left home at four in the afternoon, said she was going to Fobes's; she came back the next day at eleven. Previous to the murder, she never knew that Strang owned a rifle.

**Read** the background and excerpt from the testimony of Dinah Jackson, as reported in the Albany Argus newspaper in July, 1827

**Think...** Why do you think there are so few artifacts from the perspective of people who were enslaved at Cherry Hill?

**Dig Deeper:** Read about “Ashley’s sack” to better understand the challenges of interpreting the history of enslaved families:  
[Slavery's Traces: In Search of Ashley's Sack](#)

**Compare** Dinah Jackson’s circumstances with those of Bet...Did they have the same opportunities after emancipation?

**Primary Source:**  
[The western star. \(Westfield. N.Y.\) 1826-1828. August 10, 1827. Page 1. Image 1](#)



# **Lesson 1: Slavery at Cherry Hill & in Albany**

## **Part B: For a Better Life**

## **Conclusion**

### **Essential Question:**

***Consider the laws in Albany that restricted everyday life for enslaved and free people of color...***

***What decisions did people make in order to have a better life?***

**Think about the primary & secondary sources you've seen in Part B--**

**Bill of sale of Dublin;  
Bet's Manumission;  
1790 census chart;  
Dinah Jackson's  
testimony.**

# Lesson 1: Slavery at Cherry Hill & in Albany

## Conclusion

### Mystery #1

***Why do you think Dinah Jackson stayed at Cherry Hill, even after emancipation in 1827?***

***What were her opportunities?***

**Take a virtual walk through Cherry Hill:** Explore Dinah Jackson's room and other spaces where people who were enslaved at Cherry Hill lived: [www.tours.vividmediany.com/3d-model/historic-cherry-hill/fullscreen/](http://www.tours.vividmediany.com/3d-model/historic-cherry-hill/fullscreen/)

*Start on Floor 1*

### Resources & Citations:



[Social History For Every Classroom](#)

[1713/14 Act for Regulating Slaves Rutgers.edu](#)

[New York Slave Code, 1730 | New York State Archives](#)

Bielinski, Stefan, "Wards," NYS Museum [Albany Wards](#)

[New York Slavery Records Index](#)

[The confession of Jesse Strang.](#)

Davis, Thomas J. "Three Dark Centuries Around Albany..." Afro-Americans in New York Life and History, Jan. 1983.

Robinson, Cedric J. Black Movements in America, New York and London, Routledge: 1997.

Williams, Oscar, "Slavery in Albany, New York, 1624-1827," Afro-Americans in New York Life & History