

Historical Black Experiences at Cherry Hill Collection

4-8 Teaching Unit



My Right to Freedom

Slavery at Cherry Hill in Albany, N.Y.

1761-1827

Credit Statement:

Shawna Reilly researched and created this teaching unit, with interpretive and editorial support from Kori Graves, PhD, Frederick Schrock, and classroom teacher Bryony Spaziani. 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.



My Right to Freedom

Introduction

John Heaton's painting is the only known picture of a person of African descent in Albany, New York in the 1700s.

Why might it be hard to learn about what life was like for people who were enslaved?

Caption: *"Boy of the Van Rensselaer Family," made by artist John Heaton, when he was in Albany, New York during the 1730s.*



Introduction Worksheet :

Write down 2 things that you notice about the painting.

Think of one question you have about the painting.

Brainstorm question: What do you know about slavery?

Citations: [Boy of the Van Rensselaer Family on NYSM page](#) "copied from a plate reproduced in [Patria...](#)"



Class Worksheet: Observations about the painting “Boy of the Van Rensselaer Family”

Click here to write...



agricultural- Click here to write...

bill of sale- Click here to write...

citizen- Click here to write...

colonists- Click here to write...

enslaved- Click here to write...

enslaver- Click here to write...

laborer- Click here to write...

merchant- Click here to write...

primary source- Click here to write...

trade- Click here to write...

A. A settler or inhabitant of a colony

B. A legal document that transferred ownership of an enslaved person from one enslaver to another

C. To be owned by someone else; forced to work without being paid

D. A person who does physical work for pay

E. A person who is guaranteed certain legal rights and privileges in a nation

F. A person who buys, sells, and trades goods

G. Original materials; a first hand account of a moment in history

H. Related to farming

I. The business of buying and selling or bartering goods

J. A person who makes another person their property

Vocabulary Worksheet

Match each vocabulary word to the correct definition.



Slavery was legal in Albany from 1626 until July 4, 1827.

Many of the people who were *enslaved* in Albany were kidnapped from Africa and brought to the New York City port. When their children were born, they were also enslaved.

Wealthy *merchant* families like the Van Rensselaers of Cherry Hill enslaved between 10 and 30 people on their farms.

Slavery on an Albany Farm



Caption: Wood cut of Cherry Hill mansion in 1827.

1. Write one thing you notice about the picture.
2. How long did Slavery exist in Albany, New York?
3. How did people become enslaved?
4. About how many enslaved people lived on large manor farms outside of Albany, N.Y.?

Dig Deeper:

<https://www.historiccherryhill.org/history/>

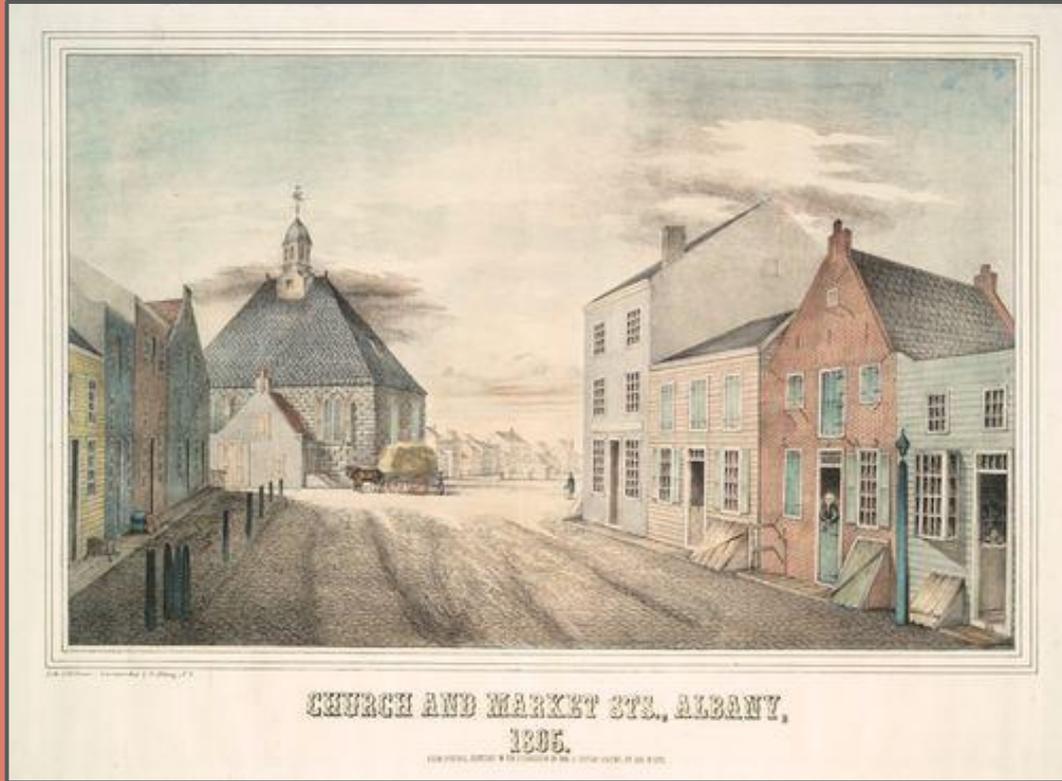


Slavery in a City Household

1. Write one thing you notice about the picture
2. About how many enslaved people lived in a household in the city of Albany?

The average *household* in the city of Albany enslaved 1 or 2 people, as well as their children, if they had any.

People who were enslaved worked without pay. They did not have the rights or freedoms of American *citizens*.



Caption: Print of a painting, *Church and Market Sts., Albany, 1805*, by James Eights, from the Rankin Collection at Historic Cherry Hill.



3. **Compare & Contrast** life on a farm with life in the city.

What do you think was similar?

What do you think was different?



Albany's Market

Philip Van Rensselaer of Cherry Hill was a merchant. *Cargo* lists in Historic Cherry Hill's collection show that he traded *agricultural* goods from his farm and from other farms outside of Albany.

Farmers traveled to Albany to *trade* their goods at the public market on Market St.

Worksheet 2:

1. Write one thing you notice about the picture.

Brainstorm: What do you think was traded in the Albany market?

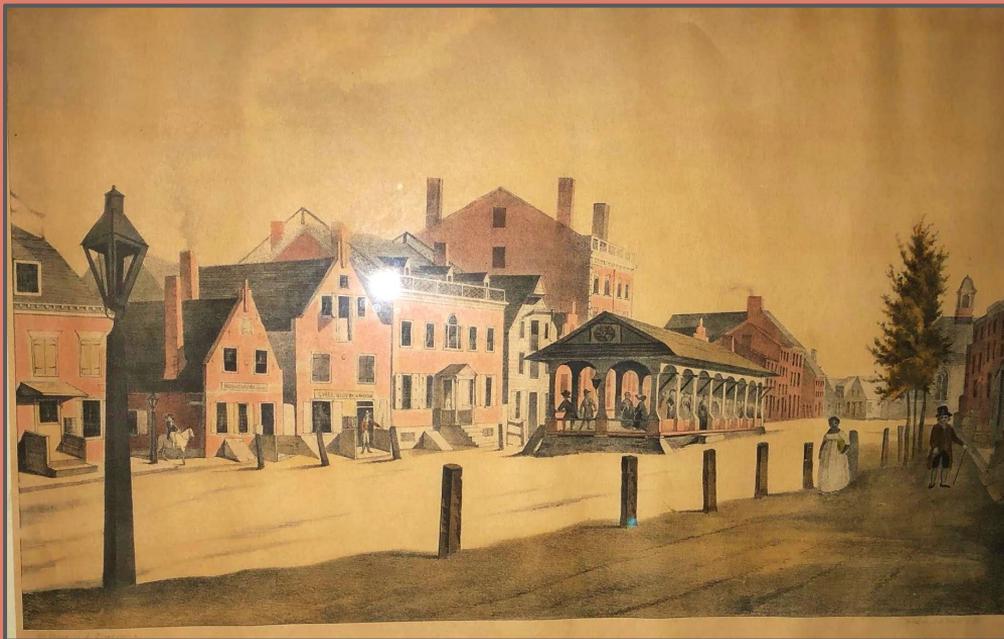
Dig Deeper:

[NYSM Market St. Page](#)

[Friends of Albany History Public Market](#)

Market Street is now called Broadway. It is in downtown Albany, next to the Hudson River.

Caption: “A View of Market Street...1805...”
from the Rankin collection at Historic Cherry Hill





Albany's Port

Agricultural goods like wheat and hay from Cherry Hill and other farms were loaded onto Philip's sloops (large sailboats) in Albany's Port. A captain and crew sailed the sloops down the Hudson River to New York City.

At the New York City market, Albany's goods were traded for sugar, tea, and other items from all over the world. They were brought up the river to be sold in Albany.



Caption: *Return of the Experiment*, by L.F. Tantillo, 1994

Worksheet 2:

2. **List** some of the goods that were transported on Philip Van Rensselaer's sloops.

Dig Deeper:

Check out NYSM's interactive image:

[Return of the Experiment - 1787](#)

Secondary Source:

The [Return of the Experiment](#), by [L. F. Tantillo](#), 1994. Collection of Key Bank

My Right to Freedom

Part B: Activity 2c



The Slave Trade

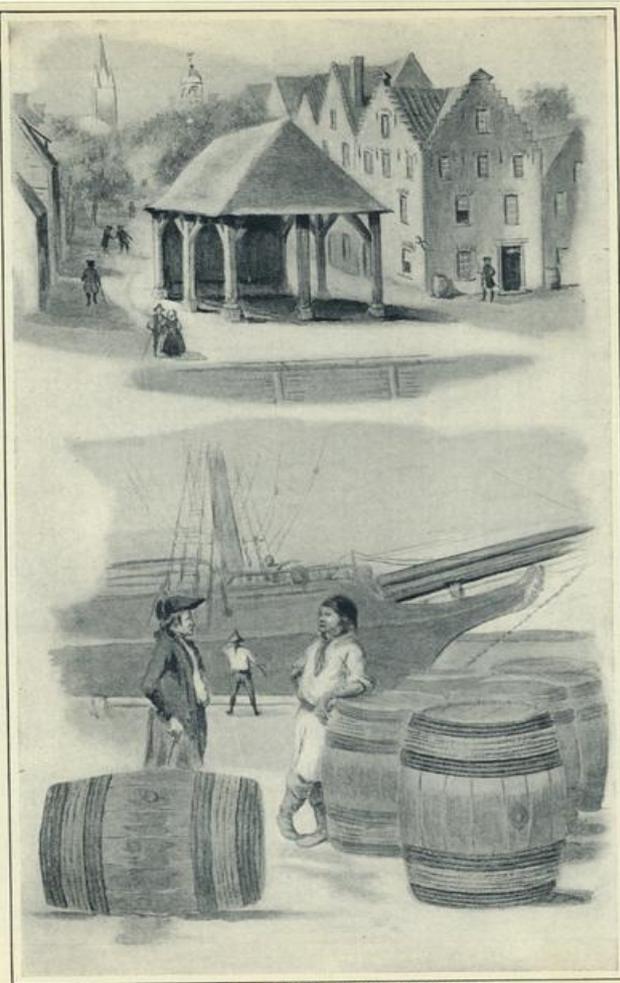
These drawings are of New York City in the mid 1700s.

The top drawing shows the market where people who were enslaved were bought and sold.

The bottom drawing is of merchants like Philip Van Rensselaer, trading barrels of rum at the port.

Philip Van Rensselaer bought things like rum to sell at the Albany market. Enslaved people on plantations in the West Indies cut the sugarcane to be made into rum for trade.

Enslaved people worked on Philip's sloops and on his Cherry Hill farm.



THE SLAVE MARKET IN WALL STREET

PUNCHEONS OF RUM

BoK Dec 1907

Worksheet 2:

3. Write down 1 way that Philip Van Rensselaer participated in the Slave Trade.

Brainstorm:

What kind of work do you think enslaved people did on the sloops?

Primary Source:

Drawing: "Slave Market, 1730"

[The Slave Market In Wall Street ; Puncheons Of Rum.](#)



Andrew

A man named Andrew was enslaved by Philip Van Rensselaer. He was a *cooper*-- a skilled craftsman who makes barrels.

Andrew worked on Philip Van Rensselaer's sloops.

He made barrels to carry water and food for the sailors on the sloop.

He also made or fixed barrels that held expensive goods like sugar and rum.



Caption: The men in this photograph are *historical reenactors*. They are showing how coopers made barrels. They are wearing costumes to show what coopers wore.

Worksheet 3:

1. What was Andrew's job?

Brainstorm:

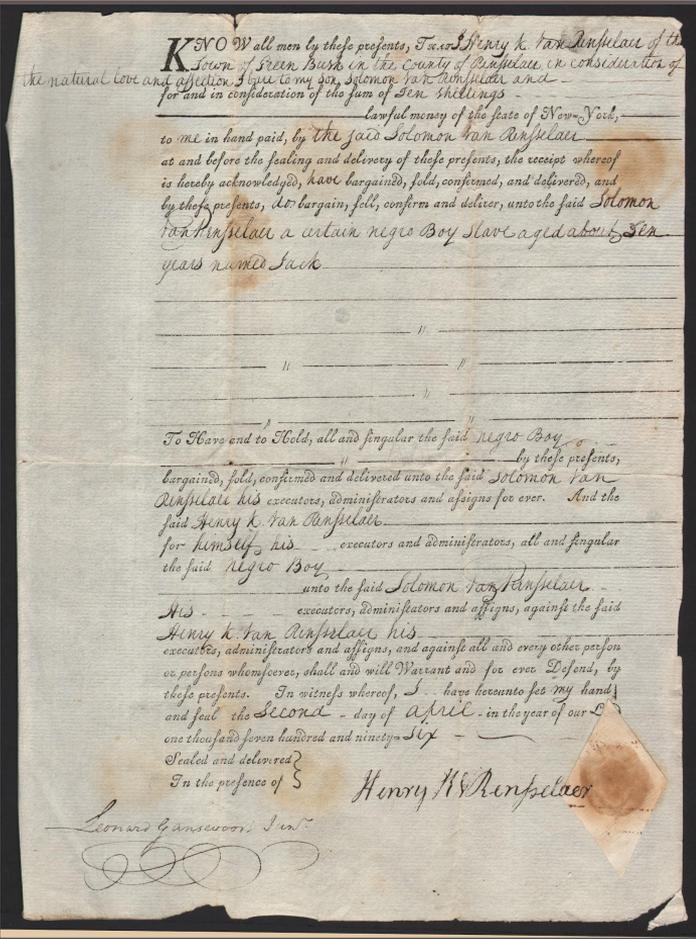
Why do you think Andrew's job was important?



Bill of Sale for Andrew

Transcription:

“...I John Brown,...Cooper, for and in consideration of the sum of one hundred pounds proclamation money of America to me in hand paid by Philip Van Renselaer of the City of Albany in the province of New York, Mariner...deliver unto...Philip Van Renselaer...a Negroe Man Named Andrew, by trade a Cooper...” - July, 19, 1774



Worksheet 3:

- 2. What was John Brown’s job?
- 3. What was Philip Van Rensselaer’s job?

Brainstorm Question: How do you think Andrew learned to be a cooper?

View the primary document on New York Heritage:

[24 July 19 1774 Bill of Sale JB to PVR](#)

My Right to Freedom

Part B: Activity 4a



Worksheet 4:

1. What year did Maria write the first entry in the ledger?

2. How long ago was that?

3. What kinds of things did the Van Rensselaers write in their ledger?

Brainstorm:

What important events would you record in your ledger for people to discover?

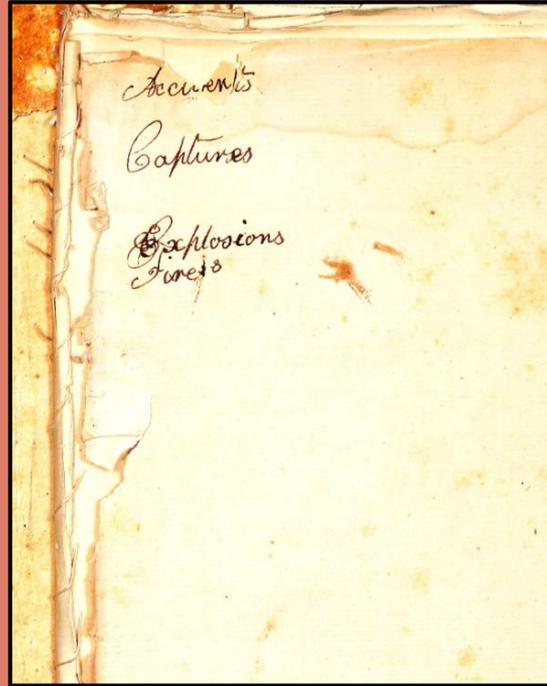
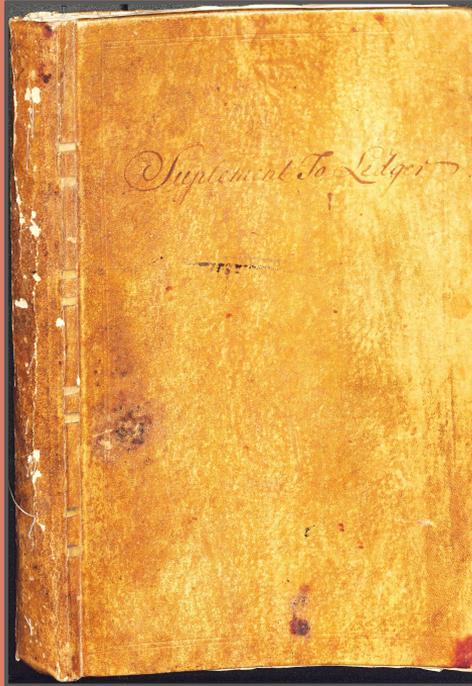
View the primary document on New York Heritage:

[2_6_ledger_MSVR](#)

Maria Van Rensselaer's Ledger

Philip's wife was named Maria Van Rensselaer.

This is the cover and first page of Maria's ledger. She and Philip wrote in it between 1761 and 1829.



Transcription:

*“Accounts
Captures
Explosions
Fires”*

The ledger was a like a journal or a diary. It was where Maria Van Rensselaer recorded important events.



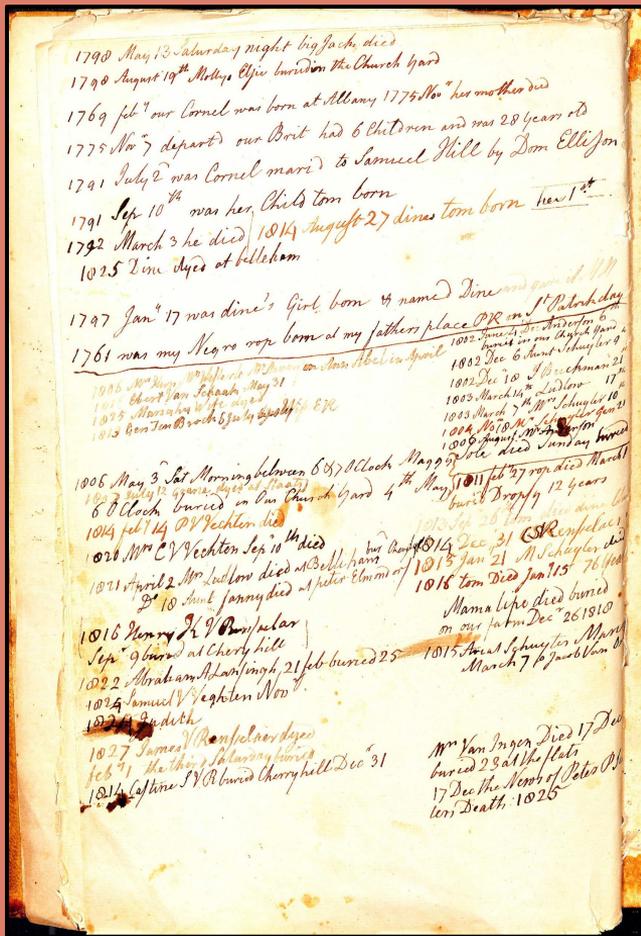
Worksheet 4:

Who was Enslaved at Cherry Hill?

On this page in the ledger, Maria recorded important events in the lives of the people the Van Rensselaers enslaved.

Transcription:

- “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 [married] to Samuel Hill...**
- 1791...her Child tom born**
- 1792...he died/ 1814...dines tom born her 1st...**
- 1825 Dine dyed at belleham [Bethlehem]...”**



3. Choose one date, and record what happened on that date.
4. Write one question you have about this page in the ledger.

Brainstorm:

What surprises you about the entries on this page?

View the primary document on New York Heritage:

[2 6 ledger MSVR](#)



Martineek & Cato

This notice was in the newspaper in 1789. It announced a reward for anyone who found two teenagers who had become freedom seekers.

Transcription:

“30 Dollars reward. RAN AWAY...two... Boys; one named Martineek, the other Cato.---Martineek is about 19 years of age---had on when he went away a sailor’s blue jacket...Cato is about 17 years of age...Martineek has been four seasons employed in a sloop between Albany and New York and is expected that Cato and himself will make for some sea-port town. Masters of vessels are forbid taking them off at their peril...Philip Van Rensselaer...”

- printed in the Albany Gazette, April 24, 1789

A historical notice from the Albany Gazette, dated March 31, 1789. The notice is framed and features a woodcut illustration of a young boy carrying a bundle on a shoulder pole. The text is in a mix of bold, serif fonts and smaller, regular fonts. It offers a 30-dollar reward for anyone who apprehends two runaway teenagers, Martineek and Cato, and provides details about their appearance and the reward conditions.

30 Dollars reward.
RAN AWAY last Friday evening, from the subscriber, Two Boys ;
one named MARTINEEK, the other CATO.---Martineek is about nineteen years of age--had on when he went away a sailor's blue jacket and brown overalls.---Cato is about 17 years of age, and had on a green jacket and overalls. They are both very active, and speak very fast and much alike.---Martineek has been four seasons employed in a sloop between Albany and New York, and it is expected that Cato and himself will make for some sea-port town. Masters of vessels are forbid taking them off at their peril.
Whoever will apprehend the said runaways, and secure them in gaol, and give information to the subscriber or the printer hereof, shall receive the above reward of Thirty Dollars, and if returned to Albany, the same reward and all reasonable expences, by
Philip Van Rensselaer.
Albany, March 31, 1789. 154

Worksheet 5:

1. **Record** 2 facts that you have learned about Martineek and Cato.
2. Where did Philip Van Rensselaer think they went?

Brainstorm:

Draw a picture of what they might have seen on the river. OR

List things they might have seen on the river.

Primary Source:

The notice was edited for content. The original was published by the Albany Gazette:

[Hudson River Maritime Museum History Blog.](#)

My Right to Freedom

Part C: Activity 6a

Work on the Farm

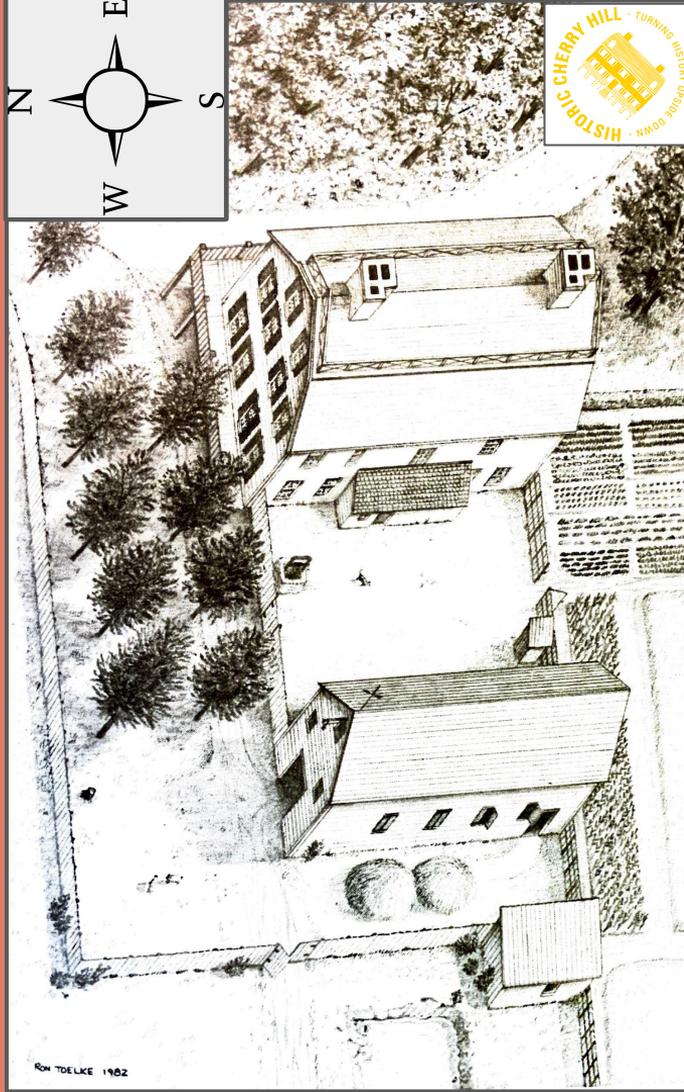
This drawing shows what the Cherry Hill farm looked like in 1827.

An orchard of fruit and nut trees were *north* of the house. The garden was *south* of the house, and the barn was *west*. The Hudson River was to the *east*.

A free farmhand named Jesse Strang wrote about the Cherry Hill household in 1827.

He wrote that the Van Rensselaer family worked with *laborers* and enslaved people on large chores.

In autumn, they gathered nuts together in the orchard at Cherry Hill.



Worksheet 6:

1. **Find** the orchard, *north* of the house.
2. **Write** one thing that the Van Rensselaers, laborers, and enslaved people did together.

Brainstorm:

What other kinds of work do you think free laborers and enslaved people did on the Cherry Hill farm?

Primary Source:

[Cornell University Library](#)
[Digital Collections Bookreader](#)

Secondary Source:

Drawing by Ron Toelke, published in book: Jones, Louis C. Murder at Cherry Hill, Albany: Historic Cherry Hill, 1982.



Dinah Jackson

Jesse wrote that everyone in the Cherry Hill household spent time together in the basement kitchen, “*sitting about the fire.*”

He also wrote about Dinah Jackson. She was born around 1777, at the time of the American Revolution.

She was the cook, and the last person enslaved at Cherry Hill.

Slavery ended in New York on Emancipation Day, July 4, 1827.



Caption: Kitchen fireplace at Historic Cherry Hill

1. When was Dinah Jackson born?

2. How old was she when Slavery ended on July 4, 1827?

Brainstorm:

What kinds of foods do you think Dinah Jackson cooked?

Hint: A Cherry Hill cookbook lists recipes for muffins, cakes, gruels, jellies, jumbles, whigs...sauces, breads ...pickled beef, cured hams... caviars, waffles, puffards, rusks, biscuits, syllabub, and pies.

3. Draw a picture of food Dinah made.

Primary Source:

Photograph by Historic Cherry Hill.



Dinah Jackson's Room

As the Van Rensselaer family's cook, Ms. Jackson prepared the meals and managed the food supply. She also watched the children in the household.

We know from Jesse's writing that this was her bedroom. It is through a doorway in the back of the basement kitchen.

She slept in the back part of the room. Sometimes one or more of the Van Rensselaer children slept with her.

After she became a free woman, Ms. Jackson continued to work as a cook at Cherry Hill for the rest of her life.

Worksheet 7b:

1. **List** four words that describe this room.
2. **Think**...did she have privacy? Why or why not?

Brainstorm:

What questions do you have about Dinah Jackson's life?

Primary Source:

Photograph by Historic Cherry Hill.



Explore Our Largest Artifact: Cherry Hill Mansion

We can learn about slavery and people's lives by looking at primary source objects and documents left behind by the Cherry Hill household.



The Cherry Hill mansion is another object (our largest!) that helps us understand what life might have been like for people who were enslaved.

Worksheet 8:

1. **Write** the most interesting thing you saw during the virtual tour of Cherry Hill, and why it was interesting.

OR

Draw a scene from Cherry Hill.

Brainstorm: What do you want to know more about?

Primary Source: Photo of Historic Cherry Hill

Full 3D tour link:

www.tours.vividmediany.com/3d-model/historic-cherry-hill/fullscreen/

Take a virtual walk through Cherry Hill: Explore Dinah Jackson's room and other spaces where people who were enslaved at Cherry Hill lived: [Click here](#) , and go to *Floor 1*



Essential Question:

- *What did everyday life look like for people who were enslaved at Cherry Hill?*

Click here to write...

Essential Question Worksheet :

Think about what you've learned about in this lesson...

Think about the experiences of **Andrew,**

Molly, Elsie, Cornell, Brit, Tom, Dine,

Cato, Martineek,

Dinah Jackson, and others who were enslaved at Cherry Hill.