

SLAVERY RECORDS IN THE COMMON COUNCIL PAPERS AT THE NEW YORK CITY MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES

CONTRIBUTED BY MERYL SCHUMACKER*

The legislative body of New York City's municipal government has gone by several names during its long history. Today it is called the New York City Council. From 1675 to 1897 it was called the Common Council of the City of New York.¹

New York City published the minutes of the Common Council's day-to-day business in two series.² Although the minutes are flush with useful data, they cannot compare with the information in the original letters, petitions, depositions, and other documents that informed the Common Council meetings. Those original documents comprise a vast collection at the New York City Municipal Archives called the New York City Common Council Supporting Papers, or Common Council Papers. The collection is available in paper form and on microfilm.³

Relying on the minutes without checking the Common Council Papers is akin to trusting a database entry without examining the original record. Whereas the minutes might have a passing reference to a citizen's petition, for example, the Common Council Papers could contain several relevant original records—perhaps the petition in the citizen's own hand with a detailed recommendation from a member of the Council. Some records in the Common Council Papers are not referenced in the minutes.⁴

Among the papers not included in the minutes are dozens of genealogically relevant records of slaves and their children in New York City and elsewhere. Many of the slavery records in the Common Council Papers were generated in compliance with New York State laws passed between 1799 and

* Meryl Schumacker (contact@waybackgen.com) is the genealogist in residence at the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. She is currently engaged in an ongoing project to locate, abstract, and publish additional slave records from across New York City and State. She thanks the archivists at the New York City Municipal Archives, in particular Patricia Glowinski, for assistance with this project.

¹ Aaron Goodwin, *New York City Municipal Archives: An Authorized Guide for Family Historians* (New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2016), 129–30.

² *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1675–1776*, 8 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1905). *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1784–1831*, 21 vols. (New York: City of New York, 1917).

³ Common Council Papers, Municipal Archives, New York City. The supporting papers for New York City's legislative body cover the period from 1670 to 1934. Documents for 1670–1831 are available on microfilm, arranged by year and category. Categories include committee names, petition or permit types (for example, "Permits Granted by the Market Committee to Butchers"), and vague titles such as "Slaves." The collection is large and unorganized; the on-site finding aid is the best navigation tool. In the author's experience, the microfilm is more convenient than the original records and, unlike the originals, the microfilm requires no lead time. The paper originals, however, are sometimes easier to read. The author recommends using the published minutes as an index, then consulting the finding aid to identify the box, folder, and roll numbers to access the corresponding microfilm. Originals can be requested as needed.

⁴ For a discussion of the Common Council and its records, see Goodwin, *New York City Municipal Archives* (note 1), 129–40.

1817.⁵ “An act for the gradual abolition of slavery,” passed in 1799, and subsequent acts, including “An act concerning slaves and servants” in 1801, spurred the creation of a range of records related to slaves and their children.⁶ They document manumissions, sales, crimes, movement into and out of the state, births of free children to enslaved mothers, and depositions on free black New Yorkers by their white neighbors. Some of the Common Council Papers on slaves are miscellaneous. One folder contains a letter from a free black man who was imprisoned as a runaway in the South.⁷ Some records have no obvious connection to the city—for example, the certificate of examination for a New Jersey slave named Hannah.⁸

Records of slaves, their children, and several free black New Yorkers in the Common Council Papers are grouped into folders labeled “Slaves,” “Slavery,” “Birth, Slave,” “Birth, Slaves,” and “Manumissions.” This article includes details of all the documents from the folders labeled “Slaves,” “Slavery,” “Birth, Slave,” and “Birth, Slaves.” The documents chronicle events from 1799 through 1820, with the exception of 1804–1807, where there is a gap in the collection.⁹ This article does not include documents from “Manumissions” folders, but it does include all manumission documents found in the “Slaves” and “Slavery” folders.¹⁰

The original order for the collection is unknown. Records are arranged in boxes by year (more or less), then in folders by year and category. The order of items within individual folders does not consistently match that on the corresponding microfilm. Records herein have been grouped by type, box, folder, then in their current order within their respective folders. Spellings of names and places reflect those on the original documents.

SLAVE BIRTH CERTIFICATES

“An act for the gradual abolition of slavery” directed slave owners to file birth certificates for their female slaves’ children within nine months of birth, at a cost of twelve cents.¹¹ The certificates contain genealogically relevant data

⁵ The New York State legislature passed laws regulating slavery in 1785 and 1788. See *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature [1777–1801]* . . . , 5 vols. (Albany: New York State, 1886–1887), 2:120–22, chap. 68, “An Act granting a bounty on hemp . . .” passed 12 Apr. 1785, and 2:675–79, chap. 40, “An Act concerning slaves,” passed 22 Feb. 1788. Following the 1817 law, which called for the abolition of slavery in ten years, additional state laws tweaked certain terms of earlier ones, such as those for abandonment (note 12, below). See *Laws of the State of New-York, Passed at the Forty-Second, Forty-Third and Forty-Fourth Sessions [1819–1821]* . . . , vol. 5 (Albany: William Gould & Co., 1821), 172–73, chap. 141, “An Act to amend an act entitled, ‘an act relative to Slaves and Servants,’” passed 9 Apr. 1819.

⁶ *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature [1777–1801]* (note 5), 4:388–89, chap. 62, “An Act for the gradual abolition of slavery,” passed 29 Mar. 1799, and 5:547–52, chap. 188, “An Act concerning slaves and servants,” passed 8 Apr. 1801. See subsequent sections for descriptions of laws.

⁷ Letter of John (Jack) Thomas from Concordy [Concordia] prison, 2 Aug. 1818, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 67, folder 1548 (Slavery, 1818).

⁸ “Certificate of Examination of Hannah a Black Woman Slave of James Ross Jnr,” Essex Co., N.J., 7 Oct. 1817, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 63, folder 1488 (Slavery, 1817).

⁹ Some post-1807 records mention events that occurred during the gap years.

¹⁰ The “Manumissions” folders were excluded because researchers looking for manumissions would be likely to check those folders. This project aims to increase accessibility of less clearly labeled resources.

¹¹ *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature [1777–1801]* (note 5), 4:388–89, “Certificate of birth to be filed.” The nine-month deadline was extended to one year in 1817. See *Laws of the State of New-York Passed at the Thirty-Ninth, Fortieth and Forty-First Sessions* . . . (Albany: New York State,

such as children's names and ages. Although the children were technically free, they were bound to serve their mothers' owners as indentured servants until age 28 for boys and 25 for girls. Within one year of a child's birth, a slave owner could opt to relinquish custody in a process legally termed "abandonment." If a slave owner abandoned a slave's child, custody transferred to the local overseers of the poor.¹² Slave owners were required to file birth certificates regardless of whether they kept or abandoned the children.

The Common Council Papers include only five slave birth certificates. Four were filed in the Town of Westchester (then part of Westchester County, annexed to New York City in 1895). One lacks a jurisdiction label. The slave owner who filed the unlabeled certificate, George Briggs, filed another in the Town of Westchester. His first certificate may also have been filed there.

To Basil T. Bartow: "Negro Wench Lil" had a child on 25 September 1799 named Lucie. [Signed] George Briggs, 19 June 1800.¹³

On 1 July 1801 "my Negro Wench Lil" had a child named Jane. [Signed] George Briggs, 16 March 1802, Westchester.¹⁴

West Chester, 17 May 1803. I John Bosin certify that "my Nigrow winch" Carline [Corline?] had a child called Hannah on 28 November 1802. [Signed] John Bussing.¹⁵

A "Nigrow woman named Jain a slave" had a child named Nancy on 11 June 1801. The birth "was Rigesterd on the Clerks Books in the Town of West Chester." I "abandon all my right and title to [the child's] servises" from this date. [Signed] Jacob Vermilya, West Chester, 12 July 1802.¹⁶

West Chester, 28 September 1802. I David Heustis certify that "my Nigrow wench Ginny" had a child called Tom on 3 April 1802. [Signed] David Heustce [*sic*].¹⁷

SLAVE DECLARATIONS

Slave owners who wished to move permanently to New York State with their slaves had to make an oath before a local official such as the mayor within

1818), 136–44, especially p. 137, Session 40, chap. 137, "An act relative to slaves and servants," passed 31 Mar. 1817.

¹² *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature [1777–1801]* (note 5), 4:389, "Abandonment by person entitled to service."

¹³ Slave birth certificate for Lucie, filed 19 June 1800, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 20, folder 578 (Slaves, 1800).

¹⁴ Slave birth certificate for Jane of Westchester, filed 16 Mar. 1802, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 21, folder 609 (Birth, Slaves, 1802).

¹⁵ Slave birth certificate for Hannah of Westchester, filed 17 May 1803, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 22, folder 637 (Birth, Slave, 1803). The certificate handwriting is distinct from the signature, which explains the markedly different spellings of "Bussing."

¹⁶ Slave birth certificate for Nancy of Westchester, filed 12 July 1802, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 139, folder 2416 (Slavery, 1802).

¹⁷ Slave birth certificate for Tom of Westchester, filed 28 Sept. 1802, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 139, folder 2416 (Slavery, 1802).

one year of arrival.¹⁸ As in customs declarations, slave owners specified their approximate dates of arrival, from where they came, and the names and ages of all slaves. They also had to swear that they owned their slaves during the year prior to arrival in the state. Some included additional details such as past travel, planned travel, and descriptors like “mulatto.”

In the Common Council Papers these documents carry a variety of names—declarations, slave declarations, and slave certificates, for example—but the content follows the same general format. Unless otherwise noted, the declarations abstracted below were filed in New York City and sworn before DeWitt Clinton during his tenure as mayor.

Silvein Dupont arrived in Baltmure on 12 April last “in the Schooner Adelina Capt. Collard from Gaudaloupe and proceeded to” the City of New York. He brought “two black negro women”: Marie Clarzi, age 22, and Zabetti[?] Adgee, age 28. [Signed] Dupont, 1 June 1808.¹⁹

On 6 June 1808 personally appeared Laure St. Martin, a resident of this city. She arrived “about five or six months ago” with a Negro slave Catharine, about 14. [This information repeated on verso. Signed on verso.] Laure St. Martin, 6 June 1808.²⁰

John B. Maupertius arrived in the City of New York “about three Months since from Gaudaloup” with a negro slave Figaro, about 13. [Signed] J. B. Maupertuis [*sic*], 24 August 1808.²¹

Joseph Decavery arrived in the City of New York on or about 1 November last from Gaudaloup with a Negro slave Thomas, about 18. [Signed] Decavery fausseccave [*sic*], 24 August 1808.²²

Anthony Brocarett arrived in the City of New York on or about 25 May last from Havanna with a negro slave Thomas, about 13, and “~~he intends~~

¹⁸ *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature [1777–1801]* (note 5), 5:548, “Importation of slaves.” This is distinct from a provision passed in 1813 in the identically named “An Act concerning Slaves and Servants,” which stipulated “That every person so importing or bringing in such slave, shall within six months thereafter, cause to be filed such certificate as is required in and by the twenty-second section of this act.” Section 22 is the section that required birth certificates for children of slaves born after 4 July 1799. See William P. Van Ness and John Woodworth, eds., *Laws of the State of New-York, Revised and Passed at the Thirty-Sixth Session of the Legislature*, 2 vols. (Albany: H. C. Southwick and Co., 1813), 2:201–9, chap. 88, “An Act concerning Slaves and Servants,” passed 9 Apr. 1813, especially p. 207, sect. 22, and p. 209, sect. 28.

¹⁹ “Dupont declaration,” 1 June 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808).

²⁰ Slave declaration of Laure St. Martin, 6 June 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808).

²¹ “J. B. Maupertius slave certificate,” 24 Aug. 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808).

²² “Joseph Decavery Slave Certificate,” 24 Aug. 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808). Joseph almost certainly corresponds to Joseph Fausse-Cave Decavery noted in “Ordonnance du Roi, en son conseil d’État, qui rejette une requête des nommés Casse, Gassier et Decavery, en règlement de de [*sic*] juges et en annulation d’un arrêté de l’ancien intendant de la Guadeloupe,” *Annales Maritimes et Coloniales*, vol. 24, ser. 2 (1839): 658.

~~to reside permanently in the said State~~ [crossed out in original]. [Signed] A^{ny} Brocuret [*sic*], 17 September 1808.²³

Elias Bloy arrived in the City [of] New York on or about 13 October from Havanna with negro slaves Maria Tesu, about 19, and Louisa Cally, about 18 months. [Signed] Elias Bloy, 29 October 1808.²⁴

Nicholas Darrell arrived in the City of New York on or about 27 October 1808 from Havanna with a mullatto slave George, about 23. [Signed] Nich^s. Darrell. Sworn 3 November 1808 before me, Jacob Mott, Deputy Mayor.²⁵

Yves Le Blanc arrived in the City of New York on or about 19 December inst. from the Island of Cuba with two negro slaves: Therese, about 18, and Sean, about 13. [Signed] Y. Le Blanc, 27 December 1808.²⁶

Thomas Mace arrived in the City of New York on or about 10 December last from Guadaloupe with a slave Titien, about 16. [Signed] Thomas Mace [Macey?], 22 February 1809.²⁷

Mary Martin sold a “Negro Slave Named Grand Lewis about ten Months since to Caille Desmares in Guadaloup which said Slave she has brought with her to the City of New York on Account of the said Caille Desmares as his legal property.” [Signed] Femme Martin. Sworn 7 March 1809 before me, Jacob Mott, Deputy Mayor.²⁸

Madam Montamat Le Blanc arrived in the City of New York on or about 15 April last from Cuba with a [male] negro slave Boilean, about 17. [Signed] M^r. LeBlanc, 13 May 1809.²⁹

Elizabeth Bertrand arrived in the City of New York on or about 15 May last from Bristol [interlined: “Rhode Island”] with two negro slaves: Marie Louise, about 19, and Silvye, about 16. [Signed] Elisabeth [*sic*] Bertrand, 23 May 1809.³⁰

Charles D’Espinville arrived in the City of New York on or about 20 May inst. from Havanna with negro slaves: Arnotte, about 18; Clementine,

²³ “A. Brocuret Slave Certificate,” 17 Sept. 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808).

²⁴ “Elias Bloy declaration of slave,” 29 Oct. 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808).

²⁵ “Nicholas Devirell [*sic*] Slave Declaration,” 3 Nov. 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808).

²⁶ “Yves Le Blanc Certificate of Slaves,” 27 Dec. 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808).

²⁷ “Tho^s Mace Declaration,” 22 Feb. 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980, (Slaves, 1809). The signature has a flourish at the end that may be a j.

²⁸ “Slave Grand Lewis,” 7 Mar. 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

²⁹ “Madam Montamat Declaration,” 13 May 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809). That Boilean was a male is based on the phrase “[she] owned *him*” (emphasis added) in the boilerplate language.

³⁰ “Elizabeth Bertrand Declaration,” 23 May 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

about 14; Irene, about 1; Cecile, about 8; Casimir, about 6; Joseph, about 2; and Candid, about 13. [Signed] Charles D'Espinville, 29 May 1809.³¹

Elizabeth Buford arrived in the City of New York on or about 15 July last from Charleston, South Carolina, with negro slaves London and Mary Ann, both about 16. [Signed] E – Buford, 1 June 1809.³²

James Bryden arrived in the City of New York on or about 25 April last from Baltimore with a mulatto slave Louisa, about 5. [Signed] Ja^s Bryden, 21 April 1809.³³

Jane Fradenburgh [*sic*] arrived in the City of New York on or about 29 October last from New Jersey with a negro slave Isabella Johnson, about 30. [Signed] Jane Vredenburg. Sworn 30 March 1809 before Jacob Mott, Deputy Mayor.³⁴

Madam Pⁿ Montamat arrived in the City of New York on or about 14 December last from Guadaloupe with a negro slave Rosette, about 15. [Signed] P. Roy Montamat, 15 February 1809.³⁵

Batian G Hipkins is travelling with a female slave Rachel Johnson, about 30, five feet, seven inches in height. [Signed] Batian G. Hipkins, 1 July 1815. [No signature of a city official].³⁶

Philip Camm of the Island of Trinidad “brought with me from said Island a Mulatto Slave Named Thomas” about 18, and “having arrived at this place for the Benefit of my health I intend to return with Said Slave Thomas in the space of six Months.” [Signed] Philip Camm. Taken 29 June 1818 before me, Cadwallader D Colden.³⁷

REMOVAL OF SLAVES FROM NEW YORK STATE: DEPOSITIONS, AFFIDAVITS, AND CERTIFICATES

Slave owners were permitted to leave New York State permanently with their slaves under certain conditions. Beginning in 1801, “An act concerning slaves and servants” required slave owners who intended to move from the state to prove that they had lived in the state and owned the slave or slaves for the

³¹ Slave declaration for Charles D'Espinville, 29 May 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

³² “Elizabeth Buford Declaration,” 1 June 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

³³ “Bryden’s Declaration,” 21 Apr. 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

³⁴ “Importation of Slave M^{rs} Fradenburgh [*sic*],” 30 Mar. 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

³⁵ Slave declaration for P. Roy Montamat, 15 Feb. 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

³⁶ Slave declaration of Batian G. Hipkins, 1 July 1815, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 57, folder 1366 (Slaves, 1815).

³⁷ “Declaration of Philip Camm,” 29 June 1818, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 67, folder 1548 (Slavery, 1818).

preceding year.³⁸ Slave owners who successfully proved their cases received licenses from local officials (for example, the mayor) granting them permission to leave the state with their slave or slaves. By 1813 the law required departing slave owners to show they had lived in the state for at least ten years and had owned their slave or slaves for the preceding ten years.³⁹ The 1813 law required testimony from two witnesses.

The Common Council Papers contain licenses, depositions, affidavits, and certificates related to the removal of slaves from the state. Those found in the examined folders are abstracted below. All were filed in New York City.

Lewis Scott Hay and William Hay are “severally acquainted” with Mrs. Martha Hay, a resident of this city for upwards of ten years. She owns and has owned and employed a negro female slave named Mary, about 16, for the preceding ten years. [Signed] L. S. Hay, W^m Hay. Sworn before me 8 November 1810, Jacob Radcliff.⁴⁰

[Date left blank] April 1816 appeared before me, Jacob Radcliff, Mayor, John Cumberland of this city. He has resided here for ten years “not preceding the present date.” During that period he has owned a female black slave, Charity, about 22. John Cumberland is about to reside permanently in Kentucky and desires to take the slave with him. Sworn before me, [blank] April 1816.

On [blank] April 1816 appeared Samuel Nichols of this city. He has been acquainted with John Cumberland for ten years. John Cumberland has been a resident of the city and owned and employed a black slave, Charity, about 22, for that period. Sworn [blank] April 1816, Jacob Radcliff.

Intending to reside permanently “in some other part of the U States,” J. Cumberland requested a license to take with him a black slave, Charity, about 22. I grant my licence to John Cumberland to take with him the said slave.⁴¹

I J. R. [Jacob Radcliff?], Mayor of the City of New York, certify that Margaret Roy of this city has proved, by the testimony of two witnesses, that she has resided in this city for twelve years and upwards, and that Rose, a female slave of colour, about 19, has been her property and in her service during all the said time. Margaret intending to remove permanently from this State [asterisk refers reader to note in margin: “to New Orleans . . . & desiring to take with her, the Said Slave, and the said Slave

³⁸ *Laws of the State of New York* [1777–1801] (note 5), 5:549, “Rights of persons traveling to be accompanied by slaves.”

³⁹ Van Ness and Woodworth, *Laws of the State of New-York . . . Passed at the Thirty-Sixth Session* (note 18), 2:204, “Inhabitants after a certain residence in the state.”

⁴⁰ “Affidavit of Lewis S. Hay & W^m Hay concerning a slave &c of Martha Hay,” 8 Nov. 1810, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 41, folder 1058 (Slaves, 1810). Although this record was generated prior to 1813, it follows the provisions outlined in the 1813 act (see note 39).

⁴¹ “Certif[?] to take Slaves out of the State,” Apr. 1816, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 60, folder 1428 (Slavery, 1816). The original boilerplate language includes several crossed-out portions, most significantly, “duly sworn upon the Holy Evangelists of Almighty.” Also, the scribe initially wrote that John Cumberland had resided in the city during the preceding ten years, then crossed out these portions and corrected them to say that Cumberland had lived in the city for ten years “not preceding the present date.”

being also willing & desirous to go with her said Mistress”] I license and permit her to carry the slave to New Orleans.⁴²

SLAVE RECOGNIZANCES

If a slave committed a crime not punishable by death or life imprisonment, the court could banish the slave from New York State as punishment.⁴³ The Common Council Papers include records of “recognizances” or “slave recognizances” wherein a slave owner or other person posted a bond guaranteeing that the slave would be sent out of state according to the set conditions. Genealogically relevant information includes the crime, approximate date of expulsion from the state, and names of the slave, owner, and surety.

On 15 October 1808 Robert Lenox of the City of New York, merchant, acknowledged himself to be indebted to the people of the State of New York in the sum of \$100 if default be made in the condition following: A pardon has been given for Henr^y Prince, a negro slave of Robert Lenox, for a grand larceny on condition that Henry Prince be transported from this state within ninety days from the 30th July last and shall not return within the same. [signed] DeWitt Clinton.⁴⁴

On 31 December 1808, Cornelius C Roosevelt of the City of New York, merchant, acknowledged himself to be indebted in the sum of \$100 if default be made in the condition following: A pardon has been given for Tom, a negro slave of Walter Evertson, for grand larceny, on condition that Tom be transported from this state within sixty days [interlined: “from the 8th day of November last”] and not return. Sworn 31 December 1808 before DeWitt Clinton.⁴⁵

On [blank] August 1809, John Maria Ovisé [the scribe originally wrote “Charles Deville” then recorded Ovisé’s name over it] of the City of New York, merchant, acknowledged himself to be indebted in the sum of \$100 if default be made in the condition following: A pardon has been given for “Jean Lewis a Negro slave of Charles Deville” for a misdemeanor on condition that Jean Lewis be transported from the state [interlined: “from the 10th day of July last the date of his pardon”] within sixty days and not return. Acknowledged 22 August 1809 before DeWitt Clinton.⁴⁶

⁴² “Form of Certificate to take Slave out of City,” undated, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 141, folder 2499 (Slavery, undated). The initials and handwriting on the document match those of Mayor Jacob Radcliff. If he issued the license, the document must date to 1810–1811 or 1815–1818, the years of Radcliff’s mayoral terms.

⁴³ *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature [1777–1801]* (note 5), 5:551–52, “Transportation on conviction of crime.” Although the law could order the expulsion of a slave from the state, it was ultimately the slave owner’s responsibility to arrange the slave’s transportation.

⁴⁴ Recognizance for slave Henry Prince, 15 Oct. 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808).

⁴⁵ Recognizance for slave Tom, 31 Dec. 1808, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 33, folder 908 (Slaves, 1808).

⁴⁶ Recognizance for slave Jean Lewis, 22 Aug. 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

On 18 January 1809 Joseph Loyd of the City of New York, merchant, acknowledged himself indebted in the sum of \$100 if default be made in the condition following: A pardon has been given for “Abraham a Negro Slave of Rodolphus Kent for a Grand Larceny” on condition that Abraham be sent out of this state within sixty days from 12 December last and never return. [Signed] Joseph Lloyd [*sic*]. Taken 18 January 1809 before Jacob Mott, Deputy Mayor.⁴⁷

On 16 June 1810 Alexander Kendrick and Saml P. Adriance acknowledged themselves to be indebted in the sum of \$500 if failure be made in the condition following: “Harry a Slave of John H Coventry was convicted of Grand Larceny at a General Sessions of the peace held in” the City of New York in February and sentenced to “the State Prison at hard labour for seven years.” On 12 June, Daniel D. Tompkins, governor of the State of New York, pardoned Harry on condition that within sixty days from 12 June, he leave the state and never return. Acknowledged before me, Jacob Radcliff.⁴⁸

The following recognizance is torn vertically and is missing the right side of the page. A transcription of the document follows:

City and County }
of New York } ss: Be it Remembered tha . . .
third day of June 181 . . .
Catharine Christie, William Hennessey . . .
400 Greenwich Street Laborer . and . . .
Roberts[?] of N° 11 Norh More [North Moore] . . .
Laborer[s?] Personally appeared before . . .
John FerguSon Mayor of the City . . .
Newyork & acknowledged them selves . . .
to the People of the State of Newy . . .
the Sum of One hundred Dolla . . .
levied & made of their respective G . . .
Chattels, lands & Tenements to the u . . .
People of the State of New York afor . . .
the said Catharine Christie Will . . .
Performing the condition following V . . .
The Conditin [*sic*] of their Recognizance is Such . . .
the above named Catherine Christie Wil . . .
People of the State of Newyork [two illegible letters] the Fir . . .
One Year next turning[?] the date hereof . . .
their Recognizance to be void, otherwise . . .

⁴⁷ Recognizance for slave Abraham, 18 Jan. 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

⁴⁸ Recognizance for slave Harry, 16 June 1810, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 41, folder 1058 (Slaves, 1810).

[Verso:] main in full force & virtue . [Signed] Catherine + he[r] m[ark][,]
 William + Henn . . . his mark[,]
 Ja^s. x Rober . . . his mark[,]
 Taken & acknowledged before me the day & year first above written
 [signed] Jn. [ink blot, possibly "Jn^o."] FerguSon⁴⁹

On 21 February 1817, John Eddo of New York City acknowledged himself to be indebted in the sum of \$100 if failure be made in the condition following: "John Grant a Black man" [identified as a slave on document label] has "been convicted of Grand Larceny" and sentenced to State Prison for five years. He has been pardoned on condition that, on release, he depart the State and never return. [Signed] Jacob Radcliff.⁵⁰

BILLS OF SALE

The Common Council Papers' "Slaves" and "Slavery" folders contain only three bills of sale. No bills of sale exist in the "Birth, Slave" or "Birth, Slaves" folders. All of the bills were filed in New York City and are abstracted below.

I Jamima Stout of the City of New York for \$175 sell to Jos^h C Hook of New York a negro boy, age 16 or thereabouts known as Abraham, for sixteen years. 12 May 1809, [signed] Jamima Stout. Witness: A. Butler, 23 May 1809.

[Handwritten on verso:] I assign all my right & title to Abraham "who now calls himself Thomas Cooper and has entered under that name on board the United States Vessel of War Ontario, Jesse. D. Elliot Esquire Commander, unto John R Shaw him faithfully to Serve for" ten years from 12 May 1815. [Signed] Jos^h. C. Hook, 29 April 1815. Witness: Wm Davidson.⁵¹

I Robert Carter of the City of New York sell to Samuel Mitchell, sugar maker of the same place, for \$50 a negro girl age 19 or thereabouts known as Betty. Samuel Mitchell shall manumit her two years from this date. 18 June 1814 [signed] Rob^t Carter. Witness: William Hutson.⁵²

I Josiah C Hook of the City of New York for \$100 sell to John R Shaw of the same city, Purser in the United States Navy, a negro boy age 22 "by the name of Abraham, who now calls himself Thomas Cooper" for ten

⁴⁹ "Recog—Wm Hennesey & Jas Roberts 3^d June 1815," 3 June 1815, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 57, folder 1366 (Slaves, 1815).

⁵⁰ "Recognizance of John Eddo for transportation of John Grant a Slave," 21 Feb. 1817, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 63, folder 1488 (Slavery, 1817).

⁵¹ "Jamima Stout Bill of Sale for Negro Boy" Abraham also known as Thomas Cooper, 23 May 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809). There is no explanation given for why witness A. Butler signed the document more than a week after Jamima Stout. For the bill of sale mentioned in the addendum on the reverse of this document, see note 53.

⁵² "Robert Carter to Samuel Mitchell Bill of sale" for slave Betty, 18 June 1814, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 54, folder 1313 (Slaves, 1814). The signature of William Hutson is a close, although not exact, match for the signature of William Hutson at note 64.

years “~~from the date hereof~~” [crossed out]. 29 April 1815. [Signed] Jos^h. C. Hook. Witnesses: John R Hedley, James Campbell.⁵³

MANUMISSIONS, CERTIFICATES, AND SUPPORTING DEPOSITIONS

As noted above, the bulk of manumission documents in the Common Council Papers are filed in “Manumissions” folders, which are not addressed here. Manumission documents from the “Slaves” and “Slavery” folders are abstracted below. The “Birth, Slave” and “Birth, Slaves” folders contain no manumissions. Unless otherwise noted, the following documents were filed in New York City.

Some manumissions are attached to certificates that attest the slave had been examined by officials—usually the mayor and city recorder—and was under a specified age and able to provide for him or herself. If a slave owner manumitted an older slave or one who was unable to care for him or herself, the local overseers of the poor could later bill the former owner for the cost of caring for that elderly or infirm free person. A slave owner who obtained a certificate of manumission confirming the slave’s age and abilities was exempt from having to pay. The qualifying age was 50 in 1801, but lowered to 45 in 1813.⁵⁴ All certificates of manumission in the Common Council Papers are dated after 1813 and contain the following line of boilerplate language:

“[The slave] appearing to be under 45 and of sufficient ability to provide for [him/herself], we have granted this Certificate.”

Proof hath been made before me that Nancy, a black woman about 60 and a resident of New York City, is free. “Intending to go out of this state,” she “desired this certificate of her freedom.” 31 August 1816 [signed] Jacob Radcliff, Mayor.⁵⁵

John Bancker of the City of New York “is well acquainted with a black woman called Nancy aged about sixty years” and has been for about sixteen years. Nancy is free, and has been for at least five years. She “was sold by her former Master for a period of service which hath long since expired” and “she hath always since enjoyed her freedom[.]” [Signed] Jn^o Bancker. Sworn 31 August 1816 before Jacob Radcliff.⁵⁶

I Thomas Payne of the City of New York manumit a female slave named Hetty Davis. 15 July 1816 [signed] Tho^s Payne. Witness: Geo^e W Morton.

⁵³ Bill of sale for slave Abraham also known as Thomas Cooper by Josiah C. Hook to John R. Shaw, 29 Apr. 1815, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 57, folder 1366 (Slaves, 1815). For more on this sale, see note 51.

⁵⁴ *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature [1777–1801]* (note 5), 5:547, “How slaves manumitted.” Van Ness and Woodworth, *Laws of the State of New-York . . . Passed at the Thirty-Sixth Session* (note 18), 2:201–9, chap. 88, “An Act concerning Slaves and Servants,” passed 9 Apr. 1813, particularly p. 202, “Unless he shall procure a certificate of the slave’s ability to provide for himself.”

⁵⁵ Certificate of freedom for Nancy, age 60, 31 Aug. 1816, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 60, folder 1428 (Slavery, 1816).

⁵⁶ Deposition by John Bancker regarding former slave Nancy, 31 Aug. 1816, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 60, folder 1428 (Slavery, 1816).

On 15 July 1816 [blank] appeared and acknowledged that he voluntarily executed the above instrument. [Signed] Jacob Radcliff.

[Attached Certificate of Manumission:] We, Jacob Radcliff, Mayor, and Richard Riker, Recorder, today examined a negro slave named Hetty Davis, the property of Thomas Payne, who is about to be manumitted. Certificate granted 15 July 1816. [Signed] Jacob Radcliff, RRiker.⁵⁷

I Abraham De Hart of Staten Island, County of Richmond, manumit my slave Lidia. 24 June 1817 [signed] Abraham Dehart [*sic*]. Witness: Geo. W. Morton. On 24 June 1817, Abraham De Hart appeared and acknowledged that he voluntarily executed the above instrument. [Signed] Jacob Radcliff.

[Attached Certificate of Manumission:] We, Jacob Radcliff, Mayor, and Richard Riker, Recorder, today examined a negro slave named Lidia, the property of Abraham De Hart, who is about to be manumitted. Certificate granted 24 June 1817 [signed] Jacob Radcliff.⁵⁸

I Jonas Mapes manumit one slave named Caty. 31 October 1817 [signed] J. Mapes. Witness: J. Morton. On 31 October 1817 [blank] appeared and acknowledged that he voluntarily executed the above instrument. [Signed] Jacob Morton, Master in Chancery.

[Attached Certificate of Manumission:] We, Jacob Radcliff, Mayor, and Richard Riker, Recorder, today examined one “Negro Slave named Caty, the property of Jonas Mapes,” who is about to be manumitted. Certificate granted [undated, not signed].⁵⁹

We, Jacob Radcliff, Mayor, and Richard Riker, Recorder, today examined one “Negro Slave named George, the property of John DeLancy,” who is about to be manumitted. Certificate granted 21 April 1817 [signed] Jacob Radcliff, R Riker.⁶⁰

[Torn in half horizontally, top missing:] . . . I relinquish all my right to Diana Tredwell as my slave. 27 May 1817 [signed] Margaret Ogden. Witness: Isaac G. Ogden. On 17 February 1818, Isaac G. Ogden appeared and deposed that he witnessed Margaret Ogden voluntarily sign and execute the above instrument. [Signed] Jacob Morton, Master in Chancery.

[Attached Certificate of Manumission, top missing:] . . . negro slave named Diana, the property of Margaret Ogden, who is about to be manumitted. Certificate granted 27 May 1817 [signed] Jacob Radcliff.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Manumission and certificate of manumission for “Hetty David [Davis]” by Thomas Payne, 15 July 1816, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 60, folder 1428 (Slavery, 1816).

⁵⁸ Manumission and certificate of manumission for Lidia by Abraham De Hart of Staten Island, 24 June 1817, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 63, folder 1488 (Slavery, 1817).

⁵⁹ Manumission and certificate of manumission for Caty by Jonas Mapes, 31 Oct. 1817, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 63, folder 1488 (Slavery, 1817).

⁶⁰ Certificate of manumission for George, slave of John DeLancy, 21 Apr. 1817, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 63, folder 1488 (Slavery, 1817). No corresponding manumission was found for this certificate.

⁶¹ Manumission and certificate of manumission for Diana Tredwell by Margaret Ogden, 27 May 1817 and 17 Feb. 1818, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 67, folder 1548 (Slavery, 1818).

Ellen Wilkins of the City of New York, a free woman of color, deposes that she “is well acquainted with Frances Taylor” of this city, “a woman of color aged twenty [two or three?] years on 11 October last past.” Frances is the deponent’s niece. Frances was, to the deponent’s knowledge, born a free woman, as “the Parents of Deponent and of the mother of said Francis [*sic*]” were a free man and free woman at their births. [Signed] Ellen Wilkins, “her + mark,” 14 August 1818. Sworn [before] R Riker.⁶²

John Morvatt of the City of New York is well acquainted with a colored man named Joseph, about 30 and free born. He was well acquainted with Joseph’s father and mother. Joseph “was bound by Indenture by his father to this deponent [*sic*]” when he was about 5 until age 21. “Joseph is Stout, Strong, and well made; his Skin is black and is about Five feet Ten Inches in height[.]” [Signed] John Morvatt, 20 October 1818. Sworn before Nathan B. Graham, Commissioner.⁶³

On 24 October 1818, William Hutson deposes “that he has been acquainted with Sarah Yard,” a colored woman about 38 and five feet, five inches tall, and believes she was born free. Deponent is acquainted with William Yard, son of Sarah, age 15, about four feet tall. He knows that William was born free. [Signed] W^m Hutson. Sworn before Cadwallader D Colden.⁶⁴

On 6 March 1819, Dandridge Claiborne of New York City deposes “that he is well acquainted with a certain mulatto girl named Anne Keese having lived near her parents in Washington City and truly believes her parents to be free persons both of them having been born free.” [signed] Dandridge + Claiborne, his mark. Sworn before W. E. Gallaudet, Notary Public.⁶⁵

I John Delafield manumit a slave named Thomas Adams. 15 July 1820 [signed] Jn^o. Delafield. Witness: R H Delafield. On 15 July 1820, John Delafield appeared and acknowledged that he voluntarily executed the above instrument. [signed] Rob^t Swartwout, Deputy Mayor.

[Attached Certificate of Manumission:] We, Robert Swartwout, Deputy Mayor, and P. A. Tay[?], Recorder, today examined a “negro slave named Thomas Adams[,] the property of John Delafield,” who is about to be

⁶² “Deposition of Ellen Williams [Wilkins] respecting Freedom of Frances Taylor,” 14 Aug. 1818, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 67, folder 1548 (Slavery, 1818).

⁶³ Deposition of John Morvatt on the freedom of Joseph, 20 Oct. 1818, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 67, folder 1548 (Slavery, 1818).

⁶⁴ Deposition of William Hutson on the freedom of Sarah Yard, 24 Oct. 1818, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 67, folder 1548 (Slavery, 1818). The signature of William Hutson is a close, although not exact, match for the signature of William Hutson at note 52.

⁶⁵ “Deposition [of Dandridge Claiborne] respecting Ann [Anne] Keese a Mulatto girl going to Charleston S.C.,” 6 Mar. 1819, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 73, folder 1606 (Slavery, 1819).

manumitted. Certificate granted 15 July 1820 [signed] Rob^t Swartwout, Deputy Mayor.⁶⁶

A black woman, Phillis Colden, “is the Slave of the heirs of Mr. Roe” of “Cornwell [*sic*],” Orange County. Heirs William and Peter Roe, grocers of this city, “may attempt to manumit her” here. “She has a bastard child,” about 3. An application has been made to the almshouse for her support. 14 March 1818 [not signed].⁶⁷

MISCELLANEOUS

Here follow abstracts of the remaining documents found in the “Slaves” and “Slavery” folders. The documents vary substantially, ranging from personal letters to depositions. Documents were filed in New York City unless otherwise noted.

Permit to drive, Benjamin Smith Junior:

A license has “been given by the Deputy Mayor of the City of New York to Benjamin Smith [interlined: ‘Jr’],” age 16. I Benjamin Smith of this city “agree to indemnify and Save harmless all persons who may employ” Benjamin Smith Jnr. “from all loss & damage that may happen by reason of any neglect or misfeazance” of Benjamin Smith Jnr. as a cartman. 13 March 1809 [signed] Benjamin Smith. Witnesses: Peter Ogilvie Jun^r., Jacob Mott, Deputy Mayor.⁶⁸

Three documents on Mr. DuBuc de Marentille of Guadaloupe and his slaves:

Mr Debuc brought Slaves “from the West Indies.” As he is “a transient person, I told him that a written declaration was unnecessary.” Due to obstacles that prevented his departure to Gaudaloupe, “I consider him as a Sojourner and transient person as to this State.” [Signed] DeWitt Clinton, 14 April 1810.⁶⁹

Slaves of Mr. Debuc: Margaret, mullatto; her four children, Sophie, Lise, Aline, and Thomas; Phillis, mulatto girl; two mulatto boys, Francois and Alphonse; Carolie, negro woman, and her daughter Marie; Pauline, negro woman; and Etienne, negro man.⁷⁰

I came to New York in 1808 from “Elizabeth town [*sic*],” New Jersey, where I have resided without interruption since 1799, for the “purpose of

⁶⁶ Manumission and certificate of manumission for Thomas Adams by John Delafield, 15 July 1820, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 77, folder 1668 (Slavery, 1820).

⁶⁷ Letter respecting slave Phillis Colden to be manumitted, 14 Mar. 1818, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 67, folder 1548 (Slavery, 1818).

⁶⁸ Permit to drive for Benjamin Smith Jr., 13 Mar. 1809, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 37, folder 980 (Slaves, 1809).

⁶⁹ Letter regarding sojourner Mr. Debuc by DeWitt Clinton, 14 Apr. 1810, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 41, folder 1058 (Slaves, 1810).

⁷⁰ Slaves of Mr. Debuc, undated (likely 1810), Common Council Papers (note 3), box 41, folder 1058 (Slaves, 1810).

enabling me to [page torn] learn immediatly [*sic*] if possible that [page torn] for the west indies.” Circumstances opposed my departure, chiefly “the embargo from the State in which the island of [Guadeloupe,] where I have my estates[,] happened to b[e] placed[.]” I offered to make a written [slave] declaration to Mayor DeWitt Clinton. He said it was unnecessary as I was a Soujourner [*sic*]. I came through New York only with the intention of going to Guadeloupe. “I ask a permit to embark” with my slaves, who “have belonged to me since my departure from Guadeloupe or since their infancy. the said departure in the year 1792.” They are Marguerite, mulatto; her four children; mulatto girl philis; mulatto boys francois and Alphonse; negro woman Coralie; her daughter, negro woman pauline; and negro man Etienne. [Signed] DuBuc de Marentille. Signed and sworn before John W. Mulligan, Public Notary, City of New York, 16 April 1810.⁷¹

Letter from William Turpin and the Charleston, South Carolina, City Council to the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of New York:

[To] “the Mayer & Aldermen of the City of New York”: The American Consul in London shipped twenty-five distressed American seamen to New York on “the Brig Sommerset Cap^t Steevins.” The Brig arrived in Charleston on 24 February. The Brig bringing all colored people, they have been advertised and “Committed to Prison as Runaway Negroe Slaves.” Six claim to be free citizens of New York.⁷²

N^o 1 is John Brown, age 46. He left New York “3 years past in the Brig two Sisters Cap^t Hawkins the Brig belonged to Gouverneur & Clinton, was cast a way on S^t Domingo, he could not get a Passage home he went to Jamaica” then London, and was discharged. Born in Brooklyn and known in New York, “he Refers you to Bishop Provost & Lawyer Ludlow.”

N^o 2 is James Blake (called John Blake in the advertisement),⁷³ age 30, “born at N^o 7 State Street, Albana [*sic*]” and a resident of that place. He “left Esopus last may in the Ship Tyhis[?] Cap^t Purchase who Left him sick in Livirpoole . . . he Refers to Van Ransleer & John Blake State Street Albana.”

N^o 3 Henry Riment (called Henry Raymond in the advertisement), age 26, born in New Rochelle. “[F]rom 10 years old Livid in New York with Cap^t Henry Delvey (who now Sails out of France). 3 years ago left New York in the Shark Privateer with . . . Cap^t Delvey, was discharged in Beaufort North Carolina then Ship d [shipped] in Newburn in the Hero Privateer Cap^t Waterman was sent a Shore Sick at Fyall [*sic*] the American Consul sent him to Medeira then in an English Ship went to Indies

⁷¹ Deposition of DuBuc de Marentille, 16 Apr. 1810, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 41, folder 1058 (Slaves, 1810).

⁷² Contrary to this statement, the letter lists seven men.

⁷³ The advertisement is not in the folder, but the letter refers to it and states where names differ.

Returned to London was discharged.” Born free, he “Refers to Lawyer Munro & Burgodus.”⁷⁴

N^o 4 Moses Coe, “born at Harmel near the Bridge,” resident chiefly of Rye. “[I]n May he saild in the Brig Critiorun [Criterion] Cap^t Shearborn of Portsmouth to Hampton Roads Loned [Landed] with Tobacco at Richmond went to London.” Known in “Rye[,] the Saw Pitts & the Purchase.”

N^o 5 John Thomas, age 25, born in Flushing. Lived “5 years with Abram Prawl Merchant he is also Known to Devinport Son of Devinport member of Congress & to Peter Ratlif[.] 9 Years ago saild from NewYork in the Brig Ceris Cap^t Wood he was . . . Prissed on Board a British Ship in Jamaica_ & in Livirpool when the War Commenced he claimd the Right of an American Citizen and Surrenderd himself a Prisoner and was put on bord a Prison Ship & was Set at Liberty by saving the Life of a Midshipman that fell over Board.”

N^o 6 Daniel Lasley (called Daniel Ashbey in the advertisement), age 30, always a tailor, born in New York. Known “to M^r Livingston & M^r St Clair of Harlem[.] Saild from N York in 1804 in the Eulus Cap^t Simons for New Orleans. . . . Captured at Buonus Aris & in 1814 Prised by the Niaris Frigate” and then went to London.

N^o 7 John Ensley (called John Hensley in the advertisement, alias Ansley), born in the City of New York and raised in Providence, Rhode Island.

The men are confined in the House of Correction “where Slaves are dailey sent to be Tyed up & Whiped[.]” If you wish me to “proceed agreeable to your direction,” it must be soon “as I intend to be in New York in May to Spend the Summer[.]”

Charleston, March 10th 1817 [signed] Will^m Turpin.

City Counsel of Charleston: Elias Horry, Intendant; Ward N^o 1, C R Greene, H H Barot, J Haslet; Ward N^o 2, Jos S Lovill [Lovell?], W Crafts; Ward N^o 3, HCMichell, W^m Wilson, S J Chancognie; Ward N^o 4, Peter Wyall [Wyatt], S Thomas, B A Markley, Stephen West Moore, Intendant; [illegible]; “Titus Delancy added to this list by the Chairman.”⁷⁵

Certificate of examination for Hannah, slave of James Ross Junior of Essex County, New Jersey:

Essex County, New Jersey. On 7 October 1817, James Ross Jn^r, “who has resided and done business in Savanah . . . Georgia for several years past”

⁷⁴ This is likely a misspelling of “Bogardus.” Two Bogardus attorneys were documented in Longworth’s New York City directory for 1817, the year this letter was written: John L. Bogardus, attorney and nota. [notary], 68, h. 146 Cherry, and R. Bogardus, attor [attorney] and couns. [counselor] 58, h. 56 Cherry. See *Longworth’s American Almanac and New-York Register, and City Directory* . . . (New York: David Longworth, 1817), 117.

⁷⁵ Letter from Charleston City Council to New York City Mayor and Aldermen on imprisoned free black men, 10 Mar. 1817, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 63, folder 1488 (Slavery, 1817). A separate item in the folder appears to have been fashioned into a packet to hold this and possibly additional documents. The packet sheet is labeled “In C-C [Common Council] March 24, 1817 Rend[?] & Merger requested to reply to Letter J. M. Cook.”

appeared with “a Black Woman purchased by him of Doctr. Joseph Quinly of Westfield,” Essex County. Ross wishes to return to Savannah with her and resume his business there. The black woman “privately examined by us” was 21 “the latter part of November or about 3 weeks before Christmas” 1816, is named Hannah, wishes to accompany her master, and “was not Constrained by fear or Threats” upon consent. Taken the above date [signed] Samuel Downer, John Mann, Judges of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas, Essex County.⁷⁶

Three documents on John (Jack) Thomas, a free black man of New York, imprisoned as a fugitive slave in Concordia, likely Concordia Parish, Louisiana (initial letter transcribed below, with subsequent documents abstracted):

Concordy August 2nd 1818} Dear frendes i take this Oppertunity to right to you that i am in prison in this plase. on surspisheon as a runaway and i want You to be as expeditious as you canand [can and] send memy [me my] Pertection and papers and mother you go to [illegible crossed out, interlined: “Charles Cox”] And get my protection[;] mr mabee you please to Go to the recorde office and get memy papers if you Please get them copied from the old ones of those that Mother has got . and when you right derrect The letter to m^r miller the shurref of concordy This plase is oppersit the city of natchez and is About three hundred miles a bove ~~new~~ New or(leans) [sic] there is two black girls says that tha know me and i was belonging to such a man and was sold to such a man and was in Joail [jail] in some partes [interlined: “some parrt”] of the world this way and that makes it go harder for me then it would[.]

[Continued on verso:] Dear mother when i left new york i traveled to the city of Albany to se if i could get any implaument [employment] but i cou[d] not . andthen i traveled to bufalow [Buffalo] and could not get any thing to do there. and then i traveled to old [illegible crossed out] lean Point and went down the alagana [Allegheny] river and so Down the ohio-[interlined: “river”] and so down the mississippi [interlined: “river”] and was coming home by water [seven words crossed out] M^r mabee When y send memy papers let me know how the famaly is and how breedels [beedels?] famaly is and Jacob’s [interlined: “and”] myers Framalies is and old mrs banta and my goand [grand] mother and mah [smudged] mother and brother and sister and let me know if mr Pierpoint is got home[.]

Dear mother iam in a poor state of health at this time.

[signed] John Thomas [again, same handwriting] Jack Thomas⁷⁷

23 September 1818. M^r Mabie of this city received a letter from colored man John Thomas, detained at Concordia. Mr. Mabie manumitted a John

⁷⁶ “Certificate of Examination of Hannah a Black Woman Slave of James Ross Jn^r” (note 8).

⁷⁷ Letter of John (Jack) Thomas from Concordy [Concordia] prison (note 7).

Thomas in 1806 and “has no doubt but that he is the Same person[.]” Mr. Mabie’s enclosed deposition will be sufficient for Thomas’s discharge. If anything should prevent it, inform me “as his case excites Some interest here.” [signed] J. Morton. [in corner] Direct to Major Genl. J. Morton, City of N. York. Miller Esq, Sheriff Concordia, opposite to Natches.⁷⁸

On 23 September 1818, Frederic Mabie, “a respectable citizen” of the City of New York, appeared before me, Cadwallader D. Colden, Mayor. He deposed that he owned a slave John Thomas “who was born in his family.” Thomas is now 20–22 years of age, about five feet, eight inches, mulatto, “a likely good looking fellow and has a scar on one cheek on side of his head” and was manumitted 10 May 1806 by deponent. Deponent learned by letter that Thomas went down the Mississippi. The deponent has seen Thomas write, and believes the letter was written by him. Thomas “is now detained at Natchez as a Runaway Slave.” Sworn before me [no signature].⁷⁹

ON LOCATING ADDITIONAL RECORDS

Researchers may find the record types described in this article in various repositories, including some outside the areas in which the records were created. Bills of sale, for example, may be found in museums, historical societies, town records, state archives, and collections at historic homes that once belonged to slave owners. Some record types were created in multiple formats, which could explain the lack of consolidation. Licenses to leave the state were given to slave owners, but local officials may have kept informal copies. Some families retained historically significant documents, such as manumissions and bills of sale, in their private papers. A thorough search for any of these record types may cover more than a dozen repositories.

Indexes, abstracts, and transcriptions of manumissions and slave birth certificates from various New York cities and towns have been published in peer-reviewed journals.⁸⁰ Publications related to recognizances, slave declarations, and licenses to leave the state have not been found.

⁷⁸ Letter on the care of John Thomas by J. Morton, 23 Sept. 1818, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 67, folder 1548 (Slavery, 1818).

⁷⁹ Deposition of Frederic Mabie by Cadwallader D. Colden on the freedom of John Thomas, 23 Sept. 1818, Common Council Papers (note 3), box 67, folder 1548 (Slavery, 1818).

⁸⁰ Alice Eichholz and James M. Rose, compilers, “New York State Manumissions,” *RECORD* 108 (1977): 221–25. William A. Harris, “Records Related to Slave Manumissions: Pelham, New York,” *RECORD* 123 (1992): 145–47. Terri Bradshaw O’Neill, “Manumissions and Certificates of Freedom in the New York Secretary of State Deeds,” *RECORD* 139 (2008): 72–73. Kenneth Scott, “Manumissions in Kings County, New York, 1797–1825,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 65 (1977): 177–80. Kenneth Scott, “Slaves’ Birth Records, Kings County, N.Y., After 1800,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 66 (1978): 97–103.