



New York State  
Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation

# Overview of the Institution of Slavery in New Netherland/New York

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# A Few Facts:

- 22 African men taken from a Portuguese ship arrived via a Dutch Privateer and were purchased for the Dutch West India company on August 29, 1627. They were the first enslaved.
- In 1750 New York state had the 5th largest slave population in the 13 colonies.
- In 1770 there were more enslaved persons in New York state than in Georgia.
- New York was the largest slave holding state in the North and slavery lasted longer than in any other Northern state besides New Jersey.
- New York City was the second largest slave market in the colonies. The emphasis on trading and supplying slaves to Southern, Caribbean/West Indies markets began during the Dutch period. The last slave trader based in New York was hanged in 1861. Lincoln refused to pardon him.
- Enslaved people were frequently traded and rented out to neighbors, so the number of enslavers across New York and those using their labor was greater than statistics would suggest.
- Slaveholders could just set people free. There was a costly and complicated process to manumit someone which began in 1712 and ended in 1799 with the Act of Gradual Abolition.
- Legal slavery ended on July 4, 1827, but it did not free all those held in bondage. The last person was freed in 1841, and current research indicates he may not have been the last.



# What most learned/are learning in school

- 13 Colonies – North and South
- Slavery was mostly in the South
- They lived and worked on plantations picking cotton or tobacco in the South and Sugar in the Caribbean West Indies
- They lived in small cabins behind the “big house”
- It was against the law to teach an enslaved person to read or write.
- They were owned by wealthy plantation/landowners, otherwise very few people held them.



# If New York is mentioned at all ...

- There were very few people here and most were in New York City.
- It was a “kinder” form of slavery than in the South, especially during the Dutch period.
- NY was part of the Underground Railroad making it a ‘safe’ place for freedom seekers to run through or live.
- Most of the Underground Railroad support was given by White Quakers, who were always against slavery.

*All untrue.*



# New Netherland – 1624 (settlement)

Three sections

- North – England
- MIDDLE

Dutch West India Company

- New Netherland -

*New York, New Jersey,  
Delaware, northern  
Pennsylvania & southern  
Connecticut*

- South - England

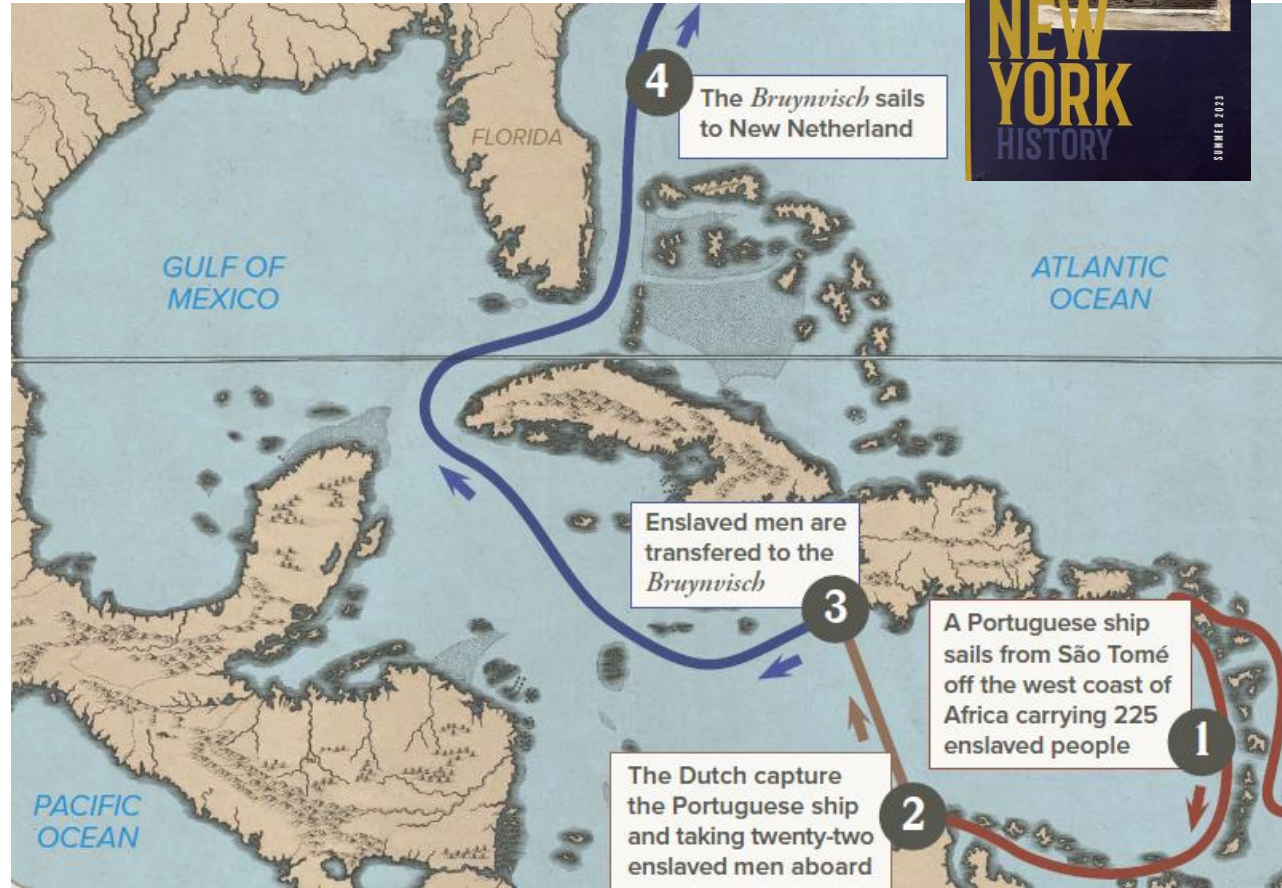


# August 29, 1627

## *The First Arrival of Enslaved Africans in New Amsterdam*

Dr. Jaap Jacobs, 2023

22 of the healthiest African men were taken off a Portuguese ship by Dutch privateers, and taken to New Amsterdam, New Netherland. Purchased by the Dutch West India Company (WIC).



# One System Growing Worldwide *Not* Dutch vs British

Slavery is generally introduced during the 1700s when the British early years of *“how do we do this”* had ended.

This placement gives the impression that there were two slave systems in New York, which is not true. We just do not discuss the British early years, because they did not affect New Netherland’s development.

But we do see the Dutch, because we are founded by the Dutch West India Company.

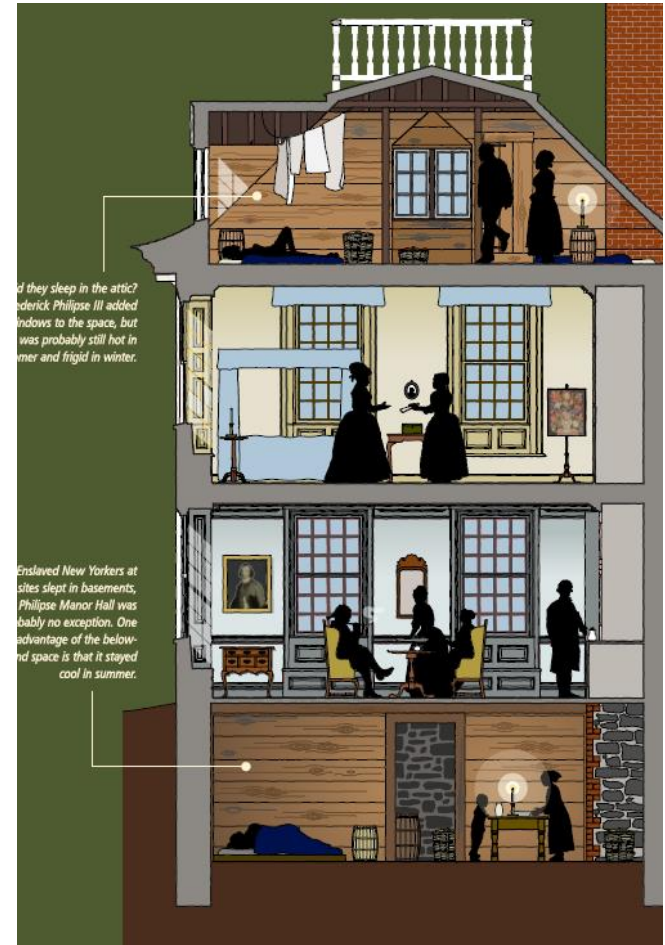


# The Institution of Slavery - The People

- **Central West Africa** - Angola, Kingdom of Kongo (Bantu speakers) – The largest portion throughout the time of enslavement.
- **West Africa** -
  - Senegambia region (Pular or Malinke speaking [Madingo] groups;
  - Bambara speakers-Wolofs, Fulbe, or Fulani;
  - Akan speakers, Ashanti from the rain forest areas,
  - New Calabar region (Ibo or Ijo)
- **East Africa** - Island of Madagascar

## ***Other things to note:***

- Held by people throughout Society – Elite Class, Tenant Farmers, Merchants, Craftsmen, and others
- Commonly held in small numbers 1-2 people – but larger holdings exist. 80% Rural – 20% Urban
- Usually lived within the slaveholder's house (garrets/attics & basements)
- No literacy laws in New York – multilingual (heavily Dutch & English), educated or not, literate and illiterate Examples:
  - Jupiter Hammon-first published Black poet, enslaved in Long Island
  - Sojourner Truth – first language Dutch - illiterate her entire life



# The Institution of Slavery - The Economy/Labor

## Seeing the enslaved in Rural New York - Agriculture: Plantations vs Manor System

Southern Style – Planation

George Washington's Mt. Vernon

- 50,000 acres
- Worked as a single farm with a resident labor force (317 enslaved)
- Cash Crop tobacco, cotton (sugar) Crops that require a lot of labor and a lot of tending.



Southern Planter Class – Wealthy slaveholders



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# New Netherland Patroons, New York Manors, Patens & Farms

The 'Lord of the Manor' – a legal title use for generations in many families.

## The Manor of Philipsburg

- 52,000 acres
- Two Manor Houses  
& Two Mill  
Complexes
- Philipse Manor Hall  
Controlled 300 acres around  
house - Mill ran 3 sets of  
stones
- Philipsburg Upper Mills  
Controlled 500 acres around  
house - Mill ran 2 sets of  
stones



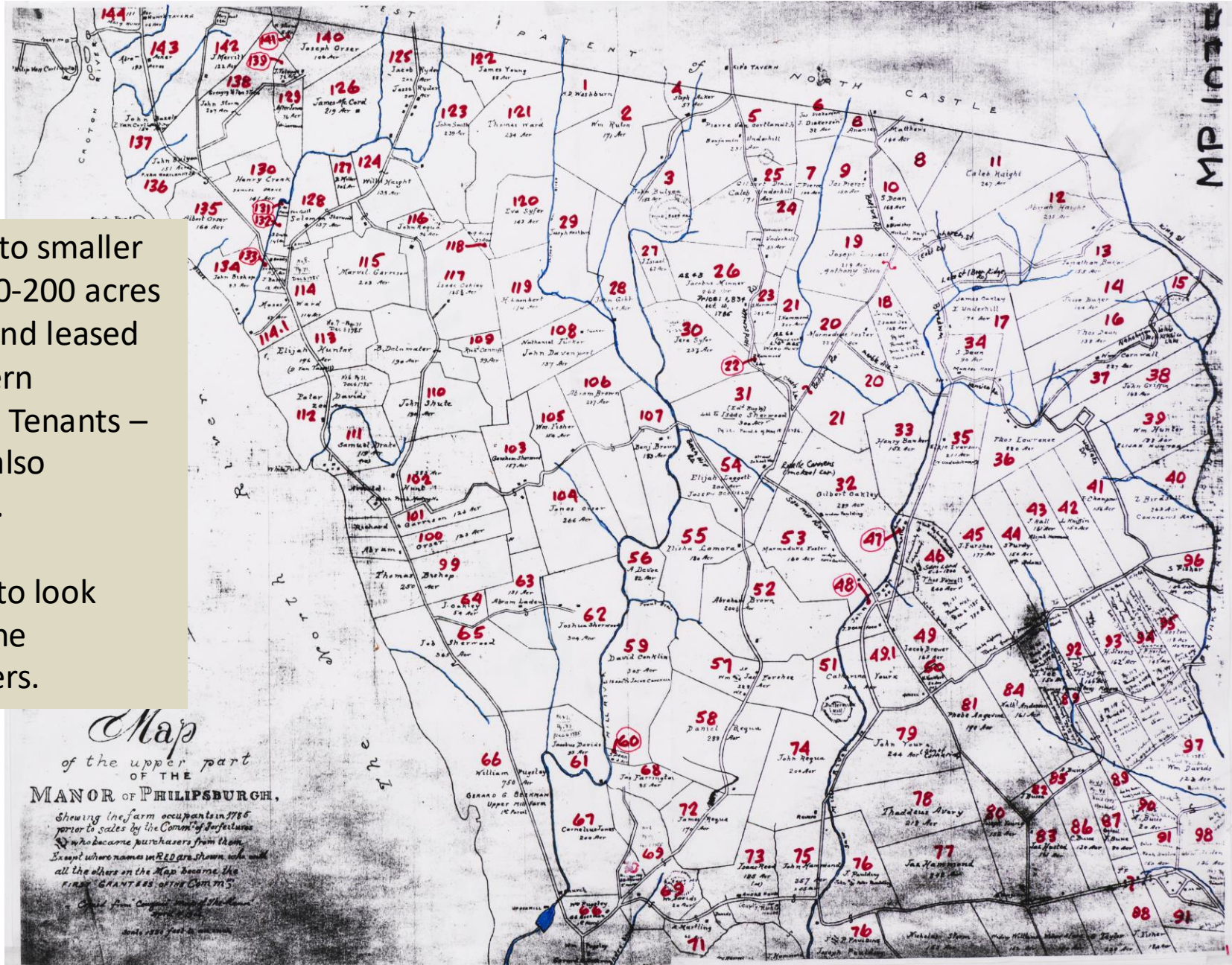
***The rest...51,200 acres***



# The Upper Part of the Manor of Philipsburgh – There is a Lower section!

Broken into smaller Farms 150-200 acres average and leased to Northern European Tenants – who are also enslavers.

We have to look beyond the landowners.



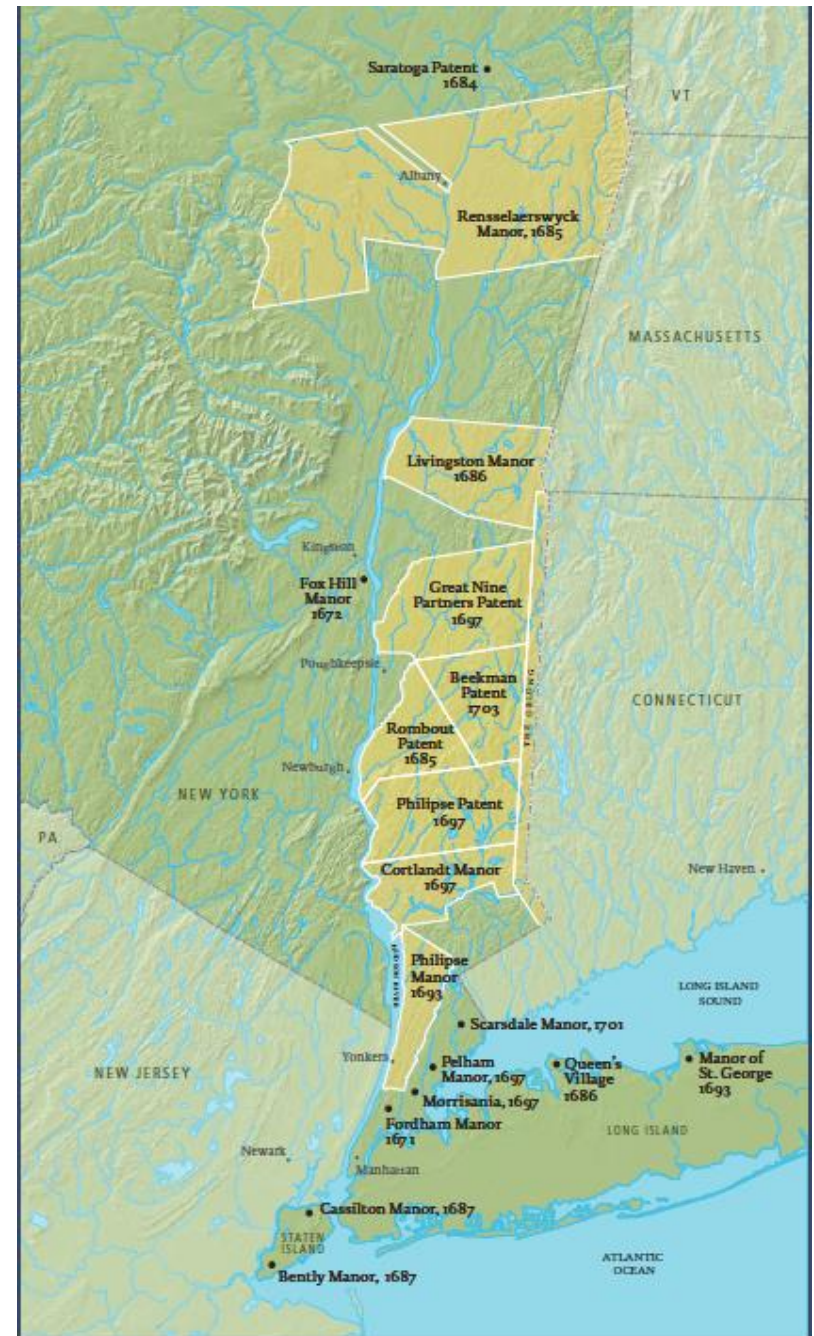
Introduced by the Dutch West India Company as Patroons – a Medieval System where a few people held large tracts of land and were responsible for populating them and making them profitable.

Begun in the 1630s - ended in the 1830s

Designed to increase trade and wealth  
New York's Manor and Patent system covered most of the colony.

Three not shown: Sylvester Manor, Shelter Island; Winthrop's Fisher's Island and the Manor of Gardiner's Island

Freeholds: the land between the Manors & Patents are large farms, run like the Manors and also spaces of enslavement.



# Cash Crop - Wheat

- Grown from the mid-1630s until mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Sown like grass in late fall, and required little attention during the growing season – winter/spring/summer.
- All hands-on deck for harvest – mid-August.
- Allowed tenant farmers to have smaller labor force to care for – holding 1-2, larger farms up to 10-20
- Milled throughout the colony/state. Many millers were enslaved Blacks.
- Allowed for the enslaved to be used for multiple tasks including additional agriculture, commercial fishing, constructions, and other jobs.
- Not native to West Central or West Africa – wheat was the dominate grain of Northern Europe. It had to be mastered by enslaved cooks. It is in every meal.



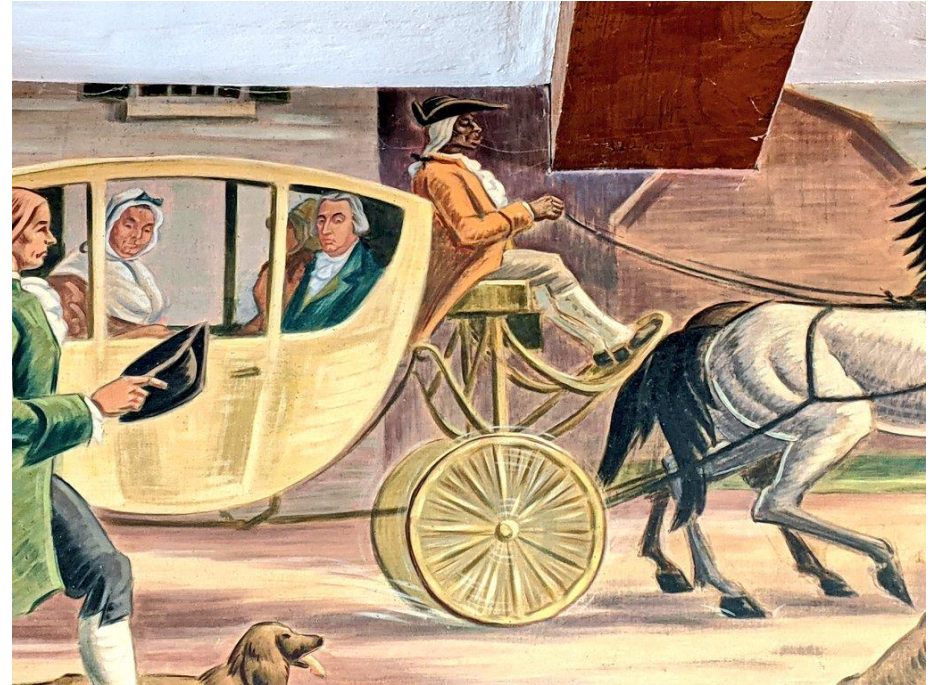
## Urban Spaces – NYC and Albany

### *The “Servants” – enslaved Africans and Descendants*

One out of three households are *not* spaces of enslavement.

It is easier to say who was a slaveholder than to identify those who were not. Including the founders of the New York Manumission Society.

Important to look at women’s papers as well as men when looking at historic documents.



Mural from Rhinebeck Public Library



## *Things to Note*

- Two slave insurrections – 1712 & 1741
- Slave Codes – written and adhered to
- Gifting young children to White children was a common practice
- African spiritual traditions maintained
- Pinkster – oldest African celebration is New York History!



## The issue with NYC and skewed view of Slavery

Many books, papers, movies, databases, etc. only focus on slavery in New York City. This skews the picture.

*Why does this continue to happen?*

The concentration of historic documents in large collections in a small geographical area. Easier for historians and scholars to do research.

This emphasis includes the lower Hudson Valley, however this narrow view is creating major issues.

*It is leaving out A LOT!*



# Up the Mohawk Valley – Spaces of Enslavement continue

As the population grows, slavery follows –

- Palatines – become slaveholders
- Southerners relocating post Rev War bring slaves with them. (Rochester, etc.)
- The Institution of Slavery – people and economy cover the state.



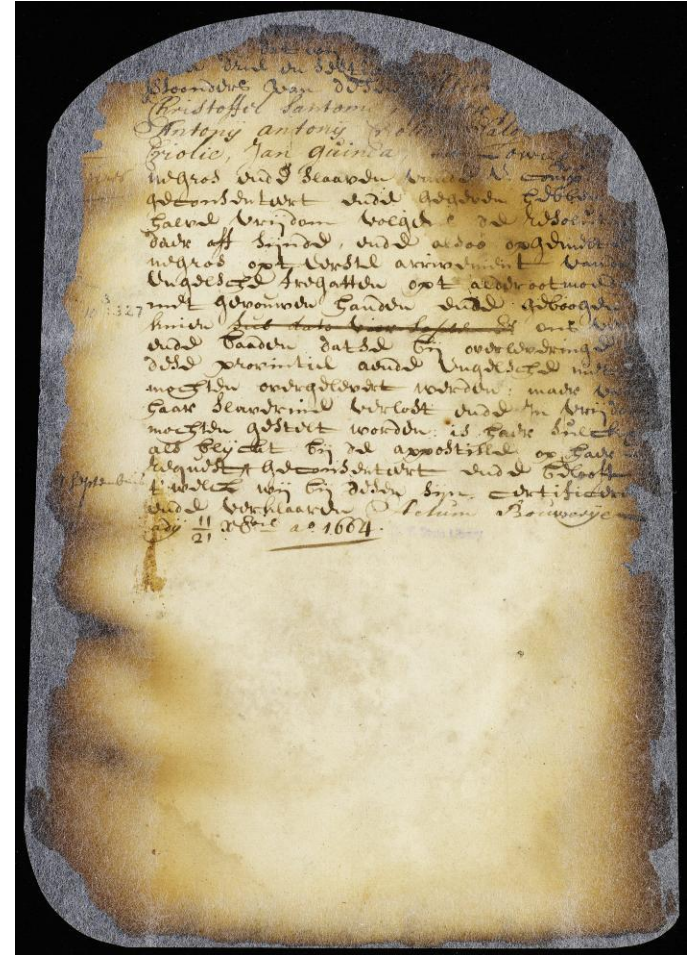
# How to Free an Enslaved Person

Manumission – 1712 requirement - a £200 bond posted for every slave freed

From 1712-1717 – the slaveholder also had to pay £20 pounds per year to the newly freed.

Paying this bond was the major purpose of the NY Manumission Society.

Ended in 1799.

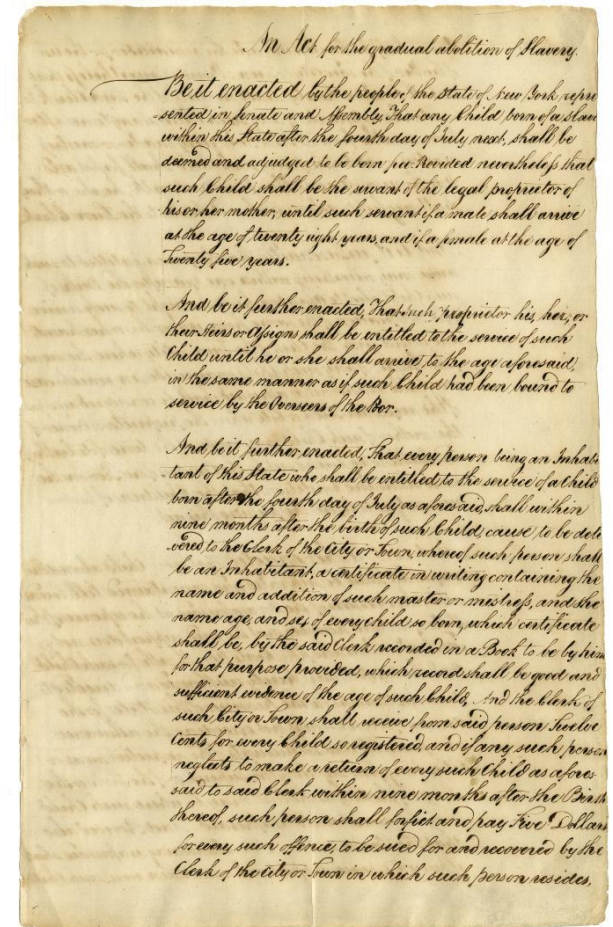


Full freedom for the half-free. NY State Archives



# 1799 Act of Gradual Abolition - Step One

- No end date for legal slavery
- Does not apply to anyone born before July 4, 1799
- Children of enslaved woman are born free but reclassified to “indentured servants” and are bound to their mother’s enslavers until they are:
  - Females – 25
  - Males – 28
- The Act allows slaveholders to abandon children to the Poor Masters – who give them back and pay them to care for them.
  - This lasts for three years until the costs become too high. Only retained for disabled children.
- Act is designed to favor slaveholders, and not free people until 1848.



## 1817 – Act Relative for Servants and Slaves – Step Two

- Sets July 4, 1827 as the legal end of slavery.
- Covers people born before July 4, 1799. However, it still does not free a lot of the bound servants, since they are not technically “slaves”
- Changes age to freeing bound children to 21
- Last person freed 1841. Research ongoing, maybe 1842, and some may never have been freed.

...tid as though the parties thereto were free, and the child, or children, of any such marriage shall be deemed legitimate: provided, that nothing in this Section contained, shall be deemed or construed to manumit any such Slave or Slaves.

And be it further Enacted, that no Slave shall be a witness in any case, except for or against another Slave, in criminal cases.

And be it further Enacted, that every child born of a Slave within this State, after the fourth day of July, in the year of our Lord One thousand seven hundred and ninety nine, shall be free, but shall remain the Servant of the owner of his or her mother, and the executor, administrators or Assigns, of such owner, in the same manner as if such child had been bound to Service by the overseers of the poor, and shall continue in such Service, if a male, until the age of twenty Eight years, and if a female, until the age of twenty five years: and that every child born of a Slave within this State after the passing of this act shall remain a servant until the age of twenty five years.

And be it further Enacted, that every person entitled to the Service of any child, under and by virtue of this Act, shall, before such child shall arrive at the age of Eighteen years, teach such child, or cause to be taught, to read, so that it may be able to read the holy scriptures, or shall give such child, between the ages of ten and Eighteen, four quarters



# Enslavement to Freedom

1627 – 1827 – 2027

*Thank you!*



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