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archives



Vital
Lighthouse
Shines On

ALSO INSIDE:
Chinatown Movies
Last Enslaved Person
Sea Lions

Indentured Paupers

A newly digitized series helps researchers find children who were enslaved.

BY JAMIE BRINKMAN

On March 29, 1799, New York State passed an act for the gradual abolition of slavery. While the act stated that any child born to an enslaved person after July 4, 1799, would be deemed free, this was not completely true.

Before gaining their freedom, a child would become an indentured servant to their enslaver until the age of twenty-eight if they were male and twenty-five if they were female. Additionally, the law stated that an enslaver could abandon their rights to the child's services within the first year of their life. If the enslaver chose to do so, the child would then be considered a pauper and could be bound, or contracted, out as apprentices or servants by the overseers of the poor in their respective town. Each town in the state elected two overseers who were responsible for distributing relief funds provided by the state. Often the child would be bound out to their former enslaver, essentially giving the enslavers both the services of the child they abandoned and money from the state for their upkeep, room, and board. The 1799 law stated that the children would be supported by a maximum of \$3.50 a month, roughly \$77.50 today.

The law would change a handful of times between 1802 and 1817. The monthly amount was reduced to \$2 a month in 1802 and would only be paid until the child reached four years old. Two years later, in 1804, the abandonment program all but ended, only allowing for payment to continue for children that had already been abandoned. According to the Comptroller's Annual Report of 1805, bills related to abandoned children totaled \$20,865.81, or about 6% of the state's budget.

With the passage of the 1817 Emancipation Law, the program was changed one final time, allowing abandoned children to be provided for—some until adulthood.

A small series in the State Archives that documents the payments made by the overseers of the poor in eleven towns and cities, primarily in the downstate area, has been digitized and made publicly available in the Archive's Digital Collections. Series A0827 contains over 100 pages of documents that provide the names of children, their birthdates, and their former enslavers in eleven cities and towns in New York State. Most are found in present day Brooklyn, Staten Island, Long Island, and the Hudson Valley.

There are two different formats for the documents. Some are formatted as invoices submitted by the overseers of the poor to the state. An example of this can be found in the folder of documents related to North Hempstead. A March 1805 document starts with an entry regarding money paid for the "Maintenance of a male Black child named Thomas born March 31, 1801 abandoned by Rich'd [Richard] Valentine—from March 31 to Jan. 26 1805 makes 33 months 26 days at 2 Doll. [Dollars] per month." Other documents are similar to register pages. In addition to the children's names, birthdates, and enslaver's name, the documents also include the date the child was abandoned by their enslaver and the length of time that support money was provided. A unique piece of information that can be found in documents related to Newtown and North Hempstead is the name of the child's mother.

In addition to the digital images, there will

The State of New York, to Lavinia Cantow and Minna Shunk
Overseers of the Poor for the Town of North Hempstead in Queens County, &c.

To the maintenance of a male black child named Thomas born March 31 st 1801 abandoned by Rich: Valentine from March 31 st 1802 to Jan: 26 th 1805 makes 33 months 26 Days at 2 Cts. p month	267	73V
To the maintenance of a male black child named Jesse born April 2 nd 1802 abandoned by Rich: Valentine from Jan: 26 th 1804 to Jan: 26 th 1805 - 12 mo at 2 Cts. p month	24	V
To the maintenance of a male black child named Peter born Feb: 10 th 1803 abandoned by Rich: Valentine from Feb 10 th 1804 to Jan: 26 th 1805 - 11 1/2 months at 2 Cts. p month	23	V
To the maintenance of a male black child named Peter born December 30 th 1800 abandoned by Henry Wolley from Jan: 26 th 1804 to December 30 th 1804 - 11 mo 3 days at 2 Cts. p mo	22	12V
To the maintenance of a female black child named Child born Dec: 5 th 1800 abandoned by Rebecca Hullett from Jan: 26 th 1804 to Dec: 5 th 1804 makes 10 mo 20 days at 2 Cts. p mo	20	40V
To the maintenance of a female black child named Bon born July 10 th 1802 abandoned by Benj: Platt from Jan: 26 th 1804 to Jan: 26 th 1805 - 12 months at 2 Cts. p mo	24	0V
To the maintenance of a male black child named Edward born Sep: 4 th 1800 abandoned by Benjamin Platt from Jan: 26 th 1804 to Sep: 4 th 1804 - 9 months 8 days at 2 Cts. p mo	14	480
To the maintenance of a female black child named Lenax born Feb: 2 nd 1803 abandoned by Benjamin Platt from Feb 2 nd 1804 to Jan: 26 th 1805 - 11 mo 24 days 2 Cts. p mo	23	60V
To the maintenance of a female black child named Eliza born Sept: 10 th 1802 abandoned by Lott Underbank from Jan: 26 th 1804 to Jan: 26 th 1805 - 12 months at 2 Cts. p month	24	0V
To the maintenance of a female black child born Jan 10 th 1803 named Rachel abandoned by George Hullett from Jan: 10 th 1804 to Jan: 26 th 1805 - 12 mo 16 days at 2 Cts.		
Amount Carried Forward		

Some documents are formatted as invoices submitted by the overseers of the poor to the state.

done by their enslavers, they were wards of the state and could be bound out for indentured service. The Diversity & Inclusion Team plans on adding further context and clarity to the finding aid to help researchers understand what the records are and why they exist.

While small in size, Series A0827 can contribute toward the larger conversation about slavery in the North and the changing laws in the first half of the nineteenth century. It can also aid genealogists searching for valuable links that connect generations of Black Americans. ■

IMAGES: NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

The State of New York, D. C. This Account made and allowed up to the 1st Inst day of August 1802, to
of the Overseers of the Poor for the Township of North Hempstead in Queens County, for the
of maintaining the Children of Slaves belonging to Residents dwelling in the said Town, and the right to the drawing of
Which Children has been abandoned by the persons entitled thereto according to the Laws of the said State constitute

Name of Slave	Parent's Name	Age	Sex	Color	Abandoned by	Date	Days	Rate	Total
Charles	John	5	Male	Black	John	5 Aug 1800	20	12 1/2	250
Agnes	John	12	Female	Black	John	12 Aug 1800	25	12 1/2	312 1/2
Joseph	John	11	Male	Black	John	11 Aug 1800	23	12 1/2	287 1/2
Isabel	John	15	Female	Black	John	15 Oct 1800	21	16 1/2	346 1/2
Agnes	John	5	Female	Black	John	5 Nov 1800	20	12 1/2	250
Ann	John	16	Female	Black	John	16 Dec 1800	20	10 1/2	210
Thomas	John	10	Male	Black	John	10 Dec 1800	14	21 1/2	301 1/2
Charles	John	16	Male	Black	John	16 Dec 1800	14	7 1/2	105
William	John	18	Male	Black	John	18 Dec 1800	14	5 1/2	77 1/2
Elizabeth	John	1	Female	Black	John	1 Jan 1801	19	1 1/2	28 1/2
Peter	John	22	Male	Black	John	22 Jan 1801	18	8 1/2	151 1/2
Thomas	John	25	Male	Black	John	25 Jan 1801	18	7 1/2	135 1/2
Judith	John	25	Female	Black	John	25 Apr 1801	15	6 1/2	97 1/2
Thomas	John	16	Male	Black	John	16 May 1801	15	1 1/2	22 1/2
George	John	27	Male	Black	John	27 May 1801	14	6 1/2	91 1/2
Thomas	John	18	Male	Black	John	18 June 1801	13	2 1/2	32 1/2
William	John	22	Male	Black	John	22 June 1801	13	6 1/2	85 1/2
James	John	16	Male	Black	John	16 July 1801	12	10 1/2	122 1/2
George	John	16	Male	Black	John	16 July 1801	12	0	0
George	John	1	Male	Black	John	1 Aug 1801	12	0	0

Total 1138 1/2

Some documents are similar to register pages.