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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 Charles 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 Ben 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 Lot: 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 up and returned to the 1st Just of a August 1802, for
of the Overseers of the Poor for the Township of North Hempstead in Queens County, for the purpose
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
An Act concerning Slaves from Somerset's report the 13th day of April 1789 and an Act passed the 1st day of August 1791
Name of Mother Name of Child Name of Mother Name of Child Name of Mother Name of Child Name of Child
Child's name Age Date of Birth Name of Mother Name of Child Name of Mother Name of Child Name of Mother Name of Child Name of Child
1. Child 5 August 99 29 July 1800 Sara Thomas Somerset 5 August 1800 20 12 13 25 5 26 4 5
2. Child 28 August 99 12 May 1800 Lydia Nathan Underbank 28 August 1800 23 4 13 3 5 26 4 5
3. Child 28 August 99 12 Aug 1800 Sarah Susanna Benjamin 28 August 1800 23 2 13 5 5 26 4 5
4. Child 15 October 99 22 June 1800 James Daniel Somerset 15 October 1800 21 16 11 16 5 26 4 5
5. Child 5 August 99 22 Oct 1800 Bet Abigail Somerset 5 November 1800 20 26 11 26 5 26 4 5
6. Child 16 Nov: 99 17 Aug 1800 Jane Abigail Somerset 16 Decemb: 1800 20 18 10 15 5 26 4 5
7. Child 10 Dec: 99 8 Sept 1800 Bet Abigail Somerset 10 Decemb: 1800 19 21 9 20 5 26 4 5
8. Child 26 Dec: 99 17 Sept 1800 Cate Abraham Springs 26 Decemb: 1800 19 7 9 11 5 26 4 5
9. Child 26 Dec: 99 22 Sept 1800 Gen Stephen Hall: 26 Dec: 1800 19 5 9 11 5 26 4 5
10. Child 1st June 1800 22 Sept 1800 Charles Sophia Hall: 1st January 1801 19 1 9 5 26 4 5
11. Child 22 June 1800 22 June 1801 Kelly James Underbank 22 January 1801 18 2 8 8 5 26 4 5
12. Child 22 June 1800 22 Oct 1801 Will: Wm: S. Underbank 22 January 1801 18 7 8 5 5 26 4 5
13. Child 25 June 1800 9 Dec: 1800 Bet Elizabeth Underbank 25 June 1801 16 6 5 5 5 26 4 5
14. Child 25 June 1800 24 Oct 1801 Jane Henry Underbank 25 June 1801 15 6 5 5 5 26 4 5
15. Child 16 May 1800 15 Feb: 1801 Bet Edward Somerset 25 June 1801 15 1 4 11 5 26 4 5
16. Child 27 May 1800 22 June 1800 Cate Capt: Springfield 27 May 1801 14 6 4 3 5 26 4 5
17. Child 18 June 1800 24 June 1800 Gen John Somerset 18 June 1801 13 22 3 12 5 26 4 5
18. Child 22 June 1800 8 Aug 1800 James Paul Springfield 22 June 1801 13 6 2 8 5 26 4 5
19. Child 16 July 1800 11 Aug 1801 Bet Frederick Underbank 16 July 1801 12 10 2 15 5 26 4 5
20. Child 16 July 1800 11 Aug 1801 Leable Frederick Underbank 16 July 1801 12 0 2 14 5 26 4 5
21. Child 1st Aug: 1800 19 Feb: 1801 Bet Maria Somerset 1st Aug: 1801 12 0 9 4 5 26 4 5

Some documents are similar to register pages.