



EXHIBIT GUIDE

Support for *Free, As One: Black Worldmaking in the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers* comes from The Haverford Trust Company and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Endowment Fund of the Philadelphia Foundation.

Introduction

Free, As One: Black Worldmaking in the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers explores themes of Black self-determination and leadership in the abolition movement of the Mid-Atlantic region, beginning in the 1770s.

This exhibit, drawn primarily from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) collection and commemorating its 250th anniversary, reexamines abolition as a global, Black-led political movement supported by the PAS. Featuring primary sources—including manumission and indenture papers, diary entries, letters, marriage certificates, broadsides, and censuses—it shows how the global emancipation movement linked antislavery activism to broader freedom struggles.

The exhibit emphasizes the vital role of family, community, and the pursuit of freedom for future generations as key motivations for Black abolitionists in Philadelphia and beyond.

The exhibit features original documents from the PAS and other collections at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) aligned to four key themes:

1. **For The Global Movement:** Black-led efforts for emancipation on both sides of the Atlantic, galvanized by Haitian Independence.
2. **For All Oppressed People:** The movement's expansion to include freedom efforts for Indigenous, Asian, and Caribbean peoples in the Pennsylvania region.
3. **For Family and Community:** The human desire for familial bonds and community support as central motivators.
4. **For the Future:** Sustained action to ensure freedom for future generations.

The Pennsylvania Abolition Society

Founded in 1775 as the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) became the first formal organization dedicated to abolishing slavery in what became the United States. This work involved legal representation for people of color asserting their rights in a complicated inter-state and international commercial network of human trafficking. Over the course of the 19th century, the PAS also provided financial support for education as well as assistance to the Black-led operations of the Underground Railroad. Thanks to the preservation efforts of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, their papers have inadvertently become an archive of the histories and achievements of Black individuals.

Early organizers of the PAS included people like Thomas and Sarah Harrison. Harrison earned a middle class living as a tailor, and other early cases show support from the artisan class, in addition to wealthier merchant families such as the Pembertons. The commonality among these white advocates of Black freedom was their membership in the Society of Friends (Quakers). Believing that slavery violated the word of God, and that all humans contained the inner light of spiritual revelation, Quakers led the white anti-slavery movement in the 18th century Atlantic world.

The papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society at HSP cover the period 1775 to 1975 and represent an extremely rich documentation of the workings of the abolition and anti-slavery movements as well as the Underground Railroad. A large part of the collection concerns the records of the Society general meeting and various committees, financial papers, minutes, and legal papers related to cases taken on by the PAS. In addition, the Society's efforts to document and assist the free Black community are represented in censuses and studies and the papers of the several PAS education boards and associations. Spanning 81 boxes and 60 volumes, the collection is one of the most heavily used by researchers at HSP.

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania is grateful for the ongoing financial support of the PAS through an endowment fund of the Philadelphia Foundation. Funds help defray the cost of collections care and support educational

programming, such as National History Day Philly and this exhibit. Additional support for *Free, As One* comes from The Haverford Trust.

Harmful Language Statement

This exhibit contains historical documents that include language and descriptions that are racist, dehumanizing, and offensive. These terms were not universally accepted but were imposed by those in power to justify and uphold systems of oppression. At the same time, many people—both then and now—recognized the harm in such language and deliberately chose more accurate, humanizing ways to describe Black individuals and other marginalized communities.

We do not present these terms uncritically or accept them wholesale. They appear in this exhibit as they appear in the archive: as evidence of the structures Black people resisted and reshaped, and as proof of the ways language has been used to control, erase, and define marginalized. We encourage visitors to engage critically with these materials, recognizing both the harm they document and the power of those who challenged such narratives in their own lifetimes.

For additional context on the language used in historical records, please refer to [The National Archives Reparative Description Guide](#).

Use of Artificial Intelligence

We use Artificial Intelligence (AI) solely to visualize historical figures for whom no images exist, ensuring their stories are represented with more than words. Following written descriptions and historical context, we depict them exclusively in oil painting-style portraits in homage to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetic protocols. We use AI to visualize the personhood of our historical subjects and to honor their legacy with dignity and respect.

Definitions

Identiture or Indenture: A form of bound labor in which an individual enters a contract to work for a specified number of years. This system was sometimes used as a transition from enslavement to freedom but still imposed restrictions on personal liberties.

Enslavement: The system by which individuals, often of African descent, were legally and forcibly held as property, denied their basic human rights, and compelled to work without compensation under threat of violence.

Freedom Seeker: A term used to describe an enslaved individual who actively sought their freedom, whether through escape, legal action, or negotiations.

Manumission: The legal act of freeing an enslaved person, either by the enslaver's decision, through purchase, or via legislative action. Manumission documents serve as written proof of an individual's transition from enslavement to freedom.

Why we use the term ‘Black’ and not African American

In this exhibit, we use the term **Black** to acknowledge the shared experiences of people of African descent across different times and places while also recognizing the unique cultural, political, and historical contexts that shaped their identities. This choice is intentional—grounded in historical accuracy and respect for the self-determination of those whose stories we are telling. For this same reason, at times we refer to our historical subjects by their first names to further humanize and honor their stories.

We also privilege the term **Black** rather than **African American** to reflect the broad and diverse identities of the people represented in these historical documents. While “African American” specifically refers to individuals of African descent born in or naturalized within the United States, the histories in this exhibit extend beyond national borders. Many of the people featured were born in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, or other parts of the world and may not have identified as “American” at all.

CASE OVERVIEW

Case 1: For The Global Movement

Key Point:

- Black people resisted enslavement from its inception. Successful freedom movements in Haiti and Jamaica energized abolitionist efforts along the Atlantic coast.

Key Story: October

In 1795, October, an eight-year-old boy enslaved in Jamaica, was freed when his Quaker enslaver, David Barclay, a partner of Barclay's Bank, chose to sell his plantations and emancipate those he enslaved. This same year in Jamaica the Second Maroon War commenced, locking the Maroon liberation movement, a movement of formerly enslaved people who had escaped plantations and formed into organized refugee communities, in violent conflict with British colonists. These sustained conflicts and the Quaker shift away from enslavement may have influenced Barclay to send 28 freed individuals to Philadelphia aboard the ship *America* on July 22, 1795, where the PAS handled their legal manumissions. The Black community in Philadelphia provided care and support for their transition to freedom.

Taking the name "Robert Barclay" in Pennsylvania, October later married a free Haitian woman named Ann Elizabeth Depee and ran an Underground Railroad stop with her brother Nathaniel Depee at 334 South Street (now 724 South). This story highlights the connections between Haitian Independence, Jamaican Maroons, and Philadelphia's abolitionist networks, illustrating the transatlantic nature of Black freedom struggles.

Sources: Stokes, K. *Philadelphia - Legacies of Slavery and Freedom*. Legacies of Slavery and Freedom. <https://www.littleoctober.com/philadelphia/>

Case 2:

For All Oppressed People

Key Points:

- Well-known global actions by Black and Indigenous people to claim their freedom inspired similar efforts in Pennsylvania.
- Oppression addressed by the PAS extended beyond the enslavement of Black people, including indentured servitude as a form of limited-time bondage.

Key Story: Dinah Nevil

In 1773, Dinah Nevil, an enslaved Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape woman, crossed the Delaware River to claim her freedom in Philadelphia, inspiring the formation of the Society For the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, the precursor to the PAS. Dinah and her four children were detained in a workhouse while her freedom suit stalled and after she won her case. Tragically, two of Dinah's children died in the workhouse, and she was emaciated when freed.

Having lost 5 children of their own to disease, Quaker tailor Thomas Harrison and his wife Sarah were deeply moved by Dinah's plight and helped form a group to support freedom seekers. Harrison eventually paid for Dinah's freedom. This case underscores the collective efforts and coalition of the greater Philadelphia community to secure justice and freedom for Dinah and her family.

Here is a timeline of other high-profile emancipation cases. Historian Kirsten Sword suggests that Dinah and her supporters may have been aware of these cases when she asserted her own freedom in 1773.

1766

- Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano) arranged to purchase his freedom from Quaker merchant Robert King, traveling to Philadelphia shortly after.
- Jane Carr asserted her freedom by refusing to leave Philadelphia for a New Jersey plantation.

1771

- James Somerset filed suit against his enslaver Charles Stewart for his freedom in England.

1772:

- James Somerset wins *Somerset v. Stewart*, a landmark case in England, effectively making slavery illegal there.

Dinah Nevil's Timeline:

1773:

- Dinah and her children were sold and brought to Philadelphia.
- Dinah asserted her freedom that year and Quaker lawyers were able to stall her legal case so she could not be removed from Philadelphia.

1775:

- The Revolutionary War disrupted her case.
- Two of Dinah's children died in the workhouse.
 - Quaker tailor Thomas Harrison, moved by Dinah's plight, took in Dinah and her remaining children, Bontury and Jane. Harrison eventually paid for their freedom.

Sources: Sword, K. (2010). Remembering Dinah Nevil: Strategic Deceptions in Eighteenth-Century Antislavery. *The Journal of American History* (Bloomington, Ind.), 97(2), 315–343.

Case 3:

For Family and Community

Key Point:

- Before the PAS existed, Black people engaged the Quaker community to assist their fight for freedom. The rising tide of requests for assistance helped inform Quakers of the nature of the support that was required. This helped shape the organization of the PAS.

Key Story: *Pollidore and Rose*

The story of Pollidore's relentless efforts to keep his wife Rose in Philadelphia spans multiple years. Over the course of a two-year journey, Pollidore earned extra money, encouraged the negotiation of her indentures, and influenced Quakers to help pay for Rose's freedom. Eventually, through this combination of efforts, enough money was raised that Joseph Pemberton decided to pay the final amount to secure Rose's freedom, just in time for the birth of Rose and Pollidore's child Sarah in early 1772. While we don't have Pollidore's words, we do have the results of his tireless efforts to talk to others and convince them to help him free his wife from enslavement.

Timeline:

1767

- On New Year's Eve 1767 at St. Peters Church, Pollidore married Rose. Both Pollidore and Rose were enslaved by Abraham Mason.

1770

- Mason sent Rose to Maryland to be sold. Pollidore appears to have sprung into action, verbalizing a "distress" that "excited pity" in many.

1770

- An agreement was reached with Mason to bring Rose back to Philadelphia where Mason reduced the amount he expected to be paid for her freedom. Quaker Joseph Yeates agreed to pay the remaining balance.

1771

- A group of 'subscribers,' or crowdfunders, were enlisted to raise the funds to pay Yeates for Rose's freedom.

Source: *U.S., Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania Church Records*

Case 4:

For the Future

Key Point:

- Despite oppression, Black people creatively imagined a future of freedom, and took courageous action based on this creativity.
- The Black community continued to build pathways of emancipation and citizenship from the eighteenth century forward, continuing the fight for civil rights throughout the 19th Century.

Key Story: Hester “Hetty” Reckless

After enduring years of horrific abuse while enslaved in Salem, New Jersey, including losing her front teeth from beatings, Hester “Hetty” Reckless boldly liberated herself in 1825, taking a stagecoach to Philadelphia with her baby to escape enslavement. Upon arriving in Philadelphia Hetty turned to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society for help protecting her self-emancipation. The PAS supported Hetty by sending a letter to her enslaver, threatening legal action and reinforcing her claims to freedom.

Hetty went on to become a dedicated member of the Pennsylvania Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Female Vigilance Committee, where she ensured that funds and resources were directed to those seeking freedom. Hetty was a courageous leader in the fight for Black freedom and justice, dedicating her life to supporting freedom seekers in Philadelphia and beyond.

In 1843, she co-founded the Moral Reform Retreat with Hester “Hetty” Burr, a shelter for Black women. Although officially established to support rehabilitation from prostitution and addiction, it also served as a vital safe house for freedom seekers. Over 200 women found refuge and support there, along with schooling for children and adult literacy classes.

Source: Haynes, A. R. (2015). *Riotous Flesh : Women, Physiology, and the Solitary Vice in Nineteenth-Century America*. University of Chicago Press.

Case Detail

Case 1

Key Point:

- Black people fought enslavement from its inception. Successful freedom movements in Haiti and Jamaica energized freedom movements and efforts up and down the Atlantic coast.

Key Story: October (Robert Barclay)

Print of Fabre Geffard

1850s

Print of Toussaint L'Ouverture

Undated

Toussaint L'Ouverture was one of the revolutionary founders of Haiti.

Manumission Paper for 28 Enslaved People from Jamaica

1795

Among the 28 individuals freed from David Barclay's Jamaican plantation in 1795 was an eight-year-old boy named October.

Influenced by the Maroon Rebellion in Jamaica and the global anti-slavery movement, Barclay—a plantation owner and partner of Barclay's Bank in London—decided to emancipate the people he had enslaved. He arranged for all 28 men, women, and children to be sent to

Philadelphia, where their manumissions were processed.

The Pennsylvania Abolition Society oversaw the legal documentation of their freedom, while prominent Black leaders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones supported the newly freed individuals in building new lives in the city. October, the youngest of the group, would go on to create his own legacy of freedom and resilience in Philadelphia.

Testimony regarding James Derham, the first documented Black doctor in the United States

Approximately 1788

Dr. James Derham holds the distinction of being the first Black doctor in the United States, with his remarkable story being documented by Dr. Benjamin Rush. In a testimony written by Dr. Benjamin Rush in 1788, Dr. Derham's life and accomplishments are rendered with great detail. Dr. Rush praises Dr. Derham's advanced knowledge and indicates that he learned new medical knowledge from Dr. Derham. "I expected to have suggested some new medicines to him but he suggested many more to me," writes Dr. Rush.

Born about 1762 in Philadelphia, Derham learned medicine while enslaved, first under Dr. John Kearsely, Jr. of Philadelphia, who taught him medical skills. Following Dr. Kearsely's death, Derham became enslaved by Dr. George West, serving as a medical assistant to British troops during the Revolutionary War. After the war, he was enslaved by Dr. Robert Dove of New Orleans, who eventually freed him.

Once emancipated, Dr. Derham returned to Philadelphia and married, continuing his journey as a physician. In the early twentieth century W.E.B. DuBois celebrated Dr. Derham for his many accomplishments.

Manumission Paper for Fidel, a boy from Mozambique

September 7, 1799

Fidel had been indentured to Jean Rene Gravelle, a man originally from Haiti. A document recorded by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society on September 7, 1799, officially released Fidel from enslavement. (see Drawer 2) His origins in Mozambique are clearly noted in the record, demonstrating his resilience in remembering his African identity and in recording his origins for future generations. affirming his identity.

Declaration of Emancipation for Lucia and Emanuel by Condy Raguet (in Portuguese)

1823

Manumission papers for Lucia and Emmanuel highlight their resilience in preserving their African heritage. In 1823, Condy Raguet, the American consul to Rio de Janeiro, dictates a testimony to a member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society documenting his decision to free Lucia after fifteen years and Emmanuel after eighteen years of servitude. The testimony shows both children retained vivid memories of their roots in Africa and enduring connection to their heritage—Lucia identified with the Rebola nation, located on an island off of Equatorial Guinea, and Emmanuel with the Benguela nation, in present day Angola.

Drawer 1

Print of President Boyer of Haiti (1776-1850)

President Jean-Pierre Boyer was a leader of the Haitian Revolution who later became one of the early Presidents of the republic.

Declaration of Emancipation of enslaved Black people in Saint Domingue (Haiti)

1793

As a result of the Haitian people's liberation efforts, the French issued a declaration of emancipation in 1793. Signed by Leger-Felicite Sonthonax, the white French colonial governor of Haiti (Saint-Domingue), this document proclaimed the abolition of Black enslavement.

However, the declaration also stated that Haiti was still under French colonial rule, highlighting that the fight for freedom was far from over. The struggle continued until Haiti achieved full independence on January 1, 1804.

The inclusion of this document among the papers of William Rawle, the first president of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and a member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, underscores the profound influence Haitian Independence had on anti-slavery movements along the Atlantic coast.

Toussaint L'Ouverture's Pass for Travel to Mademoiselle Félicité

Approximately 1800

Toussaint L'Ouverture is widely regarded as one of the most impactful revolutionary

leaders across the Atlantic region of the past 400 years. His pivotal role in liberating enslaved Africans in Haiti culminated in the establishment of the world's first independent Black nation.

This pass for "Mademoiselle Félicité" was discovered alongside the minutes of an 1801 American Anti-Slavery Conference. While the exact year of the document is unclear, it is likely to have been between 1799 and 1802.

A rough translation reads: "Let the citizen Miss Félicité freely pass all the way to Philadelphia, the place of her birth. Please do not put any obstacle to her passage, and lend her help and assistance in case of need."

Pass for Catherine, a woman from Haiti, to be able to travel to New York
1797

The Haitian liberation movement led to a significant influx of Haitian people into Philadelphia during the late 1700s. However, mobility for Black individuals was heavily policed during this period, even for those who were free. Free Black people were often required to produce proof of their freedom, such as manumission documents or travel passes.

This 1797 document served as a travel pass for Catherine, a woman from Haiti, allowing her to journey to New York. It specifies that Catherine was freed in Haiti (then Hispaniola) in 1793, highlighting the constraints on movement faced by free Black people and the importance of documentation in asserting their rights.

Print of President Boyer of Haiti

Undated

President Jean-Pierre Boyer was a Haitian Revolution leader who later became one of the early Presidents of the republic.

Drawer 2

Indenture for Samuel Skinner to Benjamin Phillips

July 24, 1801

This document shows the arrival in Philadelphia of a 21-year-old free Black man from Freetown, Sierra Leone. Samuel Skinner indentured himself to Benjamin Phillips for five years to learn the trade of ship carpentry.

Indenture for Fidel, to R.J. Gravelle

1799

One powerful form of resistance against enslavement Black people used across the Atlantic world was the preservation and honoring of one's origins. After being freed in 1799, 16-year-old Fidel documented the memory of his beloved Mozambique, homeland in Africa.

Fidel had been indentured to Jean Rene Gravelle, a man originally from Haiti. A document recorded by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society on September 7, 1799, officially released Fidel from enslavement. (see Manumission paper on top of case)

Declaration of Emancipation for Lucia and Emanuel by Condy Raguet (in English)

1823

This is the English translation of the emancipation paper on view on the top of the case.

Drawer 3

State of Facts Respecting Emmanuel Carpenter

Undated

Emmanuel Carpenter was born free in Jamaica, most likely in the 1740s. He served on an English ship during the taking of Havana, Cuba during The Seven Years War. Following the war he then went to Ireland and eventually Philadelphia in 1765.

In Philadelphia, Emmanuel served in the Continental Army during the American Revolution, helping operate a gunboat in the Delaware River.

After the American Revolutionary War, he learned the trade of coopering (barrelmaking). An auction master William Hamilton accused him of being a fugitive enslaved person. Hamilton had him thrown in goal (jail) without any charges. He was in jail for 10 months at the time this letter was written.

List Showing the Names of the 28 People from Jamaica

Approximately 1795

A ship manifest from 1795 lists the names and ages of those freed by David Barclay, including October. After gaining his freedom, October changed his name to Robert Barclay, built a new life in Philadelphia and established deep roots within the abolitionist community.

As an adult, Robert married into the Haitian Depee family, who were free people of color (*gens de couleur*) and were deeply involved in Underground Railroad activities. Frequently mentioned in the records for William Still's *The Underground Rail Road*, Nathaniel Depee worked alongside Robert to operate an Underground Railroad station from their home at what is now 724 South Street.

[See Drawer 3 for more related to this] establishment of the world's first independent Black nation.

CASE 2

Key Points:

- Highly publicized global actions of Black and Indigenous people to free themselves influenced similar efforts in Pennsylvania.
- Oppression extended beyond Black people, including indentured servitude as a form of limited-time slavery.

Key Story: Dinah Nevil [in Drawer 1]

Manumission Book D, Page 431

1795-1801

Manumissions - enslaved people's documented releases from servitude- rose significantly in 1776 when the Quakers agreed to expel members who enslaved others. This book is just one of seven books in the Pennsylvania Abolition Society papers that records manumissions. On the left page at the bottom, we can see the story of John Ridley.

Travel Pass for John Ridley, an Afro-Indigenous Man

1800

Although free Black and Brown people in Pennsylvania faced restrictions on mobility, their travels to southern states were even more heavily policed, often requiring papers to prove their free status. Understanding the importance of legal documentation for protection, John Ridley secured a pass from Robert Wharton, the mayor of Philadelphia, for his journey to the slave state of Virginia. Ridley's mention of his Indigenous heritage in the pass may have been an additional safeguard, as

various state laws prohibited the enslavement of Indigenous people.

Manumission Paper of Dinah Nevil and Bontury and Jane

May 18, 1779

Indenture for Joseph Green to William Richardson

May 13, 1788

This indenture agreement is for a young man from Calcutta, India. A three-year indenture is relatively short compared to others. This document illustrates how the legal system streamlined processes by creating standardized printed forms to reduce manual writing. The agreement includes strict behavioral rules, such as prohibitions on gambling, intimate relationships, drinking, buying or selling, and visiting taverns. Additionally, it required the indentured individual to serve faithfully and keep the "master's" secrets.

"To Be Sold"

1768

In this short advertisement placed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, an Irish boy and his labor are offered for sale.

Indentures were highly restrictive labor contracts that could last decades. Generally they differed according to race. For Black people, indentures were a step forward on the path to full emancipation. Enslaved people often entered into an indenture as an agreement to serve a "master" for a number of years, usually decades, after which legal freedom would be given. This process is called 'gradual abolition.'

White people and people from non-African countries had a different experience with indentures. They usually had shorter terms, spanning years rather than decades, and functioned as apprenticeships or a way to pay off debts, especially transportation costs from transatlantic travel.

People entered these agreements to transition from enslavement to freedom or to escape poverty and homelessness by learning a trade. These contracts are sometimes referred to as “slavery with an end date.” The language in indenture records frequently reveals deeply rooted racist and classist objectification of individuals.

In the 1760s and early 1770s in Philadelphia, most Black people of African descent were enslaved. Meanwhile, Indigenous, Asian, and non-wealthy white individuals were often subjected to indentures, which, while having an end date, reflected a similar dehumanizing treatment. This dynamic is evident in advertisements like this one, where the service agreement (the indenture) is technically the thing for sale, yet the language treats the person as the commodity being sold.

Those whose contracts were disputed or whose free status was legally challenged were often confined to the workhouse. Conditions in the workhouse were oppressive, leading to the death of children and the emaciation of residents. James Whitehead, the workhouse manager, frequently placed ads to sell workers from the workhouse throughout the Philadelphia region.

339 Manumission Project

This innovative Public History project “is a reparative, spirit-led, genealogical search to uncover the lives and family trees of the 339 Africans who were granted their freedom by members of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Quakers, once it was decided that Quakers could not be enslavers.” For more information, visit <https://friendsfiduciary.org/339-manumissions-beyond-project>.

Drawer 1

State of the Case of Dinah Nevil

1784

In 1773, Dinah Nevil, a Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape woman, boldly asserted her freedom and that of her four Afro-Indigenous children in Philadelphia. This act set off a series of events that led to the founding of the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, the precursor to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS).

Dinah and her children were brought to Philadelphia to be sold southward but were instead detained in a workhouse on Third Street, where they remained for two years as her freedom suit stalled. Tragically, two of her children died in the workhouse, and Dinah was emaciated when finally freed.

Grieving the loss of their own children to disease, Quaker tailor Thomas Harrison and his wife Sarah, were moved by Dinah’s plight. In 1775, Harrison and fellow Quakers formed a group to support freedom seekers like Dinah, marking the first organized Quaker abolitionist effort. Harrison personally paid for Dinah’s freedom and took in her remaining

children. This document highlights Thomas Harrison's efforts to secure justice and freedom for Dinah and her family.

Indenture of Robert Scott to James Reese

1788

Dinah Nevil's daughter Jane was just eight years old in 1775 when she and her family were freed from the workhouse by the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, the precursor to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. By 1788, Jane had a son named Robert Scott. This indenture outlines the terms of Robert's service as a child. It specifies moral and property restrictions during the 24-year term, including requirements for behavior and obligations. However, Thomas Harrison, who played a pivotal role in the family's freedom, ensured that the contract included provisions for Robert to learn to read and write and to receive two suits of clothing, one of them new, upon completing the term.

Harrison's note at the bottom of the document preserves the family's history by identifying Robert as the son of Jane Nevil and briefly mentioning that he had purchased Jane's freedom.

Drawer 2

Transfer Agreement for Thomas Richardson

Jan 12, 1799

Charles Erdman translated this agreement between Hendrick Govers Heldt and John Slesman from Dutch to English. The original document was signed in Batavia, present

day Jakarta, Indonesia. The subject of this paper was an Indonesian eleven-year-old boy Thomas Robinson from Banjarmasin.

Indenture for Thomas Robinson to John Slesman

January 12, 1800

Indenture of August, a Chinese Boy to John Stillé Jr.

1796

The indenture records of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society reflect the diverse origins of people from around the world. Among these records is an agreement for August, a boy from China, who was indentured for eight years to John Stillé, a tailor. Notably, the section of the agreement requiring teaching and education was crossed out, and there is no indication of approval or consent from August. The agreement is signed by publisher Matthew Clarkson.

Known for tailoring clients like Thomas Jefferson, John Stillé had a son, John Stillé Jr., who became a merchant seaman. Goods procured from the West Indies during this period would have largely been produced by enslaved labor, connecting this story to the broader context of global exploitation and labor inequality.

Drawer 3

The Old Rising Sun Tavern

Undated

In this watercolor, artist David Kennedy depicts the Old Rising Sun Tavern, the location where the founders of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society gathered to form the group.

CASE 3

Key Point:

- Before the PAS existed, Black people engaged the Quaker community to assist their fight for freedom. The rising tide of requests for assistance helped inform Quakers of the nature of the support that was required. This helped shape the organization of the PAS.

Key Story: Pollidore and Rose

Key Story: Pollidore and Rose

The story of Pollidore's relentless efforts to keep his wife Rose in Philadelphia emerges from a file of papers in the PAS collection. Both Pollidore and Rose were enslaved by Abraham Mason. When Mason sold Rose southward, Pollidore sprang into action to keep her in Philadelphia. He earned extra money, encouraged the negotiation of her indentures, and influenced Quakers to help pay for Rose's freedom. Eventually, through this combination of efforts, enough money was raised that John Pemberton decided to pay the remaining balance for Rose's freedom, just in time for the birth of their child Sarah in early 1772.

Notes and receipts related to Pollidore's attempt to free Rose 1770-1771

This collection of documents highlights Pollidore's determined efforts to raise £45 (about \$7,500-\$10,000 today) to secure Rose's freedom in 1770. He enlisted influential Quaker leaders like Joseph Yeates and John Pemberton as well as a number of craftsmen and artisans for support. Despite securing pledges,

Pollidore faced funding gaps, leading Yeates to indenture Rose to candlemaker Richard Porter for six years. Porter eventually released Rose in 1771 after receiving £10, reflecting the complex financial and social negotiations behind her emancipation.

Manumission of Joseph

March 17, 1788

"Now know that I, Dick, a Negro man, do Set Free My Son (the said Joseph)...I declare him Absolutely Free from Bondage and that I only Retain the Right of Parent over him." So declared a father who just purchased his son out of slavery from enslaver William Finley.

Typed Index of Letters

20th Century, Undated

Many free Black people worked to free their family members. This index is a listing of the letters in the PAS collection recording instances where Black people freed their kin.

Birth Document of Margaret and Rebecca Colley

Approximately 1788

The stability of the future relied heavily on the ability to keep families together. This document, certifying the births of sisters Rebecca and Margeret Colley, ensures their continued connection to each other, even to this day.

William Still, Journal C

1852-57

This facsimile shows a page from the secret journal from William Still, sometimes known as the father of the Underground

Railroad. In it he documents the people escaping slavery and arriving in Philadelphia. He describes each person's name under slavery, their new name, a physical description, the conditions under which they were enslaved, and the family they left behind.

Drawer 1

Advertisement for Rose's Labor

August 1770

Through Pollidore's efforts, Rose stayed with her loved ones in Philadelphia. But her status was still not stable. This ad offers Rose out as an indentured servant which could have taken Rose far from Philadelphia at any time.

By the time this ad was published, Pollidore had also encouraged others to 'subscribe' to help pay down the cost of Rose's freedom to Yeates.

Pollidore's Note for Fulfillment

September 1770

John Pemberton wrote this note explaining to people who had promised to help pay for Rose's freedom (subscribers) that now was the time to pay. The note indicates that Pollidore is the bearer of the note, thus we can imagine that Pollidore personally held this note and presented it as he visited the subscribers.

[see Drawer 1 for more documents related to this case]

Receipt of Final Payment for Rose

July 1771

John Pemberton made the final payment for Rose to Rich Porter. Porter discharged Rose, who was pregnant, "from my service and any demands whatsoever." Rose and

Pollidore's daughter Sarah was born a few months later, in early 1772.

Drawer 2

Manumission of Dorcas

1805

This document describes the sequence of payments made by a Black man named Isaac for the freedom of his wife Dorcas. Thomas Harrison records Isaac's heartfelt words: "For the Love I Bear - to Dorcas - the above-named woman - My Wife - I hereby Release her from all Bondage as a Slave or Servant."

Colley Family Deposition

1788

In this document, Amos Colley affirms that he has two daughters, Margaret and Rebecca. He likely faced a legal challenge alleging their enslaved status from someone in Maryland. By presenting both their birth certificates and this sworn affidavit, Colley was able to assert and protect the free status of his daughters.

Certificate of the Children of Thomas Black

Approximately 1798

Indentures often carried the devastating risk of separating family members across great distances. This document preserves critical details such as the names, parentage, birth dates, and death dates of a Black family divided by indentures. By maintaining these records, the document ensured that family members could be located and familial connections preserved despite the hardships of separation.

Drawer 3

Souvenir Historical Chart

1899

In 1787, Richard Allen became the founder of the first congregation of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in the heart of Philadelphia's Black Metropolis. This broadside shows the evolution of the Philadelphia congregation affectionately called 'Mother Bethel,' highlighting the transformation of the church buildings and leadership from its inception to 1899.

Richard Allen's Character Reference

1785

A prominent member of the Philadelphia Black Metropolis, Richard Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in 1787, a global, Black-led denomination that thrives to this day. At the time of this document's creation, however, those ambitions were still taking shape in his mind. He may have sought this character reference to establish credibility and security as he worked to create a revolutionary religious community.

The document highlights Bishop Allen's heroic actions, including preaching the gospel during self-funded travels from New York to the Carolinas and spending two months with Indigenous nations. It also recounts his discovery of a trunk full of money, his efforts to locate its rightful owner, and his refusal to accept any form of reward.

Print of The Reverend Absalom Jones (1746-1818)

The Reverend Absalom Jones was a foundational leader of the Philadelphia Black Metropolis. Jones founded the St.

Thomas African Episcopal Church, a church that stands to this very day.

Marriage certificate of Luke Johnson and Saborah Smith

July 1, 1798

Within the relative safety of the Philadelphia Black Metropolis, Black people married with hope for the future. This marriage certificate between Luke Johnson and Saborah Smith reminds us that love survived in the most difficult of circumstances. The danger and horror of enslavement was ever-present and yet Black people stepped into possibility and created new worlds for future generations. This certificate is written by Absalom Jones, an important Black national leader and founder of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas.

Case 4

Key Points:

- Despite oppression, Black people creatively imagined a future of freedom, and took courageous action based on this creativity. They turned to the PAS to help legally secure the freedoms they had gained.
- Liberation led to the building of new lives and the Philadelphia Black Metropolis; a city within a city that functioned as a hub for emancipation for the Atlantic coast, and center for the growth of Black institutions that continue to this day.

Key Story: The Philadelphia Black Metropolis

1838 Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society Census

1838

This census, performed as part of a series of actions to prevent the loss of the right to vote for Black men in Pennsylvania in 1838, was led by Charles Gardner, pastor of First African Presbyterian and Benjamin Bacon, member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. It documents the wealth, education, real estate, and amounts paid for freedom.

Constitution and Bylaws

1831

Founded in the late 1820s, the Daughters of Africa, was a beneficial society specifically for single women and widows, aimed at providing financial support for each other. This document outlines their constitution and by-laws.

Lyrics to Fantasy by Earth, Wind and Fire

1977

Despite a global financial system based on the enslavement of Africans and their descendants, and the continued oppression and anti-Blackness faced by free people in the North, Black people imagined freedom and built new physical, emotional, and social spaces for the present and the future.

The song “Fantasy” by Earth, Wind and Fire speaks to the ability to imagine a new world and the driving desire to live in community and in unity, forever

*Every thought is a dream
Rushing by in a stream
Bringing life to the kingdom of doing
Take a ride in the sky
On our ship, fantasize
All your dreams will come true miles away*

*Our voices will ring together
Until the twelfth of never
We all will live love forever, as one*

Quote from Philadelphia Native and Actor Erika Alexander

2024

*“Black people have always created the future.
Your future that you’re living in is because Black people imagined it.
For Black people, the past is painful, the present precarious,
but the future is free.”*

An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Delivered on the First of January, 1812 at the African Church of St. Thomas

1812 and 1816

The pamphlet documents speeches by Russell Parrott printed during his time as an assistant reverend at St. Thomas African Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. These speeches show the Black community's early efforts to fight against the slave trade and to record their opposition on their own terms.

Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, To the People of Pennsylvania

1838

Aiming to prevent the loss of voting rights with its pending restriction to "white" citizens rather than all "freemen," the Black community organized to create this pamphlet to advocate for civil rights to the state legislature in Harrisburg. The goal was to provide legislators with a comprehensive history of Black achievements and contributions so that they would vote to allow Black men to keep the right to vote in Pennsylvania.

Published Minutes of the Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League

1866

The Pennsylvania Equal Rights League (PERL) was a pivotal organization that championed civil rights for Black Americans. In 1865, the PERL hosted a Convention in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This pamphlet outlines the League's goals to secure full citizenship and equal rights for Black Americans, particularly focusing

on voting rights, education, and combating racial discrimination in Pennsylvania

Print of Jacob C White Sr. (1806-1872)(facsimile)

1872

Jacob C. White Sr. was a fearless abolitionist, successful businessman, and key figure in Philadelphia's Black Metropolis. A highly influential leader in the region, he co-founded organizations such as the Social, Civil, and Statistical Association and the Agricultural and Mechanical Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Constitution, By Laws, Rolls, and Minutes of the Civil and Social Committee of Superintendence

1850-1867

The Social, Civil, and Statistical Association was a groundbreaking 19th-century organization dedicated to empowering Philadelphia's Black community through education, civil rights advocacy, and data collection. Co-founders and members included William Still, Jacob C. White Sr., and Jonathan C. Gibbs.

Lecture and Concert with Frederick Douglass and "Black Swan" Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield

1865

In 1865, the Social Civil and Statistical Association held a series of lectures amplifying many of their civil rights and suffrage initiatives as well as their support for Black soldiers and veterans. This lecture headlined by Frederick Douglass also features a performance by Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the "Black Swan," an

internationally renowned Black opera singer from Philadelphia.

Drawer 1

Key Point:

- As the Black population grew and settled in Philadelphia, the community enthusiastically and consistently supported the arts.

Key Story: William H. Dorsey

Lithograph of Frank Johnson, From a daguerreotype by Robert Douglass Jr.

1846

Black artist Robert Douglass made this lithograph made of his friend and world-renowned musician Francis “Frank” Johnson. A Philadelphian, Johnson had a tremendous impact on the development of musical arts and in the Philadelphia Black Metropolis and in the United States more broadly.,

Concert at St. Thomas African Episcopal Church

1841

Thanks to the work of the African Harmonic Society in the 1820s, by the 1840s orchestral concerts were hugely popular in the Philadelphia Black Metropolis. This particular concert was held in 1841 at St. Thomas African Episcopal Church, enabling Black musicians and singers to showcase their talents.

African Harmonic Society Notice of Sacred Concert (facsimile)

The Philadelphia Inquirer Thursday, October 12, 1826

The African Harmonic Society was formed by Black musicians in 1826 to bring large orchestral music to the Black community, as white venues did not allow Black people to attend concerts at this time.

William H. Dorsey Watercolor

Approx. 1897

William Dorsey became widely known throughout the Philadelphia Black Metropolis as an artist as well as a historian. However, his works have become quite rare, as they have been infrequently collected by archives. This watercolor was discovered in a local thrift store and donated to HSP in 2024.

List of Officers

1897

Founded in the 1890s, the American Negro Historical Society dedicated itself to the preservation and collection of print, manuscripts, and artifacts relevant to the Black experience in the Atlantic world. . Their mission was to ensure Black history was protected, preserved and communicated to future generations. William H. Dorsey served as the ANHS’s curator.

Drawer 2

Key Point:

- Philadelphia became a center for Black higher education in the 1850s with the opening of the Institute for

Colored Youth (ICY). ICY's impact on Black higher education is evident to this day.

Key Story: Institute for Colored Youth

Act to Incorporate the Ashmun Institute

1854

Founded in the late antebellum period, the Ashmun Institute was the first name for what is currently Lincoln University. This act of incorporation specifies that the Institute will offer training for Black men in "scientific, classical and theological" education.

Graduation, Order of Exercises

1867

The Institute for Colored Youth (ICY), founded in 1851, was the first preparatory and high school for Black students in Philadelphia. The rigor of ICY's program was respected across the city. This brochure highlights ICY students' learning in Algebra, Geometry, Greek, Latin, Physiology and several other subjects. Graduates of ICY spread across the region and the country to seed schools and Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) throughout the country. ICY later became Cheyney University.

Concert Program

1895

Institute for Colored Youth (ICY) graduates Cordelia Jennings and Carolyn LeCount founded the Ohio Street School in the 1860s, when they were both in their early 20s. The school became so popular that it eventually served a student body of 500 students. The success of the Ohio Street School led to its transition from a private school to Philadelphia Public School

system in 1864. In 1878, the school was renamed after Octavius V. Catto, civil rights leader, ICY teacher and LeCount's fiancé. This concert program reveals notables Daniel Payne and Rev. Henry L. Phillips participating in the proceedings. The Ohio Street School hosted the concert to benefit the Music and Library Fund of the school.

Handwritten Order of Exercises

1860

This handwritten document shows the order of exercises for a graduation ceremony at the Institute of Colored Youth (ICY). Notables Octavius V. Catto and Sarah Mapps Douglass appear in the program. In the 1860s, Catto was leading suffrage and trolley car desegregation movements in Philadelphia, fighting tirelessly to protect the civil rights of the Black Metropolis. Douglass, a noted local educational leader, was one of the first women to teach sciences at the high-school level in the country.

Black Higher Education in the 1850s

The Institute for Colored Youth (ICY) in Philadelphia and the Ashmun Institute in Hinsonville, PA provided high school, college preparatory and college level education for Black students starting in the early 1850s.

ICY later became Cheyney University and the Ashmun Institute later became Lincoln University, two important Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the state of Pennsylvania.

Concert Program

1876

Institute for Colored Youth (ICY) graduate Jacob C. White, Jr. became the first Black principal of a public school in Philadelphia in 1864. This concert includes musical and theatrical performances by students at White's school, the Roberts Vaux School. The proceeds from the concert was used in the purchase of a piano for the school.

Invitation to Commencement

Undated

The Lombard Street Public School opened in 1822. In 1841 it was the premier public school (grades 1-8) for Black students in Philadelphia. Before his death in 1842, prominent member of the Black Metropolis James Forten fought together with the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to keep the school open and funded. Later in the century it was renamed the James Forten School. Graduates of this school include Octavius V. Catto and Jacob C. White Jr..

School Program Cards

Various Dates

These cards functioned as advertisements and tickets to encourage people to attend various functions.

Drawer 3

Key Point:

- The disenfranchisement of 1838 did not stop political activities or progress for the Black community. Black leaders continued to advocate for rights through petitions, memorials and political organizing and Colored Conventions.

Affidavit of Freedom, Hetty Reckless

1825

After enduring years of horrific abuse while enslaved in Salem, New Jersey, including losing her front teeth from beatings, Hester "Hetty" Reckless boldly liberated herself in 1825, taking a stagecoach to Philadelphia with her baby to escape enslavement. Upon arriving in Philadelphia Hetty turned to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society for help protecting her self-emancipation. The PAS supported Hetty by sending a letter to her enslaver, threatening legal action and reinforcing her claims to freedom.

Hetty went on to become a dedicated member of the Pennsylvania Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Female Vigilance Committee, where she ensured that funds and resources were directed to those seeking freedom. Hetty was a courageous leader in the fight for Black freedom and justice, dedicating her life to supporting freedom seekers in Philadelphia and beyond.

In 1843, she co-founded the Moral Reform Retreat with Hester "Hetty" Burr, a shelter for Black women. Although officially established to support rehabilitation from prostitution and addiction, it also served as a vital safe house for freedom seekers. Over 200 women found refuge and support there, along with schooling for children and adult literacy classes.

AntiColonization and Women's Rights Ticket

Approximately 1850

These tickets list the names of individuals who have formed into a political 'Ticket' to advocate for causes. One ticket advocates for Anti-Colonization and Women's Rights.

Another lists the members of the People's Independent Ticket. Both lists of names include Black leaders from the Philadelphia Black Metropolis in the 1840s and 1850s. We believe these tickets to be part of the print ephemera connected to the Colored Conventions movement, a series of national, regional, and state meetings focused on the civil rights and social position of Black people in North America held across the nineteenth century.

Lecture on Political Action by Francis Ellen Watkins Harper

1865

Highly respected and deeply supported by William Still, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was a political activist, speaker and author. This document highlights Harper's lecture in the schedule of an all-female program. This program was part of a series of public lectures on politics and activism hosted by the Social, Civil and Statistical Association. World-renowned opera singer Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield provides the entertainment for the lecture.

Print of Francis Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911)(facsimile)

1872

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was a pioneering abolitionist, Underground Railroad agent, suffragist, and one of the first Black women to publish a novel in the

United States. Known for her electrifying speeches and powerful writings, she fought tirelessly for racial and gender equality, weaving themes of justice, abolition, and Black humanity into her poetry and prose.

Appeal to Colored Republicans

Approximately 1865

Philadelphian Willam H. Johnson was a member of the Banneker Institute. He was among the prominent faces of the Black Republican movement in the 1860s.

A Memorial Advocating for the Rights of Suffrage

1865

This formal petition, or "memorial," addressed to the Pennsylvania Senate and House of Representatives, was written by Black political leaders in Philadelphia, including Octavius V. Catto. The memorial advocates for the rights of Black citizens generally, but specifically focuses on the issue of disenfranchisement and the denial of voting rights.

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