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Quaker Manumissions in the American Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, 1759-1805

Dataset Article

Article Authors

Zahara Martinez

Celia Caust-Ellenbogen, Swarthmore College

Dataset Creators

Bruce Bumbarger, Haverford College

Celia Caust-Ellenbogen, Swarthmore College

David Cook, Haverford College

Mary Crauderueff, Haverford College

Whitney Grinnage-Cassidy

Zahara Martinez

James Pollard

David Satten-Lopez

Contributors

James Trutt, Swarthmore College

Emily Thaisrivongs, Haverford College

Description

These two datasets, The Friends Historical Library's *Quaker Manumissions in the American Northeast and Mid-Atlantic 1759-1805* and the Haverford Quaker and Special Collections' *Manumitted: The People Enslaved by Quakers*, contain records of enslaved Africans manumitted by Quaker congregations in the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States from the middle of the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. Toward the latter half of the eighteenth century, a gradual, meeting-by-meeting ban on enslavement turned into a blanket slavery ban for all Quakers.¹ Ultimately, a Quaker was not allowed to own an enslaved person on the threat of disownment, i.e., removal from the membership rolls. This meant that Quaker slaveholders needed to legally manumit, or free, their enslaved people.

A manumission is a binding legal document used to certify the freedom of an enslaved person. Quakers at this time structured the document in roughly the same format: the slaveholder(s) started the document with a declaration of their name(s) and a declaration of the name, gender, and approximate age of the enslaved person(s) they intended to free. Many enslaved people either did not have a surname, or their surname was not recognized or recorded by their slaveholder. The enslaver stated when they intended the enslaved person to be freed, which depended on the gender and age of the enslaved. Typically, if the enslaved person was a female below the age of 18 or a male below the age of 21, then they would be freed on the day of their 18th or 21st birthdays, respectively. These ages are approximate, as enslaved people and their enslavers did not always know their exact date of birth. The document ended with the date of the signatures of the enslaver(s) and at least two witness signatures. The purpose of having witnesses was to validate the contents of the document and the identities of those who wrote and signed them. As Quakers were meticulous record keepers, these documents were sometimes stored in the records of these Quaker meetings. They were often written in volumes alongside other important Quaker records such as births, marriages, and deaths.

This dataset was prepared for inclusion in *Manumitted: The People Enslaved by Quakers* (<https://manumissions.haverford.edu/>), a digital humanities project of Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections with David Satten-Lopez, 2020-2021 Post-Baccalaureate Fellow, as project lead. The Friends Historical Library replicated the structure and fields established by the Haverford project when generating its own dataset in summer 2022, in hopes of including the dataset in the *Manumitted* website. Swarthmore's initiative was completed by Black History and Genealogy Undergraduate Research Fellows Whitney Grinnage-Cassidy and Zahara Martinez. More information can be found at <https://blackgenealogy.domains.swarthmore.edu/manumissions/>.²

¹ An excellent account of the causes and progress of anti-slavery sentiment in the Society of Friends is given in Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

² The Swarthmore Black History and Genealogy Undergraduate Research Fellows (Whitney Grinnage-Cassidy and Zahara Martinez) would like to give special thanks to Jordan Landes, Emily Higgs Kopin, and the entire staff of the Friends Historical Library for their support and guidance in procurement,

Dates of Data Collection

2020-2022

Dataset Languages

English

Geographic Coverage

Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, Delaware

Temporal Coverage

1759-1805

Document Types

Freedom or Emancipation Certificate

Sources

Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College: Quaker meeting records

- Bradford Monthly Meeting Records (including Bradford & Uwchlan (Hicksite) and other predecessors), Marriage certificates, 1737-1864, RG2/Ph/B71 3.1
- Bucks Quarterly Meeting Records, Manumissions 1776-1793, RG2/Ph/B860 7.1
- Camden Monthly Meeting Records (including Duck Creek and Motherkiln), Manumissions, 1774-1792, RG2/Ph/C34 6.5.
- Concord Monthly Meeting Records, Manumissions, 1776-1801, RG2/Ph/C61 8.3
- Chester Monthly Meeting Records, Manumissions, 1776-1780, RG2/Ph/C433 6.1
- Chesterfield Monthly Meeting Records, Manumissions, 1778-1803, RG2/Ph/C47 8.10
- Kennett Monthly Meeting Records, Births and deaths, 1694-1821, RG2/Ph/K42 3.5
- Middletown Monthly Meeting (Langhorne, Pa.) Records, Miscellaneous papers, 1684-1889, RG2/Ph/M5 7.1-7.4
- Nine Partners Monthly Meeting Records, Births, Deaths, Marriages, Disownments, Manumissions, 1769-1798, RG2/NY/N553 4.1
- Quakertown and Kingwood Monthly Meetings (1744-1905) Records, A book for registering the names, 1703-1866, RG2/Ph/Q3 3.1
- Salem Monthly Meeting Records, Miscellaneous papers, 1681-1808 and n.d., RG2/Ph/S25++ 7.2.
- Shrewsbury Monthly Meeting (1672-1927) Records, Scrapbook of Manumissions, Sufferings, etc., 1773-1802, RG2/NY/S553 4.1

handling, analysis, and indexing of the manuscripts. Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections would like to thank the Haverford Libraries and the Evans family for their support of this project.

- Uwchlan Monthly Meeting Records (Downingtown Friends Meeting), A Record of manumissions for slaves released from bondage within the limits of the Monthly Meeting of Friends at Uwchlan in Chester County Pennsylvania, 1775-1784, RG2/Ph/U9 3.2
- Westbury Monthly Meeting Records, Manumissions, 1775-1798, RG2/NY/W453 3.9
- Westbury Monthly Meeting Records, Manumissions, 1796-1798, RG2/NY/W453 3.12
- Westbury Monthly Meeting Records, Manumissions, 1776-1790, RG2/NY/W453 3.16

Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, other collections:

- Collection of Manumissions, 1776-1832, SFHL-SC-079
- Two manumissions of enslaved people, 1787, 1798, SFHL-RG5-085. Box: 7 Lamb-Booth-Miller Family Papers
- Manumission by Levi Cully, 1799-04-14, SFHL-RG5-079. Box: 5 Kent-Barnard Family Papers
- Acct. of John Randolph's last illness, manumission of the people he enslaved (typed), and pamphlet "From the deposition of Dr. Joseph Parrish in John Randolph's Case", Box: 1, 1833, SFHL-RG5-153. Underwood Family Papers
- Manumission certificate, Philener Hunt, 1799, Box: 1, SFHL-RG5-204. Anna C. Stabler Family Papers
- Manumission of James Thompson, 1759, SFHL/MSS/066. Smedley Family Scrapbook
- Manumission of Ben, 1778, SFHL-MSS-044. Elias Hicks Manuscript Collection
- Documents concerning the manumission of the children of Sue, a Woman Enslaved by the Fisher Family, 1777, SFHL-RG5-162. Joseph Wharton Family Papers

Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections:

- The original papers of manumission from the Quarterly Meeting of Philadelphia, Recorded by Abington, Exeter, Gwynedd, Haverford, Philadelphia, Northern District, and Southern District Monthly Meetings. (HC.PhM.P455.04.047) Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia (Arch Street Friends) Records
- Blackwater Minutes, 1779-1795, HC.BM.B541.02.003 (1116/196), Blackwater and Upper Monthly Meetings Records
- Manumissions, 1776-1787, HC.PhM.E800.01.004 (1250/M3.3.1), Box: E-2. Evesham Monthly Meeting Records

Methodology

The dataset was extracted from cataloged monthly and quarterly Quaker meeting records found at Swarthmore College's Friends Historical Library located in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania and Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections in Haverford, Pennsylvania. The documents are the property of different Quaker yearly meetings along the east coast, who entrust the records to Swarthmore or Haverford to be cared for on a deposit agreement. Quakers were, and continue to be, habitual and fastidious record keepers. As a result, births, deaths, marriages, and of course, manumissions, were carefully recorded.

Information from the manumissions was gathered into digital spreadsheets on Google Sheets. These fields were developed by the project team for the *Manumitted* project, and the full description for them can also be found on the "ReadMe" tabs on the dataset spreadsheets. They are:

- Page Number: the page number listed on the physical document (manumission), corresponding to the page in the book of manumissions compiled by Quaker Meeting scribes
- Image Name (ex:HC10-10002_XXX): the image name created for the scan of the manumission.
- Date (YYYY-MM-DD): the day the manumission was signed by the slaveholder
- Name of Enslaved Person (Transcribe what is listed): name of the enslaved person listed in the manumission, likely as the slaveholder listed it
- Age listed for Enslaved Person: the listed age of the enslaved person at the time of the signing of the manumission, normalized to years where possible by converting to a decimal point or rounding (e.g. "6 months" is represented as "0.5")
- Freed Age: the age of the enslaved person at which the manumission is listed to go into effect, the age at which their freedom is listed to be granted (normalized as above)
- Assumed Gender of Enslaved Person: the gender of the enslaved person that the metadata collectors assumed when reading the manumission. Genders are assumed by pronouns listed in the manumission and common genders associated with the name listed. Additionally, words like "lad," "girl," etc were used in determining the gender listed. Again, names and pronouns are likely as the slaveholder listed them.
- Monthly Meeting: the name of the Quaker Monthly Meeting that the slaveholder was a part of and presumably submitted their manumission to. The Monthly Meeting is the basic unit of Quaker administration, with responsibility for care of members, authorizing marriages, maintaining discipline, managing meeting property, fostering social concerns etc. This information can often be found on the verso of the corresponding manumission in a summary created by the scribe. This can be cross referenced and confirmed with the index of the manumission book.
- Place (Township, County, etc): the location listed in the manumission as where the slaveholder lives. Locations have been normalized to modern place locations, including county and state. If a specific location is not given, the location of the Monthly Meeting is provided.
- Transcribed - Name of Slaveholder (Last name, First name): the name of the slaveholder doing the manumitting, transcribed as written on the manumission.
- Unabbreviated - Name of Slaveholder (Last name, First name): the unabbreviated, expanded, name of the slaveholder doing the manumitting on the manumission, as determined by metadata collectors, by researching common abbreviations of the time period.
- Assumed Gender of Slaveholder: the gender of the slaveholder that metadata collectors assumed when reading the manumission. Genders are assumed by pronouns listed in the manumission and common genders associated with the name listed.
- Transcribed - Witnesses (Last name, First name): names listed in the manumissions under the caveat of "sealed and delivered in the presence of." Names are transcribed as they are written in the manumission.
- Unabbreviated - Witnesses (ex: "Sealed and delivered in the Presence of...") (Last name, First name): the unabbreviated, expanded, names listed on the manumission under the caveat of "sealed and delivered in the presence of." Unabbreviated names are determined

by the metadata collectors and their researching of common abbreviations of the time period.

- Transcribed - Monthly Meeting Clerk (Last Name, First Name): the name of the scribe who created the summary of the manumission on the verso of the corresponding manumission. Names are transcribed as they are written in the manumission.
- Unabbreviated - Clerk (Last name, First name): the unabbreviated, expanded, name of the scribe listed on the verso of the corresponding manumission, as determined by metadata collectors by researching common abbreviations of the time period.
- Notes: clarifications and observations added by the transcribers.
- Call Number: the identifying information for the physical document or book containing the manumission.

There is a distinction between the “age listed” and the “freed age” for the enslaved because, as mentioned in the description of the dataset above, often enslaved women were not freed until their 18th birthday, and enslaved males were not freed until their 21st. Although this varied from meeting to meeting, these ages were consistent across all of the manumissions that we studied in this dataset.

Ages of the enslaved, if not mentioned outright, were calculated using the dates in which they were freed. The dates that children were freed were used in the calculation of their ages, as we assumed them to be their birthdays. It is probable that even the ages that slaveholders sometimes gave to their slaves were approximate, as enslaved people’s birthdays were rarely recorded.

We separately transcribed the names of slaveholders and witnesses as they appeared in the records, as well as the unabbreviated names, as determined by metadata collectors researching common abbreviations of the time period. During that time, abbreviated first names were widely used (e.g. “Saml.” for “Samuel”) in order to speed writing and save paper, which was expensive.

Null values, for which no information is available, are indicated with double dashes.

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Data Links

Dataset Repositories: Harvard Dataverse, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/XCC3VN>;
Swarthmore, <https://github.com/swat-ds/datasets/tree/main/manumissions>;
Haverford, <https://haverford.box.com/v/manumitted-data>

Linked Data Representation: [Enslaved.org](https://enslaved.org)

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