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## The Account Book of Charles B. Calvert in Southern Maryland, 1830-1860

Peer-Reviewed Dataset Article

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### Description

The dataset transcribes information pertaining to approximately 330 enslaved people documented in the Slave Account Book of Charles Benedict Calvert of Prince George's County,

Maryland. Calvert (1808-1864) was an enslaver and politician in Maryland and one of the founders of what is now the University of Maryland, originally called the Maryland Agricultural College; many of his papers, including this account book, are housed in Special Collections there.

The account book documents the enslaved community at several different properties located primarily in Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and Calvert County, Maryland. The locations listed in the source, such as Seneca Creek, Home Place, and North West Farms, are difficult to tie to a modern county, town, or specific address. The researchers verified several of the locations through maps and land surveys from the 1850s and 1860s, one of which contains a place labeled with "Chas. B Calvert."

Researchers believe the account book to list the people enslaved on the properties of Thomas Cramphin, Jr. (ca. 1740-1830), and his wife Caroline (1793-1879), Charles B. Calvert's half sister by his father, George Calvert (1768-1838), and enslaved woman Eleanor Beckett. Cramphin was a legislator, judge, landholder, and slaveholder in Montgomery County. The account book likely documents the enslaved people that Calvert was the trustee of on Caroline's behalf upon her husband's death. Caroline and her children moved to Eaton, NY, where they passed as white, but the labor and sale of the enslaved people documented in the account book still in Maryland funded her annuity as a widow.<sup>1</sup>

The source is a notebook that contains fifteen pages, a front cover, and a back cover. The cover reads, "Chas B. Calvert of Bellefonte, Prince Georges [sic] County, Maryland." The fifteen pages are divided along the seam, so in total there are twenty-seven pages of records and three blank pages. The account book lists enslaved people by name and age, and some by location, valuation, and sale. A slave account book typically documents transactions of chattel slavery for the purpose of financial and property management. In its intended use by the enslaver, the source renders enslaved people as commodities defined solely through the enslaver's transactions. There is minimal information about the enslaved people provided by the account book itself, as it only includes name, age, and other partial identifiers like location, valuation, abbreviations and some special markings. There is no specific date recorded in the account book, but it is assumed to be written between 1831, after Calvert became the trustee, and 1864, when Calvert passed away.

The source contains a limited number of categories, and so extracted data is supplemented with imputed categories, such as sort order, page headings, named place, gender, abbreviations, and special markings. Although gender is not explicitly documented in the account book, it is included in the dataset because most of the names have gendered connotations, such as Robert or Elizabeth; researchers imputed this category for analysis purposes. For example, the researchers found a general trend of presumed men aged 18-30 to be valued higher than presumed women.

It is the intention of the research cohort to decenter the Calverts in this work and yet it is also important to situate this information in the conversation about the ongoing ways that institutions like the University of Maryland benefit from wealth built through the labor of

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Alvarez, "Caroline Cramphin and her Children -- the Little Known Descendants of George Calvert," *The Riversdale Historical Society Newsletter* (Fall 2018): 5-7.

enslaved people. Although there is limited context about the lives of the enslaved people recorded in the original document, this data is still intended to center enslaved people and make this information accessible beyond the university. It is important to recognize the fuller history of enslavement and unveil the violence of enslavers like the Calverts. The slave account book is a problematic, biased, and violent artifact; nevertheless, the researchers developed this data as a pathway to address the trauma of enslaved people historically and that is present today among the descendants of enslaved people. There is an urgent need to study enslavement in a manner that centers the experiences of the enslaved, through methods such as intentional vocabulary and shifting research focal points from the oppressor to the oppressed.

## **Dates of Data Collection**

2021

## **Dataset Languages**

English

## **Geographic Coverage**

Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and Calvert County, Maryland; Washington, D.C., Virginia

## **Temporal Coverage**

1830-1860

## **Document Types**

Appraisal or Assessment  
Inventory or Probate Record

## **Sources**

"Slave account book of Charles Benedict Calvert, Prince George's County, Maryland, circa 1830-1860," Maryland Manuscripts collection, item 4077, accession 97-33; Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD, <https://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/5750>.

## **Methodology**

Individually, the researchers created datasheets to begin transcribing and extracting information from the source, which lists the name, age, "valuation," and sale price of the enslaved persons at Calvert's several local holdings, circa 1830-1860. From the individual data sheets, the cohort collectively established consistent language and combined individual extractions into one main dataset.

The authors discussed the intentions they held while working with the data individually and determined which aspects and categories they wanted to maintain, add, or discard. In creating a digital version of the manuscript, the researchers decided to maintain most of the basic formatting and structures to the datasets such as Name, Page Heading, Age, Imputed Gender, etc. There are conscious choices around the language used in the work. Many prominent discussions of enslavement deny personhood and the agency of enslaved people, giving enslavers more narrative power and absolving them of their active roles in these violent histories. The purpose of using intentional language when describing the enslaved is to humanely address people who were and still are ignored and mistreated by the construction of "history." Thus, "Enslaved person" instead of "slave" and "Enslaver" instead of "master" or "owner" are used in the dataset.

Researchers added field categories such as Sort Order, Digital Page, and Age Category for transcription and organization purposes, while words such as "Price" and "Sale" are transcribed verbatim from the source. Researchers changed the category of "Age" in the source to be "Simplified Age," meaning a numerical value, in the dataset to differentiate from the imputed qualitative value of "Age Category."

The cohort discussed how much of their own voices, as the researchers, they wanted to appear in the data. The cohort decided it was important to explicitly define the chosen terminology for the dataset column headings. This maintains consistency while recording data, as well as describes the researcher's intentions for the audience to understand their ongoing choices. Each term is accompanied by examples from the account book to better illustrate the term meanings, as well as to show explicitly how they exist in the source.

In establishing consistent language and deciding which components to include in the combined dataset, the researchers' continuously returned to the question of recording assumed gender classifications. The account book does not have any explicit reference to gender classifications, however, the researcher's could infer based on the gendered connotations of most names. Because there was no gender explicitly stated, it qualifies as "imputed" data, meaning it is based on the researcher's voice and assumptions. Gender is signified by: "M": Male, "F": Female, and "U": Unisex.

Names were copied verbatim from the original document, however, because of occasional illegible writing, variations of the names were often searched to interpret correct spelling.

The researchers created the section "special markings" to record source markings which appeared in no specific pattern and were not exclusive to any single or set of records throughout the book. A common mark on the pages were "X"s, often written next to a name in pen or pencil. The researchers utilized this section of the datasheet to explain visually what the marking was, where it was, and any other particular qualities, for example, "'x' penciled in on left column & on right column." It remains unclear precisely what the "X" indicates, though it appears to be some sort of tally or verification exercise taken subsequent to the original registry.

The creators added a qualitative age category identifying recorded persons as "Infant," "Child," "Adult," or "Older Person." This form of identification was added in consideration of maintaining as many humanizing labels as possible. The team agreed that the labels call to human qualities and experiences in ways numbers do not.

The team was able to identify and rectify an initial scanning error, which had omitted one page and a duplicated one in its place. Based on this research, the document was rescanned and the correct version will be available to the public.

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## Data Links

Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse [<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/7UG07H>]

Linked Data Representation: *Enslaved.org* [Summary Visualization](#)

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