Enslaved | Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation

Downey, Meika, and Patrick Laird. "Enslaved People of Patrick Henry's Scotchtown." *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation* 3, no. 3 (2022): 27-33. https://doi.org/10.25971/3psj-tk63.

Enslaved People of Patrick Henry's Scotchtown

Dataset Article

Article Authors

Meika Downey, Preservation Virginia
Patrick Laird, Preservation Virginia

Dataset Creators

Meika Downey, Preservation Virginia
Patrick Laird, Preservation Virginia
Jennifer Cooke, Newcastle University

Description

This dataset documents the people whom Patrick Henry (b. 1736, d.1799) enslaved at his Hanover County plantation, Scotchtown, from 1771 until he sold the property in 1778. Patrick Henry neither funded the construction of Scotchtown, nor was he the property's first owner. The manor house was built in 1719 and originally owned by Charles Chiswell and passed through multiple hands before Henry's ownership. Henry was born in 1736 in Hanover Country to John Henry and Sarah Winston Henry. Upon his marriage to Sarah Shelton in 1754, Patrick Henry received a dowry that consisted of a 300-acre plantation known as Piney Slash and six named enslaved people from his new father-in-law, John Shelton. It has been traditionally said that

Shelton intended to give Henry ten enslaved people but could only part with six.[1] Additionally, Patrick Henry's father gifted him additional enslaved individuals around the time of his marriage. Ten named enslaved people were all listed on a tithables list from 1768: Ben, Dick, James, Will, Dinnah, Beck, Jenny, Issac, Ben, and Pedro. These individuals are believed to be the first people that Patrick Henry enslaved, and some remained with the family until after Henry passed away in 1799.[2] These nine individuals, an additional man named Ben, and a boy named Jessee were brought to the nearly 1,000-acre plantation known as Scotchtown when Henry and his family moved to the property in 1771.[3] During his early residence at the plantation, Henry acquired at least three more enslaved girls, Betty, Hannah, and Lucy.[4] Although records on the number of people that Patrick Henry enslaved are scarce, a newspaper advertisement for the sale of Scotchtown in 1769 suggested the land was significant enough to be worked by "between 20 and 30 hands."[5] Upon Henry's second marriage, to Dorothea Dandridge in 1777, another twelve enslaved people were brought to Scotchtown as dowry gifts. On the plantation, enslaved people were primarily utilized as forced agricultural labor to support the crops of wheat produced on the plantation. Select individuals such as Dinnah and Pedro labored in a more specialized fashion, as the head cook and coachman, respectively.

The Henrys owned and resided at Scotchtown until 1778, though the family relocated, for all intents and purposes, by 1776 to the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Virginia. By 1782, tax records reveal that Henry enslaved 75 individuals.[6] The bulk of these people remain unnamed, but after concluding that several people enslaved at Scotchtown in the early and mid-1770s were also documented as enslaved at Henry's retirement home, Red Hill in Charlotte County, twenty years later, we can infer a handful of individuals who would have been counted among those in the 1782 tax list. Patrick Henry reached the peak of his wealth when he lived his final five years at Red Hill from 1794 to 1799. There he enslaved 67 people on his 2,930-acre plantation, and an additional 45 between his other holdings in Charlotte and Campbell counties and their vicinity.[7] Although the Scotchtown and Red Hill historic site staffs did not collaborate on the development of our respective datasets, there are references to enslaved individuals that appear in both. We often cross-referenced our archives with Red Hill's research to corroborate whether an enslaved person labored at both properties.

---

[1] Mark Couvillon, *In Sickness and in Health: The Marriage of Patrick Henry and Sarah Shelton* (Brookneal, VA: Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation, 2021), 47-49.
[2] Rosalie Davis, ed., *Louisa County, Virginia, Tithables and Census, 1743-1785* (Manchester, MO: R. E. Davis, 1988); "Henry's Will," Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation, https://www.redhill.org/patrick-henry/henrys-will/.
[3] Sarah Henry to Anne Henry Christian, September 13, 1771, William Wirt Henry Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.
[4] Patrick Henry, Ledger, 1764-1798, Accession 22408, Business records collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.
[5] Edmund Pendleton and Peter Lyons, "Advertisement," *Virginia Gazette*, Dec. 28, 1769.
[6] Charles P. Blunt, *Patrick Henry: The Henry County Years (1779-1784)* (Danville, VA: Womack Press, 1976), 10.
[7] "History of Red Hill," Patrick Henry National Memorial, https://www.redhill.org/red-hill/.

Many of the people Patrick Henry enslaved during his life relocated with him when he moved the family to different properties over several decades. One of the individuals who remained consistently enslaved to Henry was Pedro, a man Henry acquired in the 1750s. While at Scotchtown as a young man, Pedro was trained as a coachman, a specialized position. When the Henrys moved to the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg in 1776, they brought with them the majority of those enslaved at Scotchtown, including Pedro. These upwards of twenty enslaved people engaged in forced labor on the Palace grounds and farmlands. While at Scotchtown, Pedro is known to have ferried purchased supplies to the plantation from local merchants and run errands as a house servant; in Williamsburg, Pedro performed similar responsibilities. Pedro may also have served as the enslaved doorman or butler at the Palace. When Patrick Henry left Williamsburg in 1779, Pedro was one of the dozens of enslaved individuals to likewise leave. During his enslaved residence with the Henry family, Pedro created a family and raised children of his own. When Pedro reached 41 years old in 1786, Henry contributed him to Elizabeth Henry's marriage dowry to Philip Aylett. After two years enslaved to Aylett, Pedro escaped and attempted to return to his family at either Salisbury or Leatherwood, both estates owned by Patrick Henry during that time.[8] In response to Pedro's seizure of his freedom, Aylett published a runaway advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette,* which described Pedro as "about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, and well set, of a dark complexion, has most of his upper fore teeth out, and of a good address. . . . When he went away he had on a blue coat with red cuffs and cape, a green plains jacket, a pair of fustian (olive colour) breaches, a pair of yarn stockings, and a felt hat."[9]

As noted above, by the time Henry settled at Red Hill on the Charlotte and Campbell county line in the mid-1790s, he established an expansive plantation complex stretching over 2,900 acres. Other individuals who continued to live and labor enslaved to Patrick Henry throughout his adult life include Dinnah and Jessee, who appear in records documenting Henry's retirement at Red Hill from 1794 to 1799. Henry wrote his will in 1798, in which he "give[s] to [his] said wife Dorothea all [his] Lands at and ad-joining . . . dwelling place called Red Hill . . . together with Twenty of [his] slaves, her choice of them all." His bequest indicates that Dorothea could take her pick of 20 enslaved people from the wider enslaved population at Red Hill, a total of 67 individuals. In two subsequent codicils to his will made in 1799, Henry disseminated large tracts of land and an unquantified number of enslaved people to his children and some extended family members. In addition to willing his remaining enslaved people "to be equally divided amongst my Children by my present wife," Henry also empowered Dorothea to "manage," "dispose," and "give as she pleases amongst her Children" the twenty individuals she received "at her discretion."[10] Due to the sheer magnitude of Henry's operation and utilization of enslaved labor at Red Hill, many descendants of those individuals who toiled on the land still reside in this region of Virginia today. To learn more about Red Hill's recent efforts to connect with the enslaved descendant community, visit www.redhill.org.

---

[8] Mark Couvillon, *Patrick Henry's Virginia: A Guide to the Homes and Sites in the Life of an American Patriot* (Brookneal, VA: Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation, 2001), 63-79.
[9] Philip Aylett, "Run-Away," *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, Apr. 9, 1788.
[10] "Henry's Will," Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation, https://www.redhill.org/patrick-henry/henrys-will/.

Patrick Henry is a prominent figure in the history of the American Revolution and the creation of the new nation. He conceived of his "Liberty or Death" speech while living at Scotchtown, traveling from this plantation to St. John's Church in Richmond to deliver his famous oration in March 1775. Scotchtown will forever be known as Henry's wartime residence and it was here that he shaped his thoughts and words about liberty and freedom. However, it must be made clear that the enslaved labor of Pedro, Dinnah, and others enabled Henry the time to compose his revolutionary thoughts and ideals at Scotchtown and deliver them at St. John's Church. The contradiction can be seen in Patrick Henry's January 1773 letter to Robert Pleasants that he penned at Scotchtown, in which Henry directly confronts the inconsistencies of slavery in Virginia alongside the ideals for which the colonies were to base the new nation. Referring to the institution of slavery, Henry wrote to Pleasants:

> Is it not amazing, that at a time when the rights of Humanity are defined & understood with precision in a Country above all others fond of Liberty: that in such an Age and such a Country, we find Men, professing a Religion the most humane, mild, meek, gentle & generous, adopting a Principle as repugnant to humanity, as it is inconsistent with the Bible & destructive to Liberty. . . .Would any one believe that I am Master of Slaves of my own purchase! I am drawn along by ye. general inconvenience of living without them, I will not, I cannot justify it.[11]

Patrick Henry composed these honest words from the comfort of his manor house at Scotchtown, surrounded by dozens of forced laborers that he held in bondage. This reality and contradiction is important for us to convey to both visitors to Scotchtown and researchers reading this. The dataset detailing the individuals enslaved at Scotchtown is significant not only because of the fact that Scotchtown is the last original home of Patrick Henry still standing, but also because these individuals were forced to labor under one of the most vocal advocates for freedom and liberty in Revolutionary America. Henry recognized the contradictions between being the voice for revolution while also enslaving many people, but did not rectify these inconsistencies by manumitting those he held in bondage.

We continue our research in order to uncover the fate of many of Henry's enslaved people who lived and labored at Scotchtown, as they remain an integral part of the property's history and interpretation. We hope to learn more about the individuals Patrick Henry enslaved at Scotchtown and to treat our dataset as a living document, appending additional entries as we discover them.

Dates of Data Collection

2022

[11] Patrick Henry to Robert Pleasants, January 18, 1773, *Teaching American History,* https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/patrick-henry-to-robert-pleasants/.

Dataset Languages

English

Geographic Coverage

Charlotte County, Virginia
Hanover County, Virginia
Henry County, Virginia
Louisa County, Virginia
Williamsburg, Virginia

Temporal Coverage

1768-1799

Document Types

Bill of Sale, Invoice, or Receipt
Contract
Letter
Inventory or Probate Record
Runaway Advertisement
Will and Testament

Sources

Davis, Rosalie, ed., *Louisa County, Virginia, Tithables and Census, 1743-1785* (Manchester, MO: R. E. Davis, 1988).

Henry, Patrick. Ledger, 1764-1798. Accession 22408, Business records collection. Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

"Verbatim Copy of Inventory & Appraisement of Estate of Patrick Henry in the County of Charlotte" [1799] and "Inventory of the Estate of Patrick Henry, Esq., Deceased" [1802]. In Morgan, George. *The True Patrick Henry*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1907.

"Henry's Will." Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation. https://www.redhill.org/patrick-henry/henrys-will/.

Methodology

Names of individuals who were enslaved at Scotchtown were extracted from a number of sources compiled for the preservation and interpretation of Patrick Henry's Scotchtown in Hanover County, Virginia. These sources are located in different archives and libraries but have

been digitized and collected as digital files. Some sources have been transcribed, but most exist only as digital scans. These sources include Patrick Henry's account books, tithable lists, and inventories. One runaway advertisement was also utilized to find a better description of one enslaved person who Patrick Henry owned at Scotchtown.

This core set of materials is defined by Henry's time living at Scotchtown, from 1771 to 1778. Henry also owned other properties in Virginia throughout his life that he used for agricultural production. It is quite likely that individuals served on more than one property, however, for the creation of this dataset we focused on the people Henry enslaved at his Scotchtown plantation specifically. We can assume with a strong degree of certainty that the individuals documented in this core set very likely labored at Henry's Hanover plantation. In a few cases we have ventured outside of our core sources to document supporting evidence regarding specific enslaved individuals. For example, we looked to source material documenting Henry's enslaved laborers at his properties preceding and succeeding Scotchtown, including Roundabout (1765-1771, Louisa County) before Scotchtown, and those after: the Governor's Palace (1776-1779, Williamsburg), Leatherwood (1779-1784, Henry County), and Red Hill (1794-1799, Campbell County). In some cases we inferred an enslaved person's presence at Scotchtown based on their documented presence at other Henry estates. For example, we reviewed the 1768 tithable list from Henry's property, Roundabout, and inferred that some individuals included therein would have likely been found at Scotchtown three years later (see 001-010). Since Patrick Henry sold Roundabout in 1773 and owned and resided solely at Scotchtown from 1773 until 1776, it can be inferred that individuals listed before and after this residence there likely spent time at the plantation. Furthermore, when individuals appeared in documentation from Henry's residence at Red Hill in the 1790s who were listed in the 1768 sources, we feel confident that they would have lived and labored at Scotchtown, too, decades earlier. One individual, an enslaved boy named Jessee who was first gifted to Henry in 1770, was listed as a "man" in 1799 at Red Hill with the same spelling.[12] A woman named Dinnah appears to have been a part of the dowry given to Patrick Henry in 1754 and her name continues to appear on records until 1802, when she is described as "an old woman."[13]

The dataset presented contains the principal information about each individual and the source in which they are referenced. Data points include a unique identifier (which we have assigned), name, surname, age, sex, date range of references, full source citation, names of parents, and names of children when available. When we could determine that more than one individual used the same name, we assigned each their own identifier. Throughout the source material that documents named enslaved people at Scotchtown, Henry did not include any surnames. The vast majority of entries do not include a quoted reference–except in [007]--because throughout most of the sources, individuals are listed only by name alone and do not include more substantial information.

[12] Patrick Henry, Ledger, 1764-1798, Accession 22408, Business records collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
[13] "Henry's Will," Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation, https://www.redhill.org/patrick-henry/henrys-will/.

Date of Publication

December 2022

Use Permissions

Data Links

Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/XPWRYA
Linked Data Representation: Enslaved.org Summary Visualization

Acknowledgments

National Endowment for the Humanities American Rescue Plan

Cite this Article

Downey, Meika, and Patrick Laird. "Enslaved People of Patrick Henry's Scotchtown." *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation* 3, no. 3 (2022): 27-33. https://doi.org/10.25971/3psj-tk63.

Copyright