Hired Out: Enslaved Persons from the Estate of Thomas Cramphin (Maryland and District of Columbia, 1830s)

Dataset Article

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https://doi.org/10.25971/6gsx-x310.
Description

The dataset presents a list of thirty-two enslaved individuals for hire belonging to the estate of Thomas Cramphin (ca. 1740-1830), a wealthy Maryland planter and judge. The original source is undated, but can be presumed to have been written sometime between Cramphin's death in December 1830 and the death of the estate executor, George Calvert, in January 1838.

Cramphin, a close friend of the Calvert family, cohabitated with Caroline Beckett Calvert, one of the daughters of George Calvert (1768-1838) and Eleanor Beckett, a woman Calvert enslaved. Thomas Cramphin and Caroline Beckett Calvert lived together as man and wife from 1812 until Cramphin's death in 1830. Because of miscegenation laws in Maryland, they could not legally marry. Caroline and her children later moved to Eaton, New York, where they passed as white.¹ The list from which the dataset was created was likely drafted by the executor of Cramphin's will to keep track of enslaved individuals who were hired out while the estate was being settled. It is probable that Richard Williams, Cramphin's estate administrator, was the original author of the list. Cramphin is identified as “Thos Cramphin dce^d”[deceased], suggesting the list was drafted shortly after 1830.

The dataset specifies the employer each enslaved person worked for and the location where that employer resided. Locations are in the greater Maryland area and include what researchers assume to be Washington City and Georgetown in the District of Columbia, as well as various locations in Montgomery County, Maryland, including Rockville and Barnesville.

Two types of hiring out existed alongside conventional enslavement in Maryland. Some enslaved people, usually craftspeople, were able to hire out their time and remit wages to their owner(s), living with a degree of personal freedom while still in bondage. Hiring out their labor was one of the ways in which enslaved people could both exercise their agency as individuals and attempt to purchase their freedom from their enslavers. It is important to note that this practice was more common in both the Chesapeake Region and in urban areas. Enslaved people in rural places and in the Deep South did not commonly have opportunities to hire themselves out. Some enslaved people were allowed to keep a small percentage of their wages, which they could save up to buy their freedom.² On the other hand, enslaved people were sometimes hired out by their owners in excess of the labor needs on their own property, to labor temporarily elsewhere. This practice was also pursued sometimes after an owner's death, while the fate of

said individuals was still being determined. Under these arrangements, there were various ways owners were compensated. Hirers paid Cramphin's estate for the labor of twelve individuals in the dataset. The remaining twenty enslaved people from the dataset were provided "Victuals and Cloths," which researchers interpret to mean food and clothing, in lieu of payment to the estate.

The source contains only a limited number of categories of information, but is supplemented with imputed categories, such as list of identifiers, perceived sex, formatting anomalies, event type, and source. Although it was not originally included in the source, researchers decided to impute the presumed sex of the enslaved individuals and include it in the dataset. The presumed sex was based on the gendered connotations of the names, such as Mary and Henry. Researchers felt this was an important category to add because sex influenced the experience of enslavement.

The research team's goal is to decenter the Cramphins and other enslavers, centering instead the lives of the enslaved individuals in antebellum Maryland. Using strategies that shift the research focus from the oppressor to the oppressed is urgently necessary to study enslavement in a way that prioritizes the experiences of the enslaved. For more information about the lives of enslaved individuals in Maryland, and the involvement of families like the Calverts and Cramphins, records can be found in the Maryland State Archives and the Riversdale House Museum.

**Dates of Data Collection**
2022

**Dataset Languages**
English

**Geographic Coverage**
Montgomery County, Maryland
Barnesville, Maryland
Rockville, Maryland
Georgetown, Washington, D.C.
District of Columbia

**Temporal Coverage**
1831-1837

**Document Types**
Bill of Sale, Invoice, or Receipt
Sources

"List of Slaves Belonging to Estate of Thomas Cramphin Deceased that are Hired Out," undated; privately owned; on loan to the Riversdale House Museum, Riverdale Park, MD.

Methodology

The researchers began by transcribing the digitized document individually. They decided on the title, categorization, and classification of the spreadsheet on their own. Next, the team met all together and clarified any transcription inconsistencies by going back into the original document and studying the document together. Some words in the original document are abbreviated, but the researchers decided to unabbreviate them in the dataset. (For example, "W. City", which appears as one of the locations in the document, can be assumed to be Washington City). For abbreviations for names that were unclear, they chose to keep the abbreviations so as not to introduce errors. As an example, “Geo Holtzman” is listed as a hirer in the document. At first, researchers speculated that his full name was George. Upon further research, a “Geo Holtzman” shows up in the 1830 District of Columbia Census. However, a “George Holtzman” also appears in the 1834 Washington City Directory. Because of this inconsistency, the group decided to keep the name as it appears in the list of enslaved. The researchers clarified any spelling errors and made note of this as well, along with changing some language to a more widely understood form. For example, the team chose to normalize “vituals and cloths” by modernizing the spelling to “victuals and cloths.”

After the team completed the first draft of the combined transcription, it was necessary to go through the dataset multiple times to check for paleographical accuracy. Some names of hirers were able to be cross-checked with the census records from 1830 and 1840, as well as the Washington City directory. The author of the original document often added an "s" at the end of a name where it was not present. The author's spelling was also an issue. “J Bittinger” appears on the document, but from the 1834 Washington City directory, the team gathered that it is likely that the true name of this hirer is “John Bedinger.” Researchers made the decision to normalize the spelling of these names and attempt to keep them consistent with census records so that it would be easier to make connections between documents. Because the document refers to enslavers often in the possessive tense, “Mrs Parkers near Geo Town,” for example, it is sometimes unclear whether an "s" belongs at the end of a name or it; in most cases we chose to omit it, but in a few, like Waters, it seemed more likely that it belonged in the name.

As a result of the transcription process, the dataset is divided into eleven columns or categories. These categories include a list order, list of identifiers, names of the enslaved, their perceived sex, special symbols, their location of hire by street and county or city, who the enslaved were hired out to, and payments received by Cramphin for their labor. Additionally, the event type and record type are included. The titles of field headings were created intentionally. Researchers chose to define the individuals listed as “enslaved” persons as a way to more accurately explain their historical significance and place an emphasis on differentiating an individual’s identity.
from their status. "Perceived sex" is used so that readers will understand that this category is based on assumptions made by the dataset creators based on the sex typically associated with each name. The team felt this was important to include because a person's gender played a significant role in their experience while enslaved. The column "Payments to Cramphin's estate" conveys that the enslaved individuals did not necessarily see the fruits of their labor, nor should their value as humans be based on a monetary value. For the sake of specificity and legibility, the creators chose to separate street names from city and county names. The order of the columns is also intentional. Immediately after list order and list of identifiers, the names of the enslaved persons are listed before all other information in order to place more significance on these individuals, rather than the other characteristics that have historically been used to identify them. Overall, the layout of the dataset seeks to ensure that enslaved people are at the forefront of this project.

Date of Publication
July 2023

Data Links
Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse, https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/KMW1B3
Linked Data Representation: Enslaved.org

Acknowledgments
Big Ten Academic Alliance
New York Life Foundation
University of Maryland, College of Arts and Humanities
University of Maryland Graduate School
University of California, Riverside, College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

Cite this Article

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3 The authors developed the dataset and related scholarship during a Big Ten Academic Alliance Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP), sponsored by the University of Maryland's College of Arts and Humanities and Graduate School, as well as the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at the University of California, Riverside, with financial support from the New York Life Foundation. Research design, development, and execution as well as paleographic and archival training were guided by Daryle Williams (University of California, Riverside), Kristina Poznan (University of Maryland), and guest faculty affiliated with Enslaved.org, Fairfax County Courts, the Maryland State Archives, Riversdale House Museum, and the University of Maryland Libraries.
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