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They Had Names: Representations of the Enslaved in Liberty County, Georgia, Estate Inventories, 1762-1865

Peer-Reviewed Dataset Article

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Description

The dataset is divided into time periods and in chronological order, containing abstracts of 650 Liberty County, Georgia, post-mortem estate inventories and divisions. The names of 18,300+ enslaved people were extracted from Liberty County court documents recorded between 1762 and 1865. The dataset includes original and standardized versions of names of the enslaved and slave owners, allowing for sorting by name.

A group of planters from Dorchester, South Carolina, moved to the area that later became Liberty County in the 1750s after Georgia legalized slavery, which had been initially prohibited in the colony. They brought with them approximately three times their number in enslaved people to create and work rice and cotton plantations. Liberty County has been majority African

American since the 1750s, and many descendants of people enslaved there either remain in the area or have retained ties with it. They are considered part of the Gullah Geechee people. Intermarriage among the white slaveowning families and a tradition of keeping enslaved people within those families resulted in an extensive and complex body of court documents that enables descendants and researchers to trace particular enslaved individuals and their descendants through time, even if only through the slaveowners' lens.

Because this was one of the earliest areas in Georgia settled by slaveholders, and because the Liberty County courthouse never burned, this dataset represents one of the largest and most continuous records of a community of enslaved people in Georgia, facilitating both historical and statistical analysis. The estate inventories have been digitized and are freely available online at FamilySearch.org and the Georgia Archives Virtual Vault, but lack of indexing and inconsistencies in spelling of names have complicated their use; this dataset is designed to fill that gap. The two contributors have also abstracted and transcribed other documents naming enslaved and free Africa-descended people (wills, bills of sale, marriage contracts, chattel mortgages, deeds of gift, church and other court records) and have made them available online at TheyHadNames.net, along with aids for researching Liberty County. The documents are valuable to both descendants of the enslaved persons named and to researchers studying the history of slavery in Liberty County.

Dates of Data Collection

2018-2020

Dataset Languages

English

Geographic Coverage

Liberty County, Georgia

Temporal Coverage

1762-1865

Documents Types

Census or Register

Sources

Colonial Estate Records. Georgia. "Colony of Georgia, Estate records, Record Group RG 49-1-1, Georgia Archives." Database with images. Georgia Archives Virtual Vault.

<https://vault.georgiaarchives.org>.

Georgia, Wills and Probate Records, 1742-1992. Liberty County. "Estates 1775-1892 Lowe, John-McCall, John." Database with images. FamilySearch.org. <http://familysearch.org>.

Georgia, Wills and Probate Records, 1742-1992. Liberty County. "Miscellaneous probate records 1850-1863 vol C and L." Database with images. FamilySearch.org. <http://familysearch.org>.

Georgia, Wills and Probate Records, 1742-1992. Liberty County. "Wills, appraisements and bonds 1790-1850 vol B." Database with images. FamilySearch.org. <http://familysearch.org>.

Georgia, Wills and Probate Records, 1742-1992. Liberty County. "Wills 1863-1942 vol C-D." Database with images. FamilySearch.org. <http://familysearch.org>.

Liberty County, Georgia, Superior Court. "Deeds & Mortgages v. A-P, 1777-1870." Database with images. FamilySearch.org. <http://familysearch.org>.

Methodology

Digitized sets of Liberty County Court of Ordinary and Superior Court records held by FamilySearch.org were read page by page to identify estate inventories and divisions naming enslaved African Americans. Colonial-era estate inventories were found online at the Georgia Archives Virtual Vault. Abstracts were created by the two contributors, one of whom also verified all abstracts for accuracy and consistency and created the accompanying spreadsheet. The abstracts contain all names, dates, and identifying information contained in the documents, but omit all non-human property, such as household items, animals, and plantation equipment. Land was normally not inventoried in these documents but is included in the abstracts if it was mentioned.

The spreadsheet contains columns with standardized versions of slaveholder and enslaved names to allow tracking an individual across time; the original spelling of the names is retained in a separate column. Where possible, alternative spellings were added to both documents in brackets to facilitate searches. Values in earlier records were denominated in pounds, later ones in dollars, and the difference is noted. Notes and analysis not contained in the original documents are in brackets. From 1786 to about 1800, the inventories were not dated; they have been listed in the order in which they were recorded in court. Methods used by the estate appraisers to record names and other identifying data of the enslaved people varied. Some of the inventories included only names and values; others added elements such as gender, disabilities if present, age, and occasionally a surname. All identifying information has been included in the abstracts and spreadsheet. Family relationships were sometimes specified;

sometimes a group of people was assigned a single value, presumed to indicate a family, and sometimes individuals were listed in what appeared to be family groups, with a value assigned to each one. In the latter case, the values and sometimes listed ages appear to indicate that a mother or mother and father were listed first, followed by children in age order. Research has verified these presumptions in some cases, and no case where the presumption was not true has yet been discovered. To enable sorting of the spreadsheet by name, but preserve the ability to discover family groupings, a column was added for the original order within the inventory, allowing a user to discover a name, then sort the spreadsheet by slaveowner, date, and order within original inventory to discover possible family groupings.

Date of Publication

2020

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Data Links

Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/03HR2N>

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

Acknowledgments

FamilySearch.org

Georgia Archives Virtual Vault

Cite this Article

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