

Smith, Deborah A. "Seth Woodroof Account Book, Jones Memorial Library: Sales of Enslaved Persons in Lynchburg, Virginia 1834-1840." *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation* 4, no. 5 (2023): 76-81. <https://doi.org/10.25971/cnwq-vn64>.

## **Seth Woodroof Account Book, Jones Memorial Library: Sales of Enslaved Persons in Lynchburg, VA, 1834-1840**

Dataset Article

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### **Description**

The Seth Woodroof Account Book dataset contains information about more than two hundred individuals involved with the slave trade in Lynchburg, Virginia in the 1830s from Manuscript 1047 in the collection of the George M. Jones Memorial Library.

Seth Woodroof (also spelled Woodruff and Woodrough) was a known slave trader in Lynchburg. Woodroof was born about 1805 and died in 1875. He is mentioned in advertisements and

historical accounts, including Harriet Beecher Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>1</sup> Woodroof was also named in "Charley Mitchell's Story," documented by the Federal Writers' Project Slave Narrative Project. Mitchell noted that Woodroof's Lynchburg trading yard was "full of Louisiana and Texas slave buyers."<sup>2</sup> Woodroof partnered with slave traders Rowan Harris and John Harris. Woodroof's estate was named in a 1904 chancery suit brought by the heirs of Joseph Pettyjohn regarding the price of slaves bought in Virginia in the 1830s.<sup>3</sup>

In 2021, the Lynchburg Museum System and the Legacy Museum of African American History launched a collaborative public history project titled Silent Witnesses, Inc. to document the experiences of enslaved people of African descent and mark related sites in Lynchburg. In 2023, Silent Witnesses planned to install six historical markers at sites across the city, including Woodroof's Slave Auction and Boarding Business. The business was located at 925 Commerce Street and was operated by Seth Woodroof between 1846 and 1865. The property included a three-story building and fenced yard and a large auction block. The facility was described in newspaper advertisements as "secure as the city jail."<sup>4</sup>

The Seth Woodroof Account Book is held at Jones Memorial Library in Lynchburg, Virginia. The book is among the collection's original local history holdings and can be found as Manuscript 1047. The front cover includes the notation "658 W" in white lettering on the bottom right, suggesting that the book was cataloged using the Dewey Decimal system prior to 1993, when the library switched to Library of Congress classification. A sticker on the inside back cover includes this directive: "For Reference/Virginia Collection/Not to be taken from this room." During the period when the Jones operated as a public library, the Virginia Collection was held in a local history room located in the library's original building at 434 Rivermont Avenue. The library moved to its current location in 1987. The Dewey Decimal classification number on the front cover in combination with a 'Virginia Room' stamp on the inside back cover together suggest that the account book came into the library's collection prior to 1987. The account book is believed to have been donated to the library by the Manson family after the library opened in 1908.

The dataset for Manuscript 1047 is in English. It contains 231 rows of information with 28 fields. Fields include: Source Citation; Source Page Number; Source URL Permalink; Unique ID; Event Type; Prefix; First Name; Alternate Spelling First Name; Surname; Alternate Spelling

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<sup>1</sup> "Mrs. Rose Caudle (formerly Rose King) searching for her mother Charlotte King and several brothers," Richmond Planet (Richmond, VA), August 21, 1897, Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery, accessed September 2, 2023, <https://informationwanted.org/items/show/1282>; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin; Presenting the Original Facts and Documents Upon Which the Story is Founded* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Co., 1853), 139.

<sup>2</sup> *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 3, Lewis-Ryles* [1936], <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mesn.163>.

<sup>3</sup> Lynchburg (Va.) Chancery Cause, Exrs. of Joseph Pettyjohn vs. Exr. of Seth Woodroof, 1904; Lynchburg (Va.) Chancery Cause 1904-065; Local government records collection, Lynchburg (City) Court Records; Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.

<sup>4</sup> "Silent Witnesses Lynchburg, Virginia" (Lynchburg: Silent Witnesses, 2023), 16.

Surname; Person Status; Occupation; Age; Date; Bought For [amount]; Sold For [amount]; Sale Location City; Sale Location State; Destination Location City; Destination Location State; Seller First Name; Seller Surname; Buyer Prefix; Buyer First Name; Alternate Spelling Buyer First Name; Buyer Surname; Alternate Spelling Buyer Surname; Notes.

The dataset includes the first and last names of persons listed in transactions brokered by slave traders Seth Woodroof, John Harris, and Rowan Harris in Lynchburg, Virginia and the Deep South between 1834 and 1840. The dataset includes fields for alternate spellings of first and last names.

Within the account book, 206 individuals are listed, including 135 sold persons and an additional 33 relocated (presumably enslaved) persons. Thirty-six buyers and two traders are listed. At least 36 of the enslaved persons were children under the age of 18. This includes four persons listed as “child of” under the enslaved mother’s name (surnames Davis, Mosley, and Reynoldes). No enslaved persons are listed above the age of 40. Several enslaved persons are listed with the same or similar surname; these individuals may be related. Repeated surnames among the enslaved persons include Ambler, Burford, Coleman, Crow, Davis, Day, Drew, Elliott, Hap/Hop, Hunter, Jordain, Manthews/Matthews, Monday, Moseley, Pacton/Paxton, Radford, Reynoldes/Reynolds, Ridgway, Shanks, Terry, and Wilson.

The account book documents movement of enslaved persons from Lynchburg across the American South during the period known as the Second Middle Passage. Seventeen persons named in the book were transported to Mississippi for sale in 1834 and 1835. In addition, the account book includes an entry by Woodroof on page 71 that he incurred expenses for the transport of “33 Negroes from Lynchburg, Virginia to Natchez, Mississippi from 17 of January to 18<sup>th</sup> of February.” It is not clear if these 33 persons include any of the 17 named individuals transported to Mississippi, they have therefore been included in the dataset as unnamed, relocated persons.

Entries on pages 4 and 74 appear to be related. A list of names of enslaved persons on page 4 appears under a heading “April 17th 1834 A List of Sales forward.” A list with prices and buyers then appears on page 74 under the heading “forward[ed] 11.737.50.” Each individual listed in the account book is identified with a Unique ID; the Unique IDs for names of enslaved persons on page 4 are therefore linked to the information and buyers listed on page 74, with the exception of the unnamed child of Molley Davis (person Unique ID JML030MS1047).

## **Dates of Data Collection**

2023

## **Dataset Languages**

English

## **Geographic Coverage**

Lynchburg, Virginia

Mississippi

New Orleans, Louisiana

## **Temporal Coverage**

1831-1840

## **Document Types**

Bill of Sale

Inventory

## **Sources**

Woodroof, Seth. "Manuscript 1047 Seth Woodroof Account Book." Jones Memorial Library Digital Collections, accessed September 2, 2023, <https://digitaljones.omeka.net/items/show/347>.

## **Methodology**

Data for the Seth Woodroof Account Book: Sales of Enslaved Persons in Lynchburg, Virginia 1834-1840 dataset was compiled from Jones Memorial Library Manuscript 1047, the Seth Woodroof Account Book. Data was transcribed verbatim in 2023 from the original handwritten account book.

Manuscript 1047 is a 74-page leather-bound journal measuring seven and a half inches in length by five inches in width. The front cover of the journal is stamped or imprinted "S.W. No. 4." Entries in the book were made in English and in cursive handwriting in black ink. The handwriting is believed to be Seth Woodroof's.

In 2023, the author discovered the Seth Woodroof Account Book in the library's manuscript collection. Recognizing the item's historic value, the manuscript was prioritized for transcription and digitization. A small team of library volunteers and interns then began working asynchronously to transcribe the content. Each volunteer worked independently to identify, line by line, Woodroof's handwritten entries. This process took several months, as Woodroof utilized phonetic spelling and his handwriting was not clear, especially towards the beginning of the book.

In June 2023, the library received grant funding from the Lucy Woodall Harris and Sackett-Graves Funds through the Greater Lynchburg Community Foundation (GLCF). This funding has supported transcription and digitization of Manuscript 1047, including the purchase of overhead camera equipment to make preservation quality images.

In July 2023, the author and two faculty members from Randolph College participated in the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) Legacies of American Slavery Institute at Yale University's Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition. As a result of the GLCF funding and the college's partnership with the library, a Randolph College student intern was employed to condense the volunteer transcriptions, digitize images of the original manuscript, create a draft dataset in Excel, and research individuals listed in the book.

The author reviewed the final transcription in consultation with a Silent Witnesses researcher from the Lynchburg City Museum familiar with Woodroof's handwriting through work for the historical marker for Woodroof's Slave Auction and Boarding Business. The dataset was completed in early September 2023 and images of the account book were published on the library's Omeka digital collection platform. Researchers are invited to submit clarifications of the text to the library in an ongoing data collection process.

The library is currently working on a digital exhibit that will incorporate biographical information on the individuals listed. A physical exhibit of the book is also planned. In partnership with the Randolph College CIC project, the library is employing a student intern in 2023-24 to identify additional manuscripts that may contain names of enslaved persons in the Lynchburg area, scan related documentation, and create additional datasets for research use.

## **Date of Publication**

December 2023

## **Data Links**

Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/Q3Z5PB>

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

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Council of Independent Colleges - Legacies of American Slavery Public History Institute

Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University

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