

Black Women in Colonial Pennsylvania

SOMETIME BEFORE 1750, and perhaps as early as 1720, Rachel Pemberton, the wife of long-term assemblyman and Quaker leader Israel Pemberton, Sr., offered freedom to her slave Betty. The black woman refused the offer, preferring to remain with the family.¹ Later in the century, in the spring of 1776, another wealthy Quaker couple, provincial councilor William Logan and his wife Hannah, discussed freedom with their slave Dinah. In this case, however, the black woman broached the subject. According to William and Hannah, Dinah asked them to set her free. The Logans had already freed her daughter Bess, but they seem to have been saddened by Dinah's request because she had been in Hannah's family since she was a child and they considered her a part of their family. She was a grandmother and perhaps the Logans thought she should remain under their protection. But Dinah wanted the status of a free black, and in the end the Logans agreed to give her "full Liberty to go and live with whom & Where She may Chuse."² Dinah elected to stay in the household as a hired servant, though both Hannah and William Logan soon died, and she is the woman who is supposed to have saved Stenton, their Germantown mansion, from being burned by the British in 1777.³

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¹ Philadelphia Recorded Wills, Israel Pemberton, 1754, Bk. K, 143; the original will has been lost. Original manuscript wills and inventories (Phila. Wills and Admins.) and books of recorded wills for Philadelphia County are located in the Register of Wills office in the basement of City Hall Annex, Philadelphia. The Chester County probate records cited below (Chester Wills) are housed in the Chester County Archives, Chester County Court House, West Chester, although most of the wills and inventories before 1715 are included with the Philadelphia records.

² Manumission Book for the Three Philadelphia Monthly Meetings, 1772-1796, (Phila. MM mans.), Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia; Phila. Wills, James Logan, 1752, Bk. I, No. 314; Sarah Logan, 1754, Bk. K, No. 121; William Logan, 1776, Bk. Q, No. 324; Hannah Logan, 1777, Bk. Q, No. 339.

³ John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia in the Olden Time*, revised ed. (Philadelphia, 1905), II, 480.

The contrasting ways in which the Pembertons' slave Betty and the Logans' black woman Dinah faced the prospect of freedom, or indeed viewed their condition as slaves, may have resulted from individual differences. Betty was perhaps more timid or less skillful than Dinah. Nevertheless, the periods of Pennsylvania history in which these two women lived were likely to have influenced their decisions as well. Earlier on, when Betty turned down manumission, slavery was at its height in Philadelphia and very few free blacks lived in the city. By the time Dinah demanded her freedom, a substantial number of freed men and women resided in the town or nearby. Some owned property and married in the Anglican and Lutheran churches, and many had learned to read and write. While Betty's husband and children, if she had any, were almost certainly enslaved, we know that Dinah's daughter Bess, and perhaps other family members as well, were already free. Thus, leaving aside any personal differences, life as a free black woman in Philadelphia would have been much more problematic for Betty before 1740, than for Dinah in 1776.

Slavery had existed on the Delaware, and African women had lived in the region, since before William Penn came in 1682. The largest numbers of blacks were imported relative to the local population during the first two decades of the eighteenth century.⁴ Some Pennsylvanians worried about this influx, especially after the New York slave revolt of 1712. The Pennsylvania Assembly in that year placed a prohibitive tariff of £20 on each black imported into the colony, but the Crown disallowed the law.⁵ While during the years 1711-1716 Quakers from

⁴ My analysis of all 2401 surviving probate inventories, 1682-1780, for the city of Philadelphia, where a large proportion of blacks in Pennsylvania lived throughout the colonial period, showed that the relative frequency of slave ownership peaked among decedents in the second decade of the eighteenth century. Jean Ruth Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, and Power: The Development of Opposition to Slavery among Quakers in the Delaware Valley, 1688-1780" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1981), 169-81. Population estimates in U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1975) pt. 2, 1168, and burial statistics cited by Gary B. Nash ("Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia," *The William and Mary Quarterly* [WMQ], ser. 3, XXX [April, 1973], 226-27, 230-31) show that as a percentage of the total population, blacks were more numerous in this region around 1720 than at any other time in the colonial period. Increased importation of Africans and West Indian blacks also occurred in the Chesapeake and New York in the years just after 1700. *Historical Statistics*, pt. 2, 1172-73; Paul G.E. Clemens, *The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore* (Ithaca, 1980), 60-61.

⁵ Darold D. Wax, "Negro Import Duties in Colonial Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (PMHB), XCVII (January, 1973), 23-24.

Chester County pressed the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (the central body of Friends in the Delaware Valley) to prohibit members from buying imported blacks, the Yearly Meeting, influenced by Philadelphia merchants and other slaveholders, refused to do more than caution Friends not to buy blacks lately brought into the province.⁶ In 1726, in order to control the relatively large local slave population and to discourage owners from freeing their slaves, the Assembly passed a black code that required a £30 surety bond for manumission, forbade intermarriage between whites and blacks, and restricted the freedom of both slaves and free blacks to travel, drink liquor, and carry on trade. The law also empowered justices to bind out free black children with or without the consent of their parents, boys until they reached the age of twenty-four years and girls until they were twenty-one.⁷

Unlike the sugar colonies of the West Indies and the tobacco regions of the Chesapeake, where plantation owners became increasingly dependent on black labor as the colonial period progressed, slaves remained a rather small proportion of the labor force in Philadelphia. Pennsylvania attracted large numbers of white immigrants after 1720; German and Scots-Irish servants and free laborers supplied much of the labor required by Pennsylvanians. Slavery reached a peak in Philadelphia around 1720 when slave prices were relatively low and white labor was quite scarce. With a more abundant supply of Europeans after 1720, however, Philadelphians who needed labor and wanted to avoid using slaves now had a greater choice. Thus slaveholding declined in Philadelphia after the second decade of the eighteenth century. Increasing numbers of Quakers and Presbyterians either manumitted their slaves or simply did not buy any. By the 1770s even several slave owners who were affiliated with the Church of England, the religion most resistant in Philadelphia to antislavery reform, freed their slaves. Abolitionism was strongest and earliest in the city among wealthy Quaker merchants and professionals who, because they used Africans and Afro-Americans mainly for personal service, could view involuntary bondage as a form of ostentation rather than as a necessary source of labor. Quaker craftsmen, in contrast, were much less willing to give

⁶ Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, and Power," 57-61.

⁷ James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, comps., *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801* (Harrisburg, 1896-1915), IV, 59-64.

up their blacks because they needed them to keep their shops going. Slaves became especially desirable once again during the Seven Years War when the supply of white servants dried up; but they were always valuable to craftsmen who invested a considerable amount of money and time to buy and train them. By the 1770s, however, slaveholding was much less common among all groups of Philadelphians, even craftsmen. Poor economic conditions and a glut of free white workers after the end of the Seven Years War undercut the demand for slaves.⁸

In rural Pennsylvania, most slave owners were wealthy farmers, though some craftsmen and innkeepers also held blacks. Analysis of probate records for eastern Chester County, as well as tax lists for all of Chester, Philadelphia, and Lancaster counties, show that a much smaller percentage of rural inhabitants owned slaves than did Philadelphians throughout the period before 1770. Slavery, nevertheless, did not decline among Pennsylvania farmers after 1720 as it did among Philadelphia residents. To the contrary, in the 1770s the institution actually showed signs of growing in rural Pennsylvania. However, this expansion was retarded by the Pennsylvania Assembly's passage of the gradual abolition act of 1780 and by the decision of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1776 to disown all slave owners.⁹

Except in the kind of work they did, which for most was domestic service, black women in colonial Pennsylvania had a wide range of experiences depending on where and in what time period they lived. In Philadelphia, they were close to other blacks and had certain benefits, such as schooling, that the city could provide. On the other hand, most blacks in rural areas like eastern Chester County were thinly scattered

⁸ Soderlund, "Conscience and Controversy: The Problem of Slavery in the Quaker City" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, Philadelphia, April 3, 1982); Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners," 229-56; Billy G. Smith, "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750-1800," *WMQ*, ser. 3, XXXVIII (April, 1981), 163-202.

⁹ Evidence from 510 surviving probate inventories, 1682-1780, for nine townships in eastern Chester County (Chester, Upper and Nether Providence, Aston, Middletown, Edgmont, Ridley, Springfield, and Marple) indicates that fewer than 17 percent of inventoried decedents held slaves during the years from 1701 to 1770. Thirty percent owned slaves when they died in the decade 1691-1700, and 19 percent were slave owners in the 1770s. Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, and Power," 181-204. See also Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners," 244-45; and Alan Tully, "Patterns of Slaveholding in Colonial Pennsylvania: Chester and Lancaster Counties, 1729-1758," *Journal of Social History*, VI (Spring, 1973), 284-305.

across the countryside. The situation for all African and Afro-American women in Pennsylvania changed over time as increasing numbers achieved freedom. Thus, black women of the 1760s and 1770s had several advantages over their mothers and grandmothers who had lived thirty or forty years before; many of their owners were more amenable to arguments that they should be free and, if they lived in Philadelphia, they could rely on a fairly large community of free blacks for support.

Both of the slave women mentioned earlier, Betty and Dinah, worked for the families of rich Philadelphia Quaker merchants; their lives, therefore, were substantially different from the situation of sisters living in the plantation areas to the south or even of black women working in rural Pennsylvania. In the West Indies, South Carolina, and the Chesapeake, the large majority of black women worked from sunup to sundown in the fields growing sugar, rice, tobacco, and grain. In the West Indies, most lived on large plantations with fifty or more slaves. But even though many blacks lived in close proximity to one another on the islands, their family life was disrupted because mortality was high and women on average had few children. In Virginia and Maryland, the mean number of laborers on plantations was smaller than in the West Indies: most blacks lived in slave groups of fifteen or more. Though many planters transferred husbands and teenaged children to other quarters or separated families by sale, blacks in the pre-Revolutionary Chesapeake usually lived near their immediate families and kin.¹⁰

In Philadelphia, throughout the colonial period, owners held an average of only about 2.4 slaves.¹¹ This meant that entire black families, including the mother, father, and several children, rarely lived

¹⁰ Richard S. Dunn, "Servants and Slaves: The Recruitment and Employment of Labor in Colonial America" (Paper presented at the Conference on Colonial America at Oxford, August, 1981); Allan Kulikoff, "The Beginnings of the Afro-American Family in Maryland," in Aubrey C. Land, Lois Green Carr, and Edward C. Papenfuss, eds., *Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977), 171-96.

¹¹ This average includes blacks listed in the probate inventories of decedents who had lived in the city of Philadelphia (not including Southwark and the Northern Liberties) during the years from 1682 to 1780. I have not included blacks who are specifically noted as living outside the city. The actual mean number of blacks in each household was lower because some masters had more than one house and because they often hired out their slaves. According to the Philadelphia constables' returns of 1780 (Philadelphia City Archives, City Hall Annex), only 1.4 blacks lived in each slaveholding household.

under the same roof. While the sex ratio of adult blacks was fairly even in the city, according to the probate inventories, at most only two in five black women lived in the same household with an adult black man (see Table 1). Only three percent were listed in the probate records with men who were described specifically as their husbands. The relationship of the rest of the men to the women is unknown; they could have been husbands or mates, prospective mates or friends, men to whom the women had no attachment, or men whom they detested or feared. Records of black marriages in Christ Church and St. Peter's Church, Philadelphia, also indicate that relatively few slave married couples lived together. Between 1727 and 1780, sixty-four black couples were married at the Anglican churches (all but eight after 1765). In one-quarter of these marriages, both partners were free, and another 14% were marriages between a free black and a slave. Twenty-nine (45.3%) were marriages in which both the husband and wife were slaves; of these slave couples, fewer than one-fourth (seven of the twenty-nine) were owned by the same master.¹²

TABLE 1
BLACK WOMEN AND MEN IN PHILADELPHIA, 1682-1780

Sex Ratio			Black Women				Black Men		
No Inventories	Adult Men per Adult Woman		No	% Listed with Black Man	% Listed with Child Specified as Theirs	% Listed with Child who could be Theirs	No	% Listed with Black Woman	% Listed with Child who could be Theirs
1682-90	22	1.40	5	100.0%	0%	20.0%	7	71.4%	42.8%
1691-1700	77	.88	8	37.5%	50.0%	0%	7	42.8%	42.8%
1701-10	104	1.05	21	33.3%	9.5%	33.3%	22	31.8%	22.7%
1711-20	165	1.33	24	37.5%	50.0%	4.2%	32	28.1%	46.9%
1721-30	182	.61	18	16.7%	33.3%	22.2%	11	27.3%	36.4%
1731-40	207	.93	27	33.3%	25.9%	14.8%	25	36.0%	36.0%
1741-50	353	1.11	46	39.1%	28.3%	19.6%	51	35.3%	35.3%
1751-60	378	1.33	43	48.8%	27.9%	18.6%	57	36.8%	26.3%
1761-70	512	1.17	66	48.5%	25.8%	21.2%	77	41.6%	36.4%
1771-80	401	.90	40	45.0%	30.0%	15.0%	36	50.0%	33.3%
1682-1780	2401	1.09	298	41.9%	28.5%	18.1%	325	38.5%	34.5%
Source: Probate Inventories			46.6%						

Much of the evidence for the discussion that follows comes from my analysis of probate wills and inventories for Philadelphia and for the nine townships in eastern Chester County, 1682-1780. It is assumed that the slaves listed in the probate records, aggregated by decade, represent an approximate cross section of the black population. See Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, and Power," Appendix 2, for a discussion of the potential problems in using probate data.

¹² Records of Christ Church, Philadelphia, Marriages, 1709-1800, Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania (GSP) transcripts, housed at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).

That so few of Philadelphia's black women lived in the same households with their husbands was perhaps less disruptive of family life than it seems, because most husbands probably lived close by. Philadelphia, which as late as the 1770s reached only as far back from the Delaware as 7th Street,¹³ had a fairly large black population throughout the eighteenth century. For instance, in 1750 when the population of Philadelphia was about 15,000, as many as 1500, or one-tenth, of the city's residents were black.¹⁴ Evidence from other sources suggests that the number of blacks living in the city was large enough to make white Philadelphians uneasy. The whites complained on a number of occasions about slaves and free blacks gathering in groups in the evenings and on Sundays. In 1696, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting urged its members to restrain their slaves "from Rambling abroad on First Days or other Times."¹⁵ The Pennsylvania Assembly passed a law in 1706 prohibiting blacks from meeting together "in great companies," but this statute evidently had limited effect because a number of Philadelphians, seemingly unaware that this law

¹³ Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), 11.

¹⁴ Billy G. Smith, "Death and Life in a Colonial Immigrant City: A Demographic Analysis of Philadelphia," *The Journal of Economic History*, XXXVII (December, 1977), 863-89. Blacks probably comprised 8 to 10 percent of Philadelphia's population at mid-century. My estimate is based upon data from the bills of mortality analyzed by Gary Nash ("Slaves and Slaveowners," 226-27, 230-31), which show that 13.8 percent of the burials in Philadelphia in 1722 were of blacks, 19.2 percent in 1729-1732, 10.9 percent in 1738-1742, 11.3 percent in 1743-1748, 7.7 percent in 1750-1755, 9.2 percent in 1756-1760, 8.1 percent in 1761-1765, 9.2 percent in 1766-1770, and 7.4 percent in 1771-1775. My estimate would be wrong if blacks had a higher mortality rate than the total population. However, while the black death rate may have been somewhat above that of whites, especially during periods of high importation in the early eighteenth century, in the 1730s, and in the early 1760s, the difference was probably minimized by the fact that immigrants (who had higher than average death rates) made up a large segment of the white Philadelphia population. For example, the percentage of decedents who were black, according to the mortality statistics, in the period 1750-1755 (7.7 percent) probably represents a low figure because the early 1750s was a time when few slaves were imported, but was the peak period of German immigration; close to 35,000 Germans arrived in Philadelphia during the years 1749-1754. Darold Duane Wax, "The Negro Slave Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1962), 46; Marianne Wokeck, "The Flow and the Composition of German Immigration to Philadelphia, 1727-1775," *PMHB*, CV (July, 1981), 267.

¹⁵ Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Men's), Minutes (PYM mins.), 23/7th mo./1696. These minutes and those of other Quaker meetings cited below are available on microfilm at the Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

was on the books, petitioned in 1723 for a similar ban. In 1750, another petition from inhabitants of Philadelphia County protested to the Assembly about the custom of shooting off guns at New Year's; they complained that such revelry was introduced into the country by immigrant Germans and was now practiced by servants and blacks. The behavior they found disagreeable included excessive drinking, firing guns into houses, and throwing lighted wadding into houses and barns.¹⁶ And the historian Edward Turner claimed (albeit without giving the source of his information) that as many as a thousand blacks gathered for festivals on the outskirts of town.¹⁷ Thus, while few black women lived in the same house with their husbands, there was a large slave population living in what we would now consider a small city, and hence there was a good chance that their mates lived nearby.

Of course even this tenuous link between family members could be broken at any time by the owner. Slave-owning fathers sometimes gave a young slave to their children when they married,¹⁸ and most testators either divided their blacks among the heirs or directed that the slaves be sold upon their deaths.¹⁹ While the white family members who received the blacks might live fairly close together, an owner's demise could bring about a painful separation for slaves. No testators stipulated that their slaves be sold together.²⁰ Philadelphia newspaper advertisements also provide evidence that many owners sold husbands away from wives, and children away from their parents; most indicated no concern about the consequences for the slaves. Merle G. Brouwer found in his survey of newspaper advertisements of slaves for sale in Pennsylvania that masters rarely specified that a slave should be kept in the neigh-

¹⁶ *Statutes at Large*, II, 236; Gertrude MacKinney, ed., *Pennsylvania Archives*, 8th ser. (Harrisburg, 1931), II, 1464; IV, 3396-97.

¹⁷ Edward R. Turner, *Slavery in Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, 1911), 32-33, 42.

¹⁸ For example, George Emlen gave Dinah to his daughter Hannah Logan during his lifetime; Phila. Wills, William Logan, 1776, Bk. Q, No. 324.

¹⁹ For examples, see Phila. Wills, George Claypoole, 1731, Bk. E, No. 175; Henry Dexter, 1750, Bk. I, No. 139.

²⁰ No wills were found in which the testators directed their executors to keep black families together when they were sold. Masters who cared that much about their slaves' needs either emancipated them or provided for their support by giving them small farms, houses, or tools. Some owners showed little concern about the consequences of separation for their blacks. Elizabeth Fishbourn of Chester, for example, directed that a young black boy be taken from his mother as soon as he was weaned (Phila. Wills, Bk. C, No. 141), while others wanted their slaves sold to the highest bidders.

borhood of his or her kin. Indeed, runaway notices indicate that slave families were broken up, and husbands or wives taken to other colonies. The first place masters thought to look for their runaway slaves was in the vicinity of their former residence and with the family from whom they had been separated.²¹

While slave women throughout Pennsylvania faced the prospect of being cut off from their families by sale or by the death of the master, Philadelphia black women were even less likely to live with their children than were adult females in rural areas. According to the probate inventories, which show the slaves' lives at only one point in time, only 28.5% of slave women in Philadelphia had children described as their own living in the same household (see Table 1). In most cases a woman had only one child who was specifically described as hers. Another eighteen percent (for a combined total of almost one-half) were listed on their owners' inventories with black children who *could* have been theirs but were not described as such. The number of city women who actually lived in the same household with their children was almost certainly lower than Table 1 suggests. Some of the children listed on their owners' inventories, especially those over age five, were hired out to other families.²²

Rural black women in Pennsylvania were much more likely to live with their families than were urban slaves. In eastern Chester County (now Delaware County), seventy percent of the women were listed on inventories with black children who were theirs or who could have been, and as many as 48% lived with adult men (see Table 2).²³ Life was more difficult for Chester County women in another way, however, because many fewer blacks lived there and the distances between plantations on which other slaves lived were quite far. The situation for

²¹ Merle G. Brouwer, "Marriage and Family Life Among Blacks in Colonial Pennsylvania," *PMHB*, IC (July, 1975), 368-72.

²² Though William Masters was hardly a typical Philadelphia slave owner—he held thirty-three blacks at his death—his inventory provides valuable information on the practice of binding out black children. Of seventeen children listed in his inventory, eleven were bound out, one as far away as Wilmington. Phila. Wills, William Masters, Bk. M, No. 27.

²³ Analysis of the Chester County Slave Register of 1780, which includes blacks registered in response to the gradual abolition act of 1780 by their owners from throughout Chester County, yielded somewhat similar results. Over 64 percent of the black women were listed with black children, and as many as 42 percent lived with a black man. Chester County Slave Register, 1780, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Reel 24, HSP. The author is indebted to Gary B. Nash for this reference.

men in eastern Chester County was especially bad in the years from 1721 to 1740 and in the 1770s because, according to the inventories, men outnumbered women at those times by a considerable margin. Over the colonial period, at most only a third of the black men in Chester lived with a black woman, and even fewer lived with a black child (see Table 2).²⁴ Some blacks in Chester apparently conquered their loneliness by establishing sexual partnerships with whites. In the 1760s and 1770s, 13.5% of the slaves listed in Chester area inventories were mulattos. By contrast, in Philadelphia, where the chance of obtaining a black companion was better, only 3.2% of the slaves listed in inventories during those decades had mixed parentage. Data from Quaker manumissions show a similar pattern. Mulattos were 30% of the slaves freed by members of four Chester County meetings, but only 5.4% of those emancipated by Philadelphia Friends.²⁵ Almost 16% of the slaves registered by Chester County slaveholders in 1780 were mulattos.

TABLE 2
BLACK WOMEN AND MEN IN EASTERN CHESTER COUNTY, 1682-1780

<i>Sex Ratio</i>			<i>Black Women</i>				<i>Black Men</i>		
No Inventories	Adult Men per Adult Woman		No	% Listed with Black Man	% Listed with Child Specified as Theirs	% Listed with Child who could be Theirs	No	% Listed with Black Woman	% Listed with Child who could be Theirs
1682-90	6	—	0	—	—	—	0	—	—
1691-1700	10	1 00	2	100 0%	100 0%	0%	2	100 0%	100 0%
1701-10	18	67	3	33 3%	66 7%	0%	2	50 0%	50 0%
1711-20	30	0	1	0%	0%	100 0%	0	—	—
1721-30	42	6 to 0	0	—	—	—	6	0%	0%
1731-40	55	1 80	5	60 0%	20 0%	60 0%	9	33 3%	33 3%
1741-50	82	1 00	4	50 0%	25 0%	25 0%	4	50 0%	25 0%
1751-60	84	1 00	6	50 0%	0%	16 7%	6	50 0%	0%
1761-70	104	1 00	5	20 0%	40 0%	40 0%	5	20 0%	40 0%
1771-80	79	1 86	7	57 1%	57 1%	28 6%	13	30 8%	38 5%
1682-1780	510	1 42	33	48 5%	39 4%	30 3%	47	34 0%	29 8%
Source Probate Inventories			69 7%						

²⁴ The Chester County Slave Register of 1780 indicated an almost even adult sex ratio; thus 43 percent of the men were listed with a black woman, about the same as the percentage of women who were listed with men. The register also listed more men with children than did the inventories—as many as 44 percent—but still this percentage was considerably lower than the percentage of women living with black children. The discrepancy between data from the slave register and the probate inventories may have resulted from the fact that different geographic areas were covered, or because the Chester probate data for the 1770s are too small to represent the black population reliably.

²⁵ Chester Monthly Meeting, Manumissions, 1776-1780; Concord Monthly Meeting, Manumissions Book, 1777-1789; Goshen Monthly Meeting, Manumissions, recorded in the monthly meeting minutes, 1775-1777; Kennett Monthly Meeting, Manumissions, 1776-1780; all located at Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore; Phila. MM mans. Only those emancipated slaves who lived in the vicinity of the monthly meeting are counted.

Two factors may explain why fewer black women in Philadelphia than in Chester lived with children. One reason is that infant mortality in the city was very high. Susan E. Klepp found in her study of white families that almost one-half of the children born to mothers in colonial Philadelphia died before they reached age fifteen; one-fourth died during their first year. No one has done an equivalent study of infant mortality in Chester County, but evidence from elsewhere in colonial America suggests that mortality among the total population was lower in rural areas than in the cities.²⁶ The other reason is that owners sold black children to other families. Raising a child could be expensive, especially when food had to be purchased, and her or his service was possibly less useful to a city family than on a farm. Black girls and boys in Philadelphia were more likely to be the only slaves living in their households than were children in Chester. According to the probate inventories, 20.1% of girls and 27.5% of boys in Philadelphia were their owners' only slaves, while just 9.1% of girls and 22.2% of boys in Chester lived apart from other blacks.

The evidence on the kinds of work black women performed suggests that most did domestic labor. While there are a few references to slave women working in shops, such as one woman listed in the "still house," even these women could have performed menial tasks usually assigned to females. Also, a few Pennsylvania owners kept as many as ten or fifteen blacks on their plantations; women in these groups were more likely to work in the fields.²⁷ Like most adult female slaves in Philadelphia, the Pembertons' Betty and the Logans' Dinah belonged to men who were merchants, shopkeepers, or craftsmen.²⁸ These two women probably worked under the supervision of their owners' wives. Although black men also worked as domestics in Philadelphia, the kinds of slaves owned by persons of various occupations suggest that the roles of men and women were dissimilar. As shown on Table 3, based on the Philadelphia inventories, innkeepers and widows, whose slaves would

²⁶ Susan E. Klepp, "Social Class and Infant Mortality in Philadelphia, 1720-1830" (Paper presented to the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies Seminar, Philadelphia, November 6, 1981), 17-18; Smith, "Death and Life," 887-89.

²⁷ For examples, Phila. Admins., John Knight, 1729, No. 19; Phila. Wills, John Jones, 1708, Bk. C, No. 83.

²⁸ According to the Philadelphia probate inventories, 1682-1780, men in these occupations owned 57.7 percent of all adult black women.

do mostly domestic labor, owned more women than men when they died. Craftsmen, professionals, and merchants owned more men. Husbands and fathers, in dividing their estates among heirs, often left a black woman or girl to their wives and daughters. If the woman married, her slave normally became the property of her husband under the law of coverture,²⁹ but the black woman probably continued to work for the wife. Israel Pemberton clearly regarded Betty as his wife's slave, but she was his legally and he made provision for her in his will. Hannah Logan had a definite interest in Dinah, and both she and her husband signed the manumission.³⁰

TABLE 3
GENDER AND AGE OF BLACKS OWNED BY WOMEN AND MEN OF
VARIOUS OCCUPATIONS IN PHILADELPHIA, 1682-1780

	<i>No. Blacks Owned</i>			<i>Percentage of Blacks</i>			<i>Total</i>
		<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	
Widows and Single Women	96	39.6%	21.9%	17.7%	10.4%	10.4%	100.0%
Innkeepers	37	35.2%	24.3%	13.5%	18.9%	8.1%	100.0%
Mariners	78	30.8%	26.9%	10.3%	17.9%	14.1%	100.0%
Craftsmen	287	27.2%	36.9%	11.1%	18.5%	6.3%	100.0%
Merchants and Shopkeepers	282	24.5%	30.1%	12.1%	21.6%	11.7%	100.0%
Gentlemen and Professionals	89	23.6%	36.0%	14.6%	23.6%	2.2%	100.0%

Source: Probate Inventories

Most black women in colonial Philadelphia did housework. They cooked, cleaned, washed and ironed laundry, kept fires, gardened, looked after children, and served as maids. Some also sewed and made cloth. For instance, one fourteen-year-old girl knew housewifery, knitting, sewing, and could read.³¹ Black women lived in their masters'

²⁹ Marylynn Salmon, "Trust Estates and Marriage Settlements" (Paper presented at the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies Seminar, November, 1979).

³⁰ Phila. Wills, Israel Pemberton, 1754, Bk. K, 143; Phila. MM mans.

³¹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 22 January 1767; "Record of Indentures of Individuals Bound Out as Apprentices, Servants, Etc., and of German and Other Redemptioners in the Office of the Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, October 3, 1771, to October 5, 1773," *The Pennsylvania-German Society Proceedings and Addresses*, XVI (1907), 70-71; Carole Shammas, "Mammy and Miss Ellen in Colonial Virginia?" (Paper presented at the Conference on Women in Early America, November 5-7, 1981, Williamsburg, Va.); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston, 1980), 12-23.

houses and generally slept in garrets, kitchens, or rooms near kitchens. Merchants and professionals sometimes hired women and girls out by the year or by indenture;³² and women could be lent or hired out for shorter periods to help tend the sick, put in gardens, preserve food, and wait on tables for special occasions. Girls were sometimes apprenticed to learn a trade, presumably housewifery or spinning.³³ Black women continued to do domestic labor even after they were freed, working as servants and laundrywomen.³⁴ In Chester County, most women also did housework, though here they would have tended larger gardens, raised poultry, milked cows, produced cloth, and helped in the fields (especially at harvest) as well.³⁵

While the life conditions of slave women in Philadelphia remained essentially unchanged between 1720 and 1776 in several respects—notably in the fact that few lived with their families under one roof and in terms of the work they did—nevertheless, the situation of the Philadelphia black population as a whole altered sufficiently by 1776 that a woman like Dinah sought her freedom. Most importantly, a significant number of free blacks lived in the city and its environs by the 1770s. Back in the 1720s or 1730s, when Betty refused her freedom, most of the blacks in Pennsylvania had been recently imported. Few white Americans, in Pennsylvania or elsewhere, thought that slavery was wrong. Evidence of manumissions from wills, which thus far is the only source we have before the Quakers began recording manumissions in the 1770s, indicates that only nine slaves were freed by will by Philadelphians before 1720. Another nine were freed in the 1720s, and three more in the 1730s.³⁶ Perhaps others were released during their masters' lifetimes, but relatively few blacks were freed before 1740. The Assembly further demonstrated the pro-slavery climate in Pennsylvania in the 1720s when in response to a number of petitions they

³² Phila. MM mans.; Phila. Wills, Thomas Lloyd, 1694, Bk. A, No. 105; "Record of Indentures, 1771-1773."

³³ Phila. Wills, Clement Plumstead, 1745, Bk. G, No. 163; William Coleman, 1769, Bk. O, No. 235-36.

³⁴ Phila. Wills, James Bright, 1769, Bk. O, No. 254; Lloyd Zachary, 1756, Bk. K, No. 307; James White, 1770, Bk. O, No. 352; James Young, 1779, Bk. R, No. 162; Phila. MM mans.

³⁵ Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, and Power," 188-90; Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 13-15.

³⁶ Phila. Wills, 1682-1739.

passed the black code of 1726. The act stated that "'tis found by experience that free negroes are an idle, slothful people and often prove burdensome to the neighborhood and afford ill examples to other negroes."³⁷

In the decades after 1740, in contrast, antislavery opinion grew in Philadelphia, especially among Quakers and Presbyterians. In 1754, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting issued *An Epistle of Caution*, its first forthright statement that slavery was wrong; and in 1758 Quakers forbade all members from importing or buying slaves, and appointed a committee to encourage Friends throughout the Delaware Valley to give up their blacks.³⁸ Though by no means all Quakers agreed with the Yearly Meeting's decisions, many Friends freed their slaves in their wills after 1740, and others emancipated their blacks during their lives. Philadelphia Presbyterians, influenced by the religious egalitarianism of the Great Awakening, began manumitting their slaves by the 1760s, and even some Anglicans freed their blacks.³⁹ Between 1741 and 1770, Philadelphians emancipated at least seventy-five slaves in their wills.⁴⁰ Others freed their blacks before their deaths.⁴¹ In the 1770s, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting recorded manumissions for hundreds of slaves freed by Friends and non-Friends.⁴² Gary B. Nash found a significant decrease in the number of slaves owned by Philadelphia taxpayers between the years 1767 and 1775. My study of probate records indicated the same decline, as the percentage of inventoried decedents owning slaves dropped from over 20 percent in the 1760s to 13 percent in the 1770s.⁴³ Most likely much of the decrease resulted from manumission and by 1776 a substantial free black population was living in or near the city. Given this large-scale move towards emancipation, Dinah's request for freedom should not have been too great a surprise for the Logans.

³⁷ *Pennsylvania Archives*, 8th ser., II, 1462, 1735; *Statutes at Large*, IV, 59-64.

³⁸ PYM mins., 14-19/9th mo./1754; 23-29/9th mo./1758.

³⁹ Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, and Power," ch. 6.

⁴⁰ Phila. Wills, 1740-1770.

⁴¹ For several mentioned in wills, see Phila. Wills, Samuel Preston, 1743, Bk. G, No. 41; Nathaniel Allen, 1757, Bk. L, No. 28; John Jones, 1761, Bk. M, No. 82; Benjamin Trotter, 1769, Bk. O, No. 164.

⁴² Phila. MM mans.

⁴³ Nash, "Servants and Slaves," 236-37; Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, and Power," 171-81.

In the early nineteenth century, Philadelphia was the center of both the white and black abolitionist movements in America. The source of white antislavery reform has been linked to the eighteenth-century Quakers; Delaware Valley Friends moved from ridding their meeting of slaveholding to helping to establish the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and lobbying for abolition in society at large. Historians have not yet traced the roots of the united and vocal black community of early-nineteenth-century Philadelphia back to the colonial period. Instead, they have focused on the founding of the Free African Society and separate churches by Richard Allen and Absolem Jones, and on James Forten's opposition to the movement for colonization of free blacks in Africa. No one has looked for the colonial beginnings on which these later developments rested.⁴⁴ Actually, Philadelphia became the center of the black abolitionist movement of America after 1790 because already in the 1770s a relatively large and sophisticated free black population lived there. Many could read and write and had learned trades. They married at the Anglican and Lutheran churches, and attended Quaker meetings (though they could not join the Society).⁴⁵ While the majority held menial jobs and few free blacks are noted on the tax lists, at least some owned property, and most supported themselves and their families in freedom.

Both the Society of Friends and the Anglican Church took an interest in educating Africans and Afro-Americans. Antislavery Quakers hoped to train blacks to be useful and moral citizens. As early as 1696, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting urged its members to bring their slaves to meetings, and to watch over their behavior. Beginning in the 1750s, the Yearly Meeting continually reminded slave owners to teach blacks to read and write, to educate them in the principles of Christianity, and to train them in an occupation in preparation for freedom.⁴⁶ Most local meetings believed that their members were not doing enough in these respects, but quite a few blacks did learn to read and write.⁴⁷ John

⁴⁴ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (London, 1969), 3-8; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), 422-26.

⁴⁵ Henry J. Cadbury, "Negro Membership in the Society of Friends," *The Journal of Negro History*, XXI (April, 1936), 151-213.

⁴⁶ PYM mins., 23/7th mo./1696, 14-19/9th mo./1754, and 20-26/9th mo./1755.

⁴⁷ In my survey of the minutes of most monthly meetings in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, I found that meetings generally reported in response to the query of the Yearly Meeting on slavery that their members treated their slaves decently but did not educate them as well as the meeting desired.

Woolman mentioned in 1762 that many slaves could read, and the Shrewsbury Monthly Meeting in East Jersey found in 1775 that at least five of the twenty-four slaves still held in bondage by meeting members, including two adults and three children, had been taught to read.⁴⁸ Many testators who directed that their young slaves be freed at a future date specified that they be apprenticed to a trade first.⁴⁹

Several schools opened in Philadelphia to educate blacks. A "Mr. Bolton" was taken to court for teaching them in his school in 1740; Rev. William Sturgeon, assistant to Dr. Robert Jenney, the rector of Christ Church, started catechizing Afro-Americans in 1747; and in 1750 Anthony Benezet began holding evening classes for blacks in his home. In 1758, Bray's Associates opened a school at Christ Church for free blacks, and in 1770 Benezet convinced the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting to open an "Africans' School" of their own. The first class included twenty-two girls and boys, evenly divided in gender. Later, older black men and women also came. All of the children studied reading, writing, and arithmetic. The girls learned sewing and knitting from a mistress, while boys did more advanced academic work. Though the school had trouble keeping schoolmasters and also had difficulty in maintaining regular attendance of pupils who often had to help support their families, a total of 250 black students received some instruction between 1770 and 1775.⁵⁰

Not very much is known about the economic status of free blacks in the late colonial period, but we do have a few clues. According to the Quaker committees who in the late 1770s and early 1780s checked on

⁴⁸ *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton (New York, 1971), 117-18; Shrewsbury Monthly Meeting (Men's), Minutes, 7/8 mo./1775.

⁴⁹ For example, John Jones (d. 1761), a Quaker cordwainer who freed his slaves, directed in his will that Phyllis (aged 13 years) remain bound to Joseph Morris, a Philadelphia merchant, until she reached age 15 and that she be sent to school long enough to learn to read well. Jones wanted his black boy James (aged 7 years) to go to school to learn to read and write and to be apprenticed to a light trade such as that of joiner. Phila. Wills, John Jones, 1761, Bk. M, No. 82. Boys were more frequently bound out to trades before freedom than were girls, and they were apprenticed to occupations such as cordwainer, tailor, and house carpenter. Phila. Wills, Elizabeth Holton, 1757, Bk. K, No. 324; Robert Cross, 1766, Bk. O, No. 7; Anthony Fortune, 1779, Bk. R, No. 232.

⁵⁰ Nancy Slocum Hornick, "Anthony Benezet and the Africans' School: Toward a Theory of Full Equality," *PMHB*, IC (October, 1975), 399-421; Richard I. Shelling, "William Sturgeon, Catechist to the Negroes of Philadelphia and Assistant Rector of Christ Church, 1747-1766," *Historical Magazine of the Episcopal Church*, VIII (December, 1939), 388-401.

the welfare and behavior of blacks freed by meeting members, most freed men and women were able to support themselves. A committee of the Concord Monthly Meeting in Chester County, in a report that was more detailed than those of other meetings, found only two families who had economic problems: a mother with two young children whose husband was still a slave, and an aged couple who needed their daughter's help at home but could not provide for her education or training. It is unclear how many free black families lived in the Concord area in the 1770s, but the Quakers seemed pleased with their condition. The Friends inspected and settled accounts between the blacks and their employers, and encouraged freed men and women with large families to bind out their children as apprentices in order to relieve their financial burdens.⁵¹ Quakers in other places also found that their ex-slaves prospered in freedom. Wilmington Friends were pleased that most of their liberated blacks could provide for themselves and their families "with frugallity," while members of a New Garden committee reported that most of the freed blacks continued to live among Friends and were successful in finding jobs. Quakers of the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, on the other hand, were disappointed that few free blacks asked for their help or advice; blacks in the city and its environs apparently had the resources to help one another over rough periods and thus avoided the paternalistic scrutiny to which Friends generally subjected recipients of their aid.⁵²

Several free black women living in the Philadelphia area were quite successful. In Pennsylvania, unlike New Jersey and New York, blacks could own real property.⁵³ Three free black women died before 1780 leaving wills that have survived. The first was Jane Row, deceased in 1766. She held real estate on 4th Street in Philadelphia and in Southwark and owned two slaves, whom she wanted to be sold to reasonable and good masters. Row lived with but never married a man named

⁵¹ Concord Monthly Meeting (Men's), Minutes, 4/8th mo./1779. According to the Concord MM mans., members of the Concord meeting freed at least eleven adult slaves during the period 1776-1779; other free blacks, who had been released earlier, certainly lived in the area as well.

⁵² Wilmington Monthly Meeting (Men's), Minutes, 14/7 mo./1779; New Garden Monthly Meeting (Men's), Minutes, 5/5th mo./1781. Phila. Quarterly Meeting (Men's), Minutes, 2/8th mo./1779.

⁵³ William M. Wiecek, "The Statutory Law of Slavery and Race in the Thirteen Mainland Colonies of British America," *WMQ*, ser. 3, XXXIV (April, 1977), 279.

Henry Hainy who had fathered two of her sons, John and Thomas Hainy. She had possibly been married earlier because another of her sons was William Row. A fourth son, John Miller, was a free mulatto. Like so many male testators who used the same phrase in bequeathing personalty to their wives, Row willed Hainy a bed and furniture as a token of her "love and esteem." Ann Elizabeth Fortune, a single woman, owned personal property and a black woman Jane, whom she freed. The third woman, Jane Linkhorn Woodby, was a widow; she had married her deceased husband Emanuel in 1756 at Christ Church. She directed that her lot and buildings in Spring Garden be sold and the money invested for the support and education of her daughter Jane.⁵⁴ While the numbers of black women owning property in colonial Philadelphia is unknown, these three wills suggest that at least some blacks were able to amass considerable estates. Jane Row, especially, appears to have lived with a forceful independence. She certainly took advantage of the lack of societal pressure on blacks to marry.

The names Pennsylvania blacks adopted also provide insight into their relationships with whites and into the way in which they identified themselves within the larger white society.⁵⁵ Evidence from manumissions, marriage records, and wills indicates that before emancipation at least some slaves used surnames which were at best grudgingly recognized by their masters. Most significantly, they never chose the surname of their latest owner.⁵⁶ Several examples from Quaker manumissions illustrate these points. Joseph Pratt of Edgmont Township, Chester County, freed "a certain Negro woman named Susanna, otherwise called Susanna Cuff," and John Hoopes of nearby Goshen Township freed a "Negro man named Jo, otherwise called Joseph Samuel." George Brinton, also of Chester County, referred to his slave as "Mordica" or "Mott," but admitted that the man used an "allias,"

⁵⁴ Phila. Wills, Jane Row, 1766, Bk. N, No.255; Ann Elizabeth Fortune, 1768, Bk. O, No.196, Jane Woodby, 1773, Bk. P, No.333; Emanuel Woodby, 1773, Bk. P, No.282; Records of Christ Church, Marriages, GSP, 4247.

⁵⁵ See Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York, 1976), 230-56, on the use of surnames by 18th- and 19th-century slaves.

⁵⁶ This generalization is drawn from the minority of slaves whose surnames are given in the manumission and church records cited below; a few mentioned in wills also had last names. Further research linking freed blacks to their former masters (for example, use of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society records) might reveal that some did adopt the names of their last owners.

calling himself George Brown.⁵⁷ Mulattos were more likely to use surnames than were slaves listed as "Negroes," and more enslaved men than women held recognized last names. Of fifty-three mulattos freed by Quakers in ten monthly meetings, twenty-eight (52.8%) were listed with first and last names. Surnames were given for only 61 of 383 (15.9%) freed "Negroes."⁵⁸ In the Christ Church marriage records for 1709 to 1780, 20% of the male slaves being married had last names, but only one (2.6%) of thirty-eight female slaves had a surname given. Over 80% of both the free black men and women were listed with last names.⁵⁹

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Historians have known for a long time that slavery evolved differently in colonial Pennsylvania than in the plantation areas of the American South and the West Indies. However, paucity of evidence stretching over the entire colonial period has hindered full understanding of the role slavery played in the Pennsylvania economy and society. New information from probate inventories places tax list and census data available for the late colonial period in better perspective. Philadelphians relied heaviest on black slave labor early in the eighteenth century; they turned to whites as European immigration increased and as abolitionism took hold. Slavery was only one of several kinds of labor that Pennsylvanians employed; and even those who chose to own slaves held relatively few. On average, slave masters in both urban and rural areas held fewer than three slaves each.

The limited nature of the institution in Pennsylvania and the spread of antislavery thought had a profound influence on the lives of both urban and rural black women. Though the work Pennsylvania women performed varied little over time or by geographic area, other circumstances of their lives differed considerably. In Philadelphia, rather few lived in the same house with their husbands and children, but their

⁵⁷ Goshen Monthly Meeting (Men's), Minutes, 11/8th mo./1775 and 9/5th mo./1777; Concord MM mans., George Brinton, 1781.

⁵⁸ See manumission records cited in n. 25, above, and Bucks Quarterly Meeting, Manumissions Book, 1776-1793; Chesterfield Monthly Meeting, Manumissions, 1774-1796; and Exeter Monthly Meeting, Manumissions, 1777-1787; all in Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore; and Abington Monthly Meeting, Manumissions, 1765-1784, Quaker Collection, Haverford College; Burlington Monthly Meeting, Manumission Book, 1771-1781, Burlington County Historical Society, Burlington, N.J.

⁵⁹ Records of Christ Church, Marriages, GSP.

families probably lived close by. In rural areas like Chester County, more women lived with their families, but the total black population was sparse. Though women in both places had a better chance to achieve freedom as time went by, blacks in the city had an added advantage by the 1770s because they could look to a substantial free black community for support. Many free black women, men, and children in Philadelphia could read and write and had learned trades or occupations. At least some owned property, including houses and lots in or near the city. Thus, the Logans might have anticipated that Dinah would ask for her freedom in 1776; probably many blacks throughout the province approached their owners with the same request. Serving as someone's slave in a city or area where friends, neighbors, and relatives were free must have angered and hurt quite a number of blacks. As many proslavery apologists predicted, including the Pennsylvania assemblymen of 1726 drafting their slave code, the presence of free blacks in a community had a pernicious influence on the willingness of other blacks to remain slaves.

The Papers of William Penn

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