

Research Report by Adaeze Dikko, Consultant/Cole Fellow 2021

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Regarding the Free, Black woman documented as a Cedar Grove resident, 1840 Census

The Primary Resource Documentation That We Have

- I. Censuses
 - **A. 1840 Federal Census**
 - The 1840 Census only documented the name of the head of household (Thompson), therefore, there is no name provided for the free, Black woman who lived on Cedar Grove¹
 - The 1840 Census is the only census (be it federal or state) that accounts for this woman as a Cedar Grove resident²

What We Know About the Free, Black Woman and the Conditions She Would Have Been Living In

- The free, Black woman was between the ages of 55 and 99 in 1840³
 - Note: It is likely that she was born as an enslaved person
- The free, Black woman would have been born somewhere between 1785 and 1741⁴
 - Note: She was most likely born to an enslaved mother
- The free, Black woman was likely a live-in laborer⁵
 - Note: The census accounts for people at the residence where they lay their head
- Until 1827, slavery was legal in New York State⁶
 - 1799 gradual abolition law: New York introduced gradual emancipation of the children of enslaved women born after July 4, 1799⁷
 - Children were born “free”, but had to perform free labor for their mother’s masters until the age of 25 (for women) and 28 (for men)⁸
 - All those born before July 4, 1799 were enslaved for life⁹
 - 1817 Final Act of Emancipation: New York legislature marked July 4, 1827 as the date for final emancipation¹⁰

¹ Thomas Cole National Historic Site. *Census Records*. “1840 Federal Census.jpg” Accessed via WeTransfer folder.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, 1799. New York State Archives.
<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/education/act-gradual-abolition-slavery-1799>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ When Did Slavery End in New York State. New York Historical Society Museum and Library.
<https://www.nyhistory.org/community/slavery-end-new-york-state>

- However, as of 1830, the census records 75 enslaved people living in New York State¹¹
 - May account for the Black children who were likely still enslaved by their mother's master until the ages of 25 or 28
- Past the 1830s, slavery persisted in New York City in the following ways:
 - (1) Out-of-State Enslaved People Temporarily Visiting
 - The 1817 Final Act of Emancipation permitted slave owners to bring enslaved people into New York for up to 9 months ¹²
 - New York recognized terms of enslavement that had been decided in other jurisdictions¹³
 - (2) Fugitives
 - Fugitive slaves would be captured and formally adjudicated by New York courts, under federal and state law, for return to the state they fled from¹⁴
 - (3) Slave Ships
 - The Port of New York allowed slave ships to anchor and restock as long as there was no intent to sell or transfer enslaved people on New York State territory.¹⁵

Questions To Be Answered and Further Explored

- Where on the Cedar Grove property did the free, Black woman live?
- Is she the daughter of a long standing family in the area?
- Is she in the Catskill-area alone?
- Does she have children?
- Does she know folks in the County Poor House?
- Does she know folks whose children have been leased?
- Was she a mother whose children had been leased?
- What was it like to live and labor in Catskill? On Cedar Grove?
 - Affluent Whig community
 - Laboring at Cedar Grove when the Thomsons host the Whig Convention

Representational General Research (Recommendations from Elon Cook Lee and Jonathan Palmer)

- Black populations in and around Catskill
 - Example: 20th century Great Migration brought a sizeable Black population from Warrenton, GA to Catskill, NY¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ned Benton. Dating the Start and End of Slavery in New York. New York Slavery Records Index: John Jay College of Criminal Justice. <https://nyslavery.commons.gc.cuny.edu/dating-the-start-and-end-of-slavery-in-new-york/#:~:text=Out%2Dof%2DState%20Slaves%20Temporarily,and%20practices%20of%20other%20jurisdictions>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ted Hilscher. Warrenton to Catskill: A Story of The Great Migration. Hudson River Valley Review, Vol 32 no. 1 (2015): p. 34

- Example: Older Dutch, Black families in Schoharie and Westchester county¹⁷
 - Contact: Ted Hillshire (ask Jon for an introduction)
- Note: There are deeply rooted Black families who were enslaved by the Dutch and then the English
 - Example: Black families with the last name “Vanns” (might be a point of contact)
- Note: There were Black families in Catskill who were established and well-known (evidence of these families, their story, and names might be searched for in local primary resources)
 - What to Look For: Evidence of consuming and producing their own things
 - What to Look For: Evidence of trading to/with various places
 - What to Look For: Evidence of several foundries in town
- Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Jacobs (published 1861)¹⁸
 - Jacobs undoes the idea of the Free North: slavery permeated all jurisdictions regardless of law and legislation
 - An absolute must to read!

Next Steps

- Thomson and Cole Archives (located at the State Archives in Albany)
 - Look for evidence of payments to a laborer (specifically between 1831 and 1849)
 - Invoices, receipts, letter mentions, and other records of compensation might reveal:
 - The type of labor the free, Black woman was paid to complete
 - The forms of compensation offered to the free, Black woman
 - Whether she was paid for specific items or for periods of time spent on Cedar Grove
 - More insight into the forms of labor necessary to maintaining Cedar Grove
- Microfilmed letters at the Vedder (contact Jonathan Palmer)
 - Available by in-person access
- Church Records (which hold accounts of births, deaths, marriages, baptisms, and sometimes sermon transcripts or summaries)
 - First and Second Baptist Church in Catskill
 - Would likely have been a racially segregated church - whether it was separate sermons altogether or a segregated space
 - Dutch Reform Church in Catskill
 - Would likely have been an integrated church

<https://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/documents/401021/1608258/HRVR+32.1%2C+Autumn+2015/27282900-cd1a-4d3d-ada6-29a31533fb25>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jacobs, Harriet A. (Harriet Ann), 1813-1897. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* : Written by Herself. Edited by L. Maria Child. London :Hodson and Son, 22, Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn, 1862.

- African Methodist Episcopal Church (evidence of location in Coxsackie circa 1853; evidence of location in Catskill circa 1851)
 - All-Black church
 - Seems to have moved locations before dissolving completely (would be very fruitful to understand the history of this church and track down any existing records associated with the space and its community)
- Link to some example church records that have been transcribed: http://www.tracingyourrootsgcny.com/church_records.htm
- 1855 New York State Census (can be accessed through online ancestry archive or in-person)
 - Might be a good way to track Black families in and around Catskill (although this census does not denote race of household; could look for names found in other records – using primary resources suggested above)
 - Will provide info like:
 - How long they have lived in New York State
 - Country of origin
 - Current occupation
 - Family surnames
 - To get access contact Jonathan Palmer
- 1855 Greene County Census (can be accessed through online ancestry archive or in-person)
 - Denotes race (will likely be very helpful in identifying Black families in and around Catskill)
- Underground Railroad Education Center in Albany (<https://undergroundrailroadhistory.org>)
 - Contact: Paul Stewart (ask Jon for an introduction)
 - Note: Great resource to learn about free, Black personhood in upstate New York
- Institution of the Overseers of the Poor Records / Country Poor House Records (likely will need to be accessed in-person; contact Jonathan Palmer for guidance in seeking records from the State)
 - These records would account for all those impounded at the county farm
 - Children of the detained would often be leased as laborers
 - Black folks accounted for most of the County Poor House population
 - Accounts would include information on the following:
 - Owners of the mother and child
 - Mother's name
 - Child's name, date of birth, and gender