Lesson 2: Slavery by a Different Name

An Exploration of the True Cherry Hill Mystery:

Why did Minnie Knapp have the same name as Cherry Hill’s 3rd generation matriarch?
Lesson 2: Slavery by a Different Name

Overview: This lesson examines how the children of enslaved women were indentured under Gradual Emancipation laws in New York State and its impact on generations of African American families.

Students will think about the Cherry Hill mystery: Why did Minnie Knapp - a woman of color who worked as a servant - have the same name as Cherry Hill’s 3rd generation matriarch?

Materials: Stories are told with photographs, bills of sale, Cherry Hill family notes, letters, and other primary documents.

Objectives: Students will:
Experience first-hand how primary sources help us to understand the human experience in the Albany, N.Y. area, from the late 1700s through the 1850s. They will recognize gaps in the genealogical record of people whose ancestors were enslaved.

Understand that by indenturing another generation of African Americans, New York’s Gradual Emancipation Laws were designed to serve the needs of enslavers rather than the enslaved.

Think about how Gradual Emancipation in Albany affected generations of African American families like the Jackson-Knapps throughout the 19th century.

Essential Questions:
- What did Gradual Emancipation mean for the children of enslaved New Yorkers?
- How did gradual emancipation affect generations of African Americans?
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Vocabulary:
apprenticeship-
cabinet card-
daguerreotype-
genealogy-
indentured servitude-
matriarch-
patroons-
surname-

Look up definitions for any of the vocabulary words that you don’t know.

Record and define any additional vocabulary words you find in Lesson 2 in the empty space.
Mystery #2: Why did Minnie Knapp have the same name as Cherry Hill’s 3rd generation matriarch?

Harriet Maria Elmendorf Knapp (1852-1903) was called “Minnie” by all who knew her.

Minnie Knapp lived with members of the Cherry Hill family from 1854-- when she was two years old-- until her death in 1903.

This daguerreotype was taken not long after Minnie and her sister Jane arrived at Cherry Hill. A year later, Jane was sent to the home of another Van Rensselaer family member in Syracuse. Their brothers-- James and Richard-- were raised in Van Rensselaer family households in Albany and Philadelphia.

Look at the daguerreotype of Minnie Knapp (left) with her sister Jane (middle) and another member of the Cherry Hill household.

Read the description.

List some words that describe the image.

Brainstorm reasons why Minnie Knapp had the same name as Cherry Hill’s 3rd generation matriarch.

Primary Source: 5128_Daguerreotype_HMEK_JAKB
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Introduction

“Be it enacted...that any Child born of a slave within this State after the fourth day of July next, shall be...be born free: Provided nevertheless that such Child shall be the servant of the legal proprietor of his or her mother until such servant if a male shall arrive at the age of twenty eight years, and if a female at the age of twenty-five years.” - March 29, 1799

Above: Excerpt from “An Act for the gradual abolition of Slavery,” NYS Archives digital collection (right).

Background: By the turn of the 19th century, institutions that made it necessary and easy to enslave people of color were coming to an end. The transatlantic slave trade was outlawed in 1808. An agricultural economy based on Hudson River farms and sloop trade was slowly replaced by canals, railroads and factories. New York State was industrializing.

Nevertheless, slavery was an economic institution. It existed because free labor made colonists rich—especially larger landholders like the Van Rensselaers. While political leaders took steps to end slavery, laws were passed - called Gradual Emancipation- to ensure that enslavers did not lose their investments overnight.

Read the excerpt and background about the Gradual Emancipation Law passed in 1799.

Brainstorm: How do you think enslaved parents felt about this law?

Dig Deeper:

Abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

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Part A: The Reality of Gradual Emancipation

Background: The 1799 Gradual Emancipation law freed children born after July 4, 1799, but only after they worked 25 to 28 years of indentured servitude to their mother’s enslaver.

This 1799 law was based on more than 150 years of legal rules for governing the poor. The first of the “poor laws” was Dutch; dating back to the 1630s, it denied those in poverty from the same advantages as patroons.

A 1788 law allowed “Overseers of the Poor” to assign homeless children to apprenticeships and indentured servitude. An 1804 law eliminated the minimum age required for enslavers to support any children who were “abandoned” in their household. These laws allowed enslavers to indenture the children if it suited them after 1799, but freed them of any responsibility for those whose parents could not take care of them.

Essential Question:

- What did Gradual Emancipation mean for the children of enslaved New Yorkers?

Primary documents:
Gradual Emancipation Law of 1799;
1803 Bill of Sale (Peg & Bill Grant);
1803 Bill of Sale (Dean);
1825 Agreement (Dian & infant child)

Worksheets: Venn Diagram “Enslaved- Indentured- Child of Indentured”
Lesson 2: Slavery by a Different Name

Part A: The Reality of Gradual Emancipation

Activity 1

“...I Nicholas Drum of Greenbush in the County of Rensselaer...in consideration of one hundred and seventy five Dollars to me in hand paid by Robert Woodworth of Schodack... do grant, bargain and sell...a certain Negro woman slave named Peg, aged twenty six years or thereabouts; also a certain Mulatto Boy named Bill Grant aged Eleven months and an half or thereabouts - To have and to hold the said Negro woman slave...forever; and to have and to hold the...boy...until he shall arrive to the age of twenty eight Years...” July 19, 1803

Read the excerpt from the Bill of Sale of Peg and her infant child, Bill Grant.

List facts about Peg and her son Bill Grant on the enslaved & indentured sections of the Venn Diagram.

What do they have in common? What is different about their situations?

Think...Why do you think Bill has a surname, but Peg does not?

Primary Source: 5_10_2_July_19_1803_Bill_of_Sale_ND_to_RW
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Part A: The Reality of Gradual Emancipation

Activity 2

“...I Hugh McManus for and in consideration of the sum of two hundred and fifty to me in hand paid by Solomon Van Rensselaer...do grant bargain and sell unto the said Solomon Van Rensselaer...a Certain Negro woman Named Dean of the Age of twenty-six years or thereabout; To have and to hold...for Ever...”
“...Agreement made...Between Solomon Van Rensselaer Esquire of the City of Albany... and Robert S Van Rensselaer of the Town of Bethlehem...the personal services and Labor of a certain colored girl, named Dian...born of a black woman, who was then a slave of the said Solomon...Robert is desirous and willing to take... an Assignment of the unexpired Term of Service of the said Dian and her infant child, which by law is vested in the said Solomon...in consideration of the sum of Twenty five cents ...Robert...will act towards the said Dian and her infant child in every respect as is enjoined by law...and hereby assume upon himself all the liability to which the said Solomon is subject by law...”

December 6, 1825
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Part A: The Reality of Gradual Emancipation

Conclusion

Essential Question:

- What did Gradual Emancipation mean for the children of enslaved New Yorkers?

Look at your entries in the Venn Diagram.

Think about the primary sources you’ve seen in Part A--

The Bill of Sale for Peg & her infant Bill Grant;

Bill of Sale of Dean;

Agreement concerning the services of Dian & her infant child
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Part B: Impact of Gradual Emancipation

Background: We can learn how gradual emancipation affected people throughout the 1800s by following generations of the same family at Cherry Hill. It is often challenging to trace the genealogy of people whose ancestors were enslaved. However, notes written by the Cherry Hill family reveal a connection between Dean, Dian (and her infant child), and the Knapp family.

Gradual emancipation was based on the centuries’ old practice of indentured servitude. Throughout the 1800s, it became more common for children to be indentured as their families suffered from crop failure, accidents, disease, and other financial troubles.

In Albany, institutions like the Shaker settlement in Watervliet indentured children whose guardians were unable to support them. The Cherry Hill household also fostered children with the expectation that they would work to earn their stay, but their intentions may have differed. Records from this time allow us to compare the experiences of children like Minnie Knapp to other children in Albany affected by poverty during the 1800s.

Essential Question:

- How did gradual emancipation affect generations of African Americans?

Primary Sources:
Genealogy notes about the Knapp children;
Letter about Minnie & Janie Knapp;
1865 census record;
Flora Shepperman’s indenture;
cabinet card for Minnie Knapp

Worksheets: Facts about Knapp Family
Lesson 2: Slavery by a Different Name
Part B: Impact of Gradual Emancipation

Activity 1

Read the notes tracing the genealogy of the Knapp family.

Think... Are there any problems with using these notes for genealogical information?

List facts you now know about the Knapp children...

What were their names and dates of birth?

What do you know about their parents?

What events do these notes describe?


"Jane Amelia Knap born at Hudson Nov 25th 1845--
Harriet Maria Elmendorf Knap born Oct 20th 1852, Jane their Mother died Dec 13th 1854
Hat. R.V.R. M.E. went down to Hudson & brought them up Dec 27 1854 [Dean was mother to Dianna was Mother to Jane...
Jane married Knapp (an Indian)
Their children: -
James Knapp Born Dec 16, 1843
Jane Amelia Knapp born Nov. 25. 1845
Richard Knapp
Died Dec. 18. 1903"

Note: "Hat" was Harriet Maria Van Rensselaer Elmendorf. She was a daughter of Soloman and Arriet Van Rensselaer, and the 3rd generation matriarch of Cherry Hill.
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Part B: Impact of Gradual Emancipation

Activity 2

Read the excerpt from a letter mentioning Minnie (age 2) and Jane Knapp (age 9).

The letter was written by Peter E. Elmendorf of Cherry Hill to his daughter, Harriet Maria Van Rensselaer “Hattie” Elmendorf, while she is away at boarding school.

Think... What were Minnie and Janie’s roles in the Cherry Hill household?

What were they raised to do?

Primary Source: 4_1_January_7_1855_PEE_to_HEG

“Minie & Janie are talking about you all the while, they had a little dispute the other day, Minie said she was going to be Miss Hatties waiting maid, & Janie said she should not, as she was going to be Miss Hatties waiting maid, & so they keep talking about you every day...” January 7, 1855
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Part B: Impact of Gradual Emancipation

Activity 3

Look at the Cherry Hill household's entry in the 1865 New York Census record.

Read the entry for Harriet Maria Elmendorf “Minnie” Knapp. She is on the last line.

Think...Was your hypothesis about Minnie and Jane's roles at Cherry Hill correct?

What else do you notice about Minnie's entry in the census record?

Primary Source: 1865 NYS census, New York State Archives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name...</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Relation to the Head of the Family</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Profession, trade or occupation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minnie Elmendorph</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Servant</td>
<td>Columbia Co.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Part B: Impact of Gradual Emancipation
Activity 4

“This Indenture…between D. A. Buckingham of Watervliet County of Albany…and Anna Maria Shepperman of the City and County of Albany…and Flora Agusta Shepperman a Minor, daughter...aged nine...of her own free will, placed and bound her self...until she shall arrive at the full age of eighteen years...

...the said party of the first part, will...provide the said Minor with comfortable Food and Clothing; and will teach her or cause her to be taught to Read and Write, and the Principles of common Arithmetic; and also the art and mystery of Seamstress...”

July 25, 1867
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Part B: Impact of Gradual Emancipation

Activity 5

Compare the two photographs of Minnie Knapp.

List the differences between the two pictures.

Read the description and background.

Think: What questions do you have about Minnie’s life?

Write your questions in the space provided.

Description:
Photographs of Harriet Maria Elmendorf “Minnie” Knapp: Studio portrait, 1900 (left), cabinet card, 1890 (right).

Background: The Elmendorfs lost their wealth in the 1880s, leaving Cherry Hill in 1884. At times when they could not support Minnie, she worked in other households, including with cousins at Cherry Hill. Renting out servants to other households was common; the practice dates back to Slavery. The cabinet card may have advertised Minnie’s services, in exchange for her room and board.
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Part B: Impact of Gradual Emancipation

Activity 6

Look at the photograph of Minnie Knapp’s gravesite.

Read the description.

Think... How was Minnie Knapp’s experience at Cherry Hill different from other child servants, like Flora Shepperman’s at the Shaker community?

Did Minnie Knapp have any protections?

How were their opportunities in life different?

Source:
Photograph of Harriet Maria Elmendorf Knapp’s gravesite, Van Rensselaer family plot, Lot 66, Section 56, Albany Rural Cemetery.
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Part B: Impact of Gradual Emancipation

Conclusion

Essential Question:

How did gradual emancipation affect generations of Albany’s African American families like the Knapps?

Think about the primary & secondary sources you’ve seen in Part B--

Genealogy notes about the Knapp children;
Letter about Minnie & Janie Knapp;
1865 census record;
Flora Sheperman’s indenture;
Photograph of Minnie Knapp’s gravesite/Cabinet Card
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Conclusion

Mystery #2

Why do you think Harriet Maria Elmendorf “Minnie” Knapp had the same name as Cherry Hill’s 3rd generation matriarch, Harriet Maria Van Rensselaer Elmendorf?

How was she connected to the Cherry Hill family?

Take a virtual walk through Minnie Knapp’s room in the garret and explore other spaces related to her life at Cherry Hill:

www.tours.vividmediany.com/3d-model/historic-cherry-hill/fullscreen/

Start on Floor 4

Citations & Sites for Research:

A SHORT HISTORY OF SLAVERY IN NYC — NYC URBANISM

Albany Rural Cemetery


Dulberger, Judith A. “Mother Donit for the Best” Correspondence of a Nineteenth-Century Orphan Asylum, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996.

Shaker Heritage Society