The History of Enslaved People at Georgetown Visitation

Learning, Reflecting, and Teaching

Sponsored by
The St. Jane de Chantal Salesian Center

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Washington, D.C. 20007
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PREFACE
The Steering Committee of The History of Enslaved People Project at Georgetown Visitation envisions its goals as researching and interpreting evidence of enslaved people at this Monastery and school. The hope is to foster dialogue about not only this history but also the disquiet this evidence may generate. The intention is to encourage critical thinking, reflection, prayer, and action within our Monastery and school community. We hope to do so with honesty, humility, and with an eye toward restoring the dignity and humanity of the people who had been enslaved at Visitation between 1800 and 1862.

The fields of historic preservation and education are evolving, so interpretation of Visitation’s history must also advance. It is both an educational institution and a historic site with 14 buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. This study seeks to counter the assumption that the history of such places does not need to change. History is not static. Historical research is an ongoing process that constantly refreshes our knowledge of a period. Some of the questions attempted to be answered here are much like those asked at other places. Was Visitation’s religious community engaged in slaveholding? Did this school use forced labor to subsidize its educational mission? Can the identities of those who were enslaved be recovered? Unearthing these stories now provides a vital place to begin a conversation about racial inequities that still stand in the shadow of this difficult past. This part of Visitation’s history is being assembled now because it is also a way to acknowledge the origin of legal segregation and de facto segregation that endures today. The impulse to study one historical topic over another sometimes follows the need to understand present-day challenges.

That enslaved people labored on Visitation’s campus appears in both of this institution’s published histories. Documentary evidence supports this fact, but it has been little studied, so why is this subject being researched now? This country’s national story is changing to include slavery as part of its narrative. Historic sites such as Monticello, Mount Vernon, and James Madison’s Montpelier have researched and interpreted their own enslaved communities, and universities such as Georgetown, Princeton, and Columbia are acknowledging their historical ties to slavery via research, symposia, and programming. This complicates traditional narratives at these institutions, but it also enriches them. These and other initiatives show that incorporating new documentary evidence leads to the formulation of new interpretations, which prompts reconciliation with previously held knowledge.

The committee, since its inception in September 2016, has been honoring the process it takes first to research this history and then to reflect on what it means to the Sisters and to the school. Quite consciously, they have awarded equal importance to both so this difficult past can be taught. The committee acknowledges that this research needs to be presented with care, and that people need time to process this emotional and contradictory content.

The following summary of research was written with advice and input from the committee, composed of members of the Monastery, school administration, faculty, and parent and alumnae communities. This committee tasked the St. Jane de Chantal Salesian Center to sponsor this project, with Mrs. Olivia Kane serving as coordinator of this committee’s meetings and Dr. Susan Nalezyty serving as lead researcher. Hired in August 2016 as School Archivist, Dr. Nalezyty brought the experience and skills of a published
historian necessary to the sensitive treatment of this important subject.

This work seeks to add to Visitation’s story and to provide an essential historical context, which is more complicated and nuanced. First, this project briefly explores Visitation’s historiography—the history of studying its slaveholding history. Then, relying upon documents found in the Monastery Archives and public records, this project expands previous research by assembling stories about mother superiors, nuns, and chaplains who inherited, bought, sold, and hired out the people they enslaved. These primary sources also tell of manumissions, self-emancipations, and the freeing of all enslaved people in the District of Columbia in 1862. Documents from these years approaching the Civil War’s beginning provide excellent evidence toward partially recovering the identities of some who were enslaved at Visitation. And finally, this project draws on unpublished archival material and early hand-drawn maps to study the architectural history of the oldest buildings on campus, which can be associated with its slaveholding past.

The research assembled here restores the enslaved community to the school and Convent’s memory. To date, 107 people have been identified, either by name or by brief description in documentary evidence from 1800 to 1862, as having been bought, sold, hired-out, or inherited by Georgetown Visitation Convent. Among these individuals, some were donated to the Convent, yet never set foot on campus; others were born into enslavement at Visitation. Some—including the Tilghman family, Benjamin Mahoney, Thomas Weldon, and Joseph Dixon—have been traced to years after emancipation. Others, however, are only a brief count on a census record. Wherever possible, evidence that may overlap has been cross-referenced to avoid double counting. Often history writing does not include the stories of those who cleaned buildings or harvested crops. But Visitation’s history must do so, because many of those who performed these tasks in the first 62 years of this institution’s existence were enslaved. They worked but received no wages. They could not leave of their own volition and lived under the constant threat of forced migration and separation from their families and communities.

How they were treated must remain in the realm of speculation. Favoring a positive view does not reckon adequately with the debt owed to those who labored at Visitation without freedom or who were sold to subsidize this institution’s mission. Careful study of documentation in the Monastery Archives and in public records enables understanding of specific interactions between the spiritual directors, the mother superiors, and the persons whom they enslaved. These stories are as varied as the people described; therefore, generalizations need no longer prevail, other than that the Convent was deeply typical of its time and place. Closely examining historical evidence can show the human side of Visitation’s past without justifying or embellishing it.
The enslavement of one person by another contradicts the United States of America’s traditional narrative of freedom, and this paradox cannot be disentangled from Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School’s early history either (Figure 1). It is an over-200-year-old institution founded in the nation’s capital and with a history that parallels that of the United States.

The Sisters of the Visitation have been teaching on the corner of 35th and P Street under every U.S. president except George Washington. These religious women enslaved people, as did many of those presidents. Of the first 12 presidents, only two (John Adams and John Quincy Adams) did not, and the same inconsistency surrounding the country’s early leaders vexes our assessment of this school and Convent’s leadership between the years of 1800 and 1862. That they were slaveholders did not make them different but, rather, the same as others in Georgetown, as other religious orders, and other educational institutions.

Figure 1. Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School, view of Founders Hall, 1872/1996.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF VISITATION’S ENSLAVED COMMUNITY

Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, daughter of the prominent writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, wrote Georgetown Visitation’s first published history with her husband, George Parsons Lathrop, in 1895. Its title, A Story of Courage, discloses their approach: to tell a heroic story of the three “pious women,” who established their Convent and school in a largely rural and wild place. Here, using language that readers today might find disconcerting, the authors twice mention enslaved people on campus:

[The Sisters] cleaned, salted, and put up their own fish and meat; grew all their own vegetables, and for that purpose kept a fine garden, the heavier work of which was done by their negro man or men, the lighter by themselves.

Also in A Story of Courage, a man enslaved by one of the school’s founders, Archbishop Neale, is described:

The only menial labor then obtainable in the District was that of slaves. The Archbishop had one negro slave, whom he hired out to a brick-maker in Washington; taking the amount of his weekly wage in bricks, which the negro carted back to the rude archiepiscopal dwelling, every Saturday night. By this arrangement, many hundred bricks were gathered in a promising pile, for future use.

This temporary arrangement was a common way for slaveholders to generate revenue, and in this case the unnamed man’s wages were paid in bricks, which the authors imply slowly amassed a supply that could eventually be used to erect the Chapel.

The school’s second written history by Eleanore Sullivan, Georgetown Visitation Since 1799, was published first in 1975, and was revised and expanded by Susan Hannan in 2004. Sullivan wrote in her introduction: “The Sisters were not social reformers; they accepted as their contemporaries did, the open and frank acknowledgment of class distinctions, and that, of course, included slavery.” In fact, the Sisters themselves were organized into 4 distinct classes, a practice informed by the Order’s old-world traditions, as has been convincingly argued by Joseph Mannard, a specialist in
nineteenth-century U.S. social and religious history and the lives of Roman Catholic nuns. At the top, were “choir sisters” who sang the Divine Office, who were literate and usually native born from middle-class or elite families. Next, “associate sisters” met the literacy requirement for being choir sisters yet were unable to uphold that responsibility, usually for health reasons. Third were “lay sisters,” who were usually illiterate, were often not native born, and performed housekeeping chores. And finally, “out sisters” who lacked full membership, lived in separate quarters, and could leave enclosure.

As Mannard has also determined, the Visitation Order in the New World during the antebellum period had a distinctly Southern character. All Visitation houses, except for Kaskaskia, Illinois, (opened in 1833) and Brooklyn, New York, (opened in 1850) were founded in slave states. Because of a catastrophic flood, however, the Kaskaskia community moved in 1844 to St. Louis, Missouri, where slavery was legal. Given these localities, the acceptance of enslaved people as being at the bottom of the hierarchy might not have been questioned by these women, many of whom were raised in slaveholding families. Based on 1850 and 1860 census records, it can be calculated that 73% of the native-born Visitation nuns at its six houses came from Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia. Many of these women, then, were following cultural standards that saw slavery as necessary and acceptable. As professed nuns, their Catholic identity did not provide a clear path away from those norms. In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI condemned the African slave trade, but New World customs posed challenges for the Church in the United States, and views on this issue were by no means homogenous on these shores.

In Visitation’s second published history, slavery on Visitation’s campus was treated three times. Sullivan mentioned “an oral tradition in the monastery has it that the sisters taught the children of the slaves living on the property.” Another sentence mentioned that enslaved people were brought to the Convent as part of the dowries of Sisters who joined the Order. And one passage described documentary evidence of a legal dispute between the Convent and a man they had enslaved, Ignatius Tilghman. Since Sullivan’s 1975 study, Visitation’s enslaved community has not gone unstudied. Many documents related to its slaveholding history in the Monastery Archives were assembled together in 1996 during a systematic re-organization of its contents by Sr. Mada-anne Gell, VHM, and Sr. Dolores Liptak, RSM. Sr. Mary Paula McCarthy, VHM, also analyzed Monastery documents and others related to this history found in public repositories. The present study, which was shared with the community and placed on the school’s website in May 2018, draws a good deal from this reorganization and is indebted to the Sisters’ efforts to gather these documents. Sr. Mada-anne’s sharing of these papers provided crucial evidence of Visitation’s slaveholding past. And most recently, research gathered from this report along with other new findings were published in May 2019 in a peer-reviewed academic journal, The U.S. Catholic Historian, in a special issue titled, The Church and Slavery.

**SLAVEHOLDING AT GEORGETOWN VISITATION, 1800–50**

In 1799, Father Leonard Neale, S.J., became President of Georgetown College and the next year was elevated to Bishop and coadjutor to the Bishop of Baltimore, John Carroll. After Fr. Neale relocated to Georgetown, he sent for a woman, Alice Lalor, whom he had known in Philadelphia. Soon after, Maria McDermott and a widow named Maria Sharpe and her daughter joined Alice Lalor in Georgetown. Initially they boarded with nuns from the Order of the Poor Clares, who were refugees displaced by the French Revolution and who
had opened an academy in 1798 at the corner of Third (now P Street) and Fayette (now 35th Street). The following year, in 1800, Bishop Neale bought these women a house next door to the Poor Clares to serve as their residence. In 1805, the Abbess of the Poor Clares died, so the remaining two nuns returned to France. This same year, Alice Lalor, Maria McDermott, and Maria Sharpe moved into the French sisters’ house, which Bishop Neale purchased for these three “pious women,” as he once called them in a letter. From this phrase, the appellation “the three pious ladies” has been given to the Convent’s founders.11 When Bishop Neale’s term as President of Georgetown College expired in 1806, he moved next door to the Convent.

The “pious ladies” and Bishop Neale tentatively discerned the Order and school they hoped to form and, from these modest beginnings, depended on enslaved labor. The 1800 Census has a “Mary McDermit” as head of household living in Georgetown with two other women (presumably Alice Lalor and Maria Sharpe) and two girls under 10 (one presumably Maria Sharpe’s daughter and the other a student). Also noted as living in that house was one enslaved individual, with no note of any other information, such as age or sex.12 The following year, on March 14, 1801, Bishop Neale is documented as having bought a man named George from a College boarder for £67, which was about the cost of a year’s board and expenses at the College.13 In 1808, an enslaved man named George was hired out for 20 months at $35 a month to a cobbler, and some of his wages were paid in shoes.14 In 1811, Bishop Neale paid $176 for another man named George and for a woman named Stace.15

One of Bishop Neale’s responsibilities as Georgetown College President from 1799 to 1806 was managing business related to the Jesuits’ plantations in Southern Maryland. An 1805 letter from him in Georgetown to his brother, Francis Neale, in St. Inigoes, MD, reports that an enslaved man named Spalding had fled from his enslavement. Here also Bishop Neale advises him to keep another enslaved man named Stephen in St. Inigoes but “to dispose of the unhappy girl.”16 Another letter has Bishop Neale purchasing a man named Wat from Charles Boarman for $400, and that Wat was then promptly resold for $500 via George Fenwick to St. Inigoes.17 Bishop Neale also periodically hired enslaved people held by Ann Fenwick to work on the College campus between 1804 and 1806.18

Georgetown College and Georgetown Visitation’s early histories were intertwined during Archbishop Neale’s tenure. In 1800, the College ledger book records regular debits to Mrs. McDermott’s account for pedagogical items, such as quills, books, and slates. McDermott also paid to the College pew rental fees and received assistance with driving the Sisters’ cows, presumably to market. Buried in these mundane accounting records is the hiring from the College of an enslaved man named Zealeam for 3 days’ labor at the Convent starting on July 15, 1800.19 The College in fact did not own Zealeam; he was being hired out by the Fevrier family in lieu of expenses for their two sons’ education.20

Bishop Neale’s elevation to Archbishop of Baltimore in 1815 enabled him to communicate directly with Rome, and the next year he received response from a letter he had sent the Pope, who sent an indult to approve the formation of the Order of the Visitation in Georgetown. Archbishop Neale was finally able to preside over the founding Sisters taking their solemn vows. He died in 1817, and Mother Teresa A. Lalor became the group’s leader and advocate.

The next year she mentions an enslaved man called George in an October 27, 1818, letter to Archbishop Marechal. Since Archbishop Neale had owned two men named George, it is
unclear as to whom she means. She asked if she might purchase George's wife, a woman owned by a neighbor, who planned to sell her and her children:

_She is the Wife to our servant George, who is very much distressed for fear she should be sold away. He has been so faithful a servant to our late Venerable Bishop [Neale] and continues so to us that we would wish to do everything in our power for him. As to the woman we do not stand in need of her but if your Reverence thought well of us to buy her and hire her out. I humbly request your Reverence will let me know your will on the subject as soon as convenient with the enclosed paper as Mr. Addison has given her only until Saturday to look for a Master._

A postscript in a November 10, 1818, letter tells the Archbishop that Mother Lalor had purchased George's wife and children. She acted swiftly and pragmatically, recouping her money by hiring out George's wife to someone nearby. This solution lessened the burden for this family within the narrow confines of enslavement, showing an acceptance of their status with no legal rights—that slavery was a condition inherited through the mother and that slaveholding was governed by principles of property law. In Archbishop Neale's absence, Mother Lalor was now making decisions on her own. She was an Irish immigrant from Philadelphia, someone who likely had little firsthand experience with slavery. She was very much unlike Archbishop Neale, who had been born in Port Tobacco, Maryland, and raised in proximity to the plantation system that employed enslaved labor to grow crops in this region.

Archbishop Neale’s death in 1817 ushered in a new era at Visitation, one when the College and Convent began to depend less on one another. Archbishop Neale had arranged for his replacement before his death, inviting Father Pierre-Joseph Picot de Clorivière, who arrived in 1819, as chaplain. He was a French nobleman and Royalist who had come to the United States after his involvement in a failed plot to assassinate Napoleon. Immediately after his arrival to the Convent, Father Clorivière set about initiating a major building campaign to establish the school as a prominent institution for the education of girls and disadvantaged children. His accomplishments in such a short time, from 1819 until his death in 1826, earned him the unofficial title of being the school’s second founder. The first thing he did was to open the Benevolent School, locating it in a newly built Early Republic/Federal–style brick building—the oldest building constructed by the Convent—which still stands today (Figure 2).

An accomplished painter, Clorivière sketched a plan of the Convent grounds in 1819 that visualized his strategies for architectural changes to campus (Figure 3). At the upper left he drew the Benevolent School, which he had just built near the first academy building, the chicken coops, stable, and living quarters for the enslaved community. At middle right, he marked the site for the future Chapel, next to his living quarters and the Convent buildings on Fayette (now 35th Street).
Visitation’s slaveholding history is well documented during Clorivière’s tenure in the early 1820s because the Convent employed a slave dealer in Southern Maryland. This geographic distance required much written correspondence, which survives today in the Monastery Archives. Their dealer, George W. Neale, had ties to the Convent, for his sister, Felicity (Elizabeth) Neale, and daughter, Rosey (or Emily?), were both nuns at the Convent.\(^{26}\) One letter of February 1820 mentions an “old woman” whom he was arranging to have brought from Georgetown to him in Port Tobacco so she could be sold.\(^{27}\) Another important document from Neale summarizes the sale of 21 enslaved people between 1819 and 1822.\(^{28}\) Cross-referencing this with other documents reveals that it lists people as inherited wealth brought by Elizabeth and Catherine Lancaster, as well as others, whose origins remain unknown.

From her father upon his death, Elizabeth Lancaster inherited $1,542 of “negro property,” phrasing that strikes ears today as painful but was commonly found in such legal documents at this time. As part of dividing the siblings’ inheritance, the will also dictates that her brother pays her an additional $17 in “negro property,” a solution to keep a mother with her child. Seven names of those enslaved individuals are noted, and other correspondence tells that Rose was sold for $200. Betty and her 3 children (Cletidus, George, and an unnamed child) were sold for $550. Harriet went unsold for some time but was eventually sold for $300. Ned was sold for $400.

Despite never having seen these people whom they were selling, the Sisters were nonetheless financially responsible for their care until they were sold. An account book from George Neale lists midwife services charged to the Convent for Betty. It took about two years for Harriet to be sold, so she was placed for a time in rental quarters before being hired out for $50, though the Convent never paid for this long-term arrangement. Ned had been hired out for $80 until his sale, proceeds of which were not immediately forthcoming until the Sisters enlisted the help of Georgetown mayor John Threlkeld.\(^{29}\) Written between the lines of these documents describing business transactions are the disquieting circumstances for the people awaiting their sale, separated from the community with whom they had lived in the Lancaster household.

Catherine Lancaster’s inherited wealth brought proceeds to the Convent in 1819 from the sale of enslaved people who were part of her inheritance: Charles, described as a carpenter, was sold for $475; Milly and her two children were purchased with two other men (Naas and another man named Charles, both of whom
were not from the Lancaster inheritance) for $720. In this case, the Convent only received a down payment of $570 and were forced to sue to get the balance owed. Mocay and her two children went for $520, and Spincers and Michael were sold for $450 each. Again, the Convent received only a $200 deposit for Michael and sued to recoup the balance from Robert Diggs. Another delinquent account was that of Lawrence Posey, who finally paid in full for Mocay and her children, but he paid only $200 of the $550 owed for his purchase of Betty and her children.30

Interspersed throughout this list containing enslaved people from the Lancaster estates, George Neale notes 11 others, whose origins are not identified here nor in any other documents thus far found. As mentioned above, he sold Naas and Charles. To another unnamed buyer went Monaca, Mary, and Eliza together for $520. A man named Leon was sold but was returned to the Convent, so no money was exchanged. And last on this list, in 1822, Neale sold a woman named Prudence with her child for $150.31 The total value of these sales was $3,915, but, as the Sisters would learn, receiving those full proceeds would take a good deal of litigation initiated on their part.

This coincides with the major crisis in the country brought about by the Panic of 1819, wherein the U.S. economy experienced a profound collapse that would take some years from which to recover. This might explain why those individuals could not pay. These sales also overlap with the July 1820 groundbreaking for the Chapel of the Sacred Heart, which was consecrated on November 1, 1821. James Simpson’s 1846 painting documents the original two-story façade (Figure 4). Father Clorivière himself designed this building, and it cost $9,748 to construct. He raised some money donating the pension paid to him by the French government for his military service. In 1814, he had initiated legal proceedings to sell his family estate in Brittany, Château Limolan, to his brother-in-law, but the final transaction was not completed until 1823. Records from the Monastery Archives show that between 1820 and 1826 he donated a total of $9,354, but it is safe to assume that most of that did not arrive until after 1823—that is, two years after the Chapel’s completion.32

Figure 4. James Alexander Simpson. Georgetown Visitation Convent, View from P Street Looking North (detail), 1846. Oil on canvas. Georgetown Visitation Collection.

Left to right: 1) East wing of Convent with dormers before its 1857 elevation, 2) Chapel’s original two-story façade, designed by Father Clorivière and consecrated in 1821, 3) Chaplain’s house, and 4) “New Academy,” designed by Father Clorivière and built in 1824.

One document in the Monastery Archives illustrates what a substantial undertaking it was to raise money for its construction. Two letters are copied onto the back of a reused piece of paper, a printed announcement that solicits donations for the Chapel’s building fund. Titled “To the Friends of the Religious Female Institutions,” it describes the Sisters’ charitable works, which benefit orphans, the poor, and women by creating a place for them to live and be educated. Making the case that a chapel would further their sacred cause, they seek “any gifts, bequests and donations for the above purposes.”33

Written on the back of this fundraising publication is handwritten text copied from letters that were sent by Mother Superior Agnes Brent. The first letter from early
November 1821 discusses a promised gift of enslaved people owned by the family of two professed women at the Convent, Mary Ann and Susan Boarman. Addressed to the women’s father, Gerard Boarman, it reports that his letter arrived during a time in which they had been busily engaged with the opening of their chapel, which had just occurred days prior, on All Saints Day. She writes that “The community will feel much gratified by the generosity of your proposal giving to your daughters these negroes.”

Another letter copied below this text is addressed to George Neale from Mother Agnes Brent. It asks him to clarify Boarman’s intentions as to whether he is giving four enslaved people or only the two children of a woman named Minty. She asks him to collect these enslaved people; however, if he discovers that Boarman intends to take them back, this will be an unwelcome expense, not a profit.

For our intention would be to sell these negroes & if they are not saleable they would be a charge to us. If they are so young that they cannot be separated from the mother & the mother be given also, then we would have to request you to get a place for them, free of expense at least. In time you will oblige us in acting in this as in other things for the best interests of a community so large & which at this moment particularly must think of making money by all lawful means to pay our just debts, in which we lay our hopes in your collections for us as speedily as possible.

This unvarnished candor discloses the financial situation after such a major building campaign. Another letter from George Neale to Mother Agnes Brent dated November 30, 1821, discloses that by asking for Boarman’s enslaved people, the Convent was calling in a promise made during “Bishop Neale’s times,” that is before 1817. George Neale reports from Cobb Neck, Charles County, that he has collected those 4 enslaved people from Boarman. He describes a 30-year-old woman who already has two small children and is expecting another child any day. The other is a 35- or 40-year-old man, who tells him that he earns a good wage working in Georgetown brickyards. Neale further reports that the sale of the woman cannot happen until her baby is delivered, so he has furnished her with provisions and therefore asks for further direction from Mother Agnes Brent. In different handwriting is her response, copied from a letter she had sent him, which states that there is nothing else to do but sell these enslaved people. No other documents disclose to whom these 5 people were sold, nor for how much. These exchanges about the Boarman slaves strongly suggest that the Chapel’s construction had caused an economic strain.

It is implied that the enslaved brickmaker described in Visitation’s first published history may have in fact brought the bricks he manufactured from elsewhere in the city to build the Chapel’s brick foundation, still visible in the crypt today. This first history by the Lathrops, published about 30 years after emancipation, is more poetic verse than history writing. It has no footnotes to documentary sources, but perhaps the authors had read the Monastery Archives document describing the man enslaved by Boarman, who earned a good wage making bricks in Georgetown. The story parallels are certainly noteworthy. Perhaps the authors spun an artful tale based on this evidence. The man enslaved by Boarman could not have fabricated the bricks that built the Chapel’s foundation, however, because he was acquired by the Convent after its completion. He likely never came to campus, but his sale may have funded the construction costs for the Chapel and other buildings on campus. This could have been the authors’ attempt at conveying that this institution was indebted to the sale and labor of enslaved people. They got the details wrong but, perhaps, the sentiment right.
In 1823, the Sisters hired out Eliza, a woman they enslaved, to a Bernard Spalding for $1.25 a month, an agreement expected to be lengthy, as it specifies that he would provide her with summer and winter clothing; the agreement was not profitable but certainly did reduce the number of enslaved people to keep and care for on campus. The urgent tone in correspondence regarding the sale of enslaved people in these years confirms that the Convent must have been eagerly awaiting funds from the sale of Father Clorivière’s property in France, which arrived just in time in 1823. This new infusion of cash fueled another building’s construction. Promptly in the following year, 1824, the “New Academy” was built where Founders Hall stands today (Figure 5). Revenue fell so short this year that the school was almost bankrupted. Relief came in the form of pre-payment of tuition for two students from a parent in New York, John B. Lasaler.

The overstretched resources on campus can be detected in the urgent tone of the Mother Superior’s 1824 correspondence with George Neale. A lengthy letter written to him, again copied on the back and margins of the same fundraising publication for the Chapel’s construction, conveys frustration with the accumulating unpaid debts owed to the Convent from the sale of enslaved people. It laments that the individuals who owed them, themselves Catholics with relations who were professed at the Convent, do not recognize their responsibility to pay for the upkeep of these women and that the community is entirely dependent on them. The end of the letter expresses genuine shame and fear:

What would become of us all if we were reduced to break up. We would rather die with hunger. It is true but our creditors would not let us stay in the house. We would have to die in the street. We hope it will happen better but God must move the heart of our debtors & friends before we expect he move that of strangers. We know it is an imprudent thing to let the public know our embarrassment & we recommend to you some prudence in doing it to our debtors & no others, but if we do not to them it should come out at last.

A January 1824 letter from George Neale summarizes 6 separate lawsuits the Convent was bringing against people who had bought enslaved people but had not paid the full amount due. A March 1824 letter tells Neale that because of his delay in response, the Sisters themselves had sold “the boy & girl to a gentleman in town” and that they agreed to selling a woman they enslaved named Stacy for $25 to a Mr. Saughter[?], whom Neale had found as a buyer. The Mother Superior laments the fact that it would be at the Convent’s expense to send Stacy to Neale in Southern Maryland but confesses that “our object in selling her is not [to] make money, [but] to diminish the number of mouths at our charge.” She goes on further to insist that his last conveyance of charges does not match their books and that next time he comes, he must bring his vouchers to compare. She further maintains that they have researched fees elsewhere and that his 10 percent commission
for selling enslaved people was “by far too much.”

Almost a year later, George Neale sends a letter to Sister Anne Combs in February 1825 defending his fees:

I am sure to the best of my knowledge that I distinctly told you that I could not, yet would not, sell negroes for less than ten per cent, but I would make your other collections for five percent, as for other people offering to do it for 5 or less, that may be the case, and I could do it too for that fee had I no conscience and would sell them to whomever would give the most money for them. I could have sold Harriet several times, a year or two ago, but what was my reason, because my conscience would not permit to sell her to the persons that wished to purchase; therefore the extra trouble I take in selling your negroes is worth the 10 per cent. I mentioned it to Father [Francis?] Neale last summer and he says the trouble and responsibility is worth the 10 percent and more.

The unyielding business acumen communicated in this correspondence demonstrates that strained economic circumstances were persistent at the Convent. The stresses here for the nuns, the dealer, and, of course, the enslaved are striking. The community was learning that liquidating human property was neither easy nor immediately profitable.

There still was an enslaved community on campus amidst these dealings in Southern Maryland. The 1820 Census counted 13 enslaved people that year. In 1823, an enslaved woman named Ruth died, according to Holy Trinity burial records. These same burial records document an unnamed child enslaved on campus who died in 1825. Also in this year, Sr. Harriet Agnes Brent and Father Clorivière entered into a manumission agreement with one of the Convent’s enslaved men, Edward Shorter, who appears to have been hired out to a Mr. Bradley. Writing on Shorter’s behalf, Bradley negotiated the agreement’s terms, insisting that their asking price of $400 was at least $100 over market. Bradley also asked to extend the contract’s terms to make all payments from 4 years to 6 years, which would have given Shorter time enough to raise the necessary money. Mother Brent was firm on her offer, and with little leverage to negotiate, Shorter agreed to these terms, which obliged Bradley to advance him the difference to make timely payment, charging interest along the way. In the end, Shorter paid $560 plus $5.86 for clothing—that is, $166 dollars above the original asking price, which had been above market. In Shorter’s case, his manumission made a profit not only for the Convent but also for Bradley as the middleman.

Proceeds from this manumission likely would have contributed to the ongoing architectural projects. After the “New Academy’s” completion, Father Clorivière designed and initiated construction of the Odeon, an elegant Neoclassical building, which served as an assembly hall and place for annual public examinations (Figure 6). It also housed spaces for bathing, dressmaking, and scientific laboratories. Its original location is unknown, but it is thought to have stood roughly where Fennessy Hall stands today, facing 36th Street when it was open to traffic. Father Clorivière didn’t see this building’s completion before his death in 1826, but it was opened the next year.
Figure 6. The Odeon engraved on stationery, signed by Margaret Boucher. Circa 1875.

Designed by Father Clorivière and completed in 1827. Now demolished, but likely stood where Fennessey Hall is today, facing 36th Street when it was open to traffic.

The Convent’s new spiritual director, Fr. Michael Wheeler, carried out his predecessor’s intentions to enhance science instruction. In 1828, he ordered from abroad “apparatus” costing $2,447. Part of the costs for this sizable expenditure came via an additional fee students had paid since 1822 “for use of apparatus.” But also in 1828, a document tells of the sale of a woman named Susan and her three children, which served as a way of clearing an account on which the Convent owed money in town. 48

The years from 1819 to 1827 were extraordinary in Visitation’s history. Four buildings were constructed in 8 years: The Benevolent School, the Chapel, the “New Academy,” and the Odeon. Although records are scant for enrollment, there seem to have been only 16 paying students in 1820. By 1826, this number had increased to at least 48. 49 Father Clorivière’s daring agenda turned the school’s performance around but certainly moved at an ambitious pace, perhaps overly so. He contributed much of his family’s fortune, which partially paid for these improvements, but this forced the Convent also to seek revenue in ways it never had. And one source of trusted revenue was that of donations and the inheritances of professed women, which legally brought money, land, and enslaved people.

Another comparable scenario described in other legal documents dates to this time as well. In 1831, two professed women, Eleanor and Celeste Combs, together inherited from their father, Enoch Combs, 16 enslaved people, appraised at $2,750. They, however, were sold to pay down debt owed by their father’s estate. In fact, the amount owed exceeded the estate’s value, so not only did the Convent not receive proceeds from the Combs sisters’ inheritance, the Convent learned the next year that they had to pay about $250 to rectify the debt owed after interest was added to the estate’s final dispersal. 50 This example illustrates that inheritances were complex legal agreements and certainly not profitable in every case.

By this time, the economic strains from the previous decade were waning. According to the 1830 Census, there were 12 grammar school students, 51 middle school students, and 37 who were high school age. Also on campus were 57 young, middle-aged, and mature women, presumably the nuns. These numbers tell that the school and Convent were thriving. With these incremental successes, however, the need for enslaved labor also increased. The 1830 Census counted 10 people enslaved on campus: 4 young to middle-aged men, 5 young to middle-aged women, and one mature woman. 51 In 1828, the Convent hired a man named Harry owned by a Mr. Warring at a rate of $5 a month for a year-long contract. That same year, they also had purchased a woman named Nelly for $100. 52 She might have been someone briefly described in the 1830 Census. A family not mentioned might have been Joe and his wife and children, who had been bought by a Mr. Brent. For some reason, however, in 1831 Brent was returning them to
the Convent, though Joe was to stay on for a longer duration for the sum of $40. A few years later, this family would be joined on campus by another woman, Sophia, whom the Convent purchased in 1834. This is yet more evidence of the social fragmentation brought about by forced migration.

As should be clear by now, the enslaved community at Visitation increased or decreased in any given year. The 1840 Census documents the enslaved numbering only 3: a girl under 10 years old, a young woman, and a middle-aged man. A few years later, in 1844, Stephen was purchased by the Convent for $600. An 1847 letter to Sr. Mary Magdalen Neale from Henrietta Lancaster notes monthly payments received to purchase a woman named Eliza from the Convent for $325, an agreement made on November 1, 1845. From the context, it appears that Lancaster was planning to immediately manumit Eliza after the purchase was concluded.

Around this time in 1845, or perhaps 1841, another inheritance brought 8 enslaved people with certainty, although it was likely at least 11 individuals. A young married couple, two boys (who were not their children), a man, and a woman with two children experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate as property inherited by Martha Young, who joined the Convent as Sr. Mary Ellen. They presumably came from Young’s plantation on the Potomac River, which eventually became the south side of the National Mall. Young had considerable acreage there, and the 1840 Census has him enslaving 26 people. Unlike the Lancaster inheritance of enslaved people, who were immediately sold, some of these individuals were enslaved on Georgetown Visitation’s campus.

Shortly after arriving in Georgetown, four of these people experienced forced migration to the Academy of the Visitation in Baltimore, which 11 nuns from Georgetown had founded in 1837. A decade later, Sr. Mary Ellen Young signed over her deed of ownership for a man and a woman with 2 children for $5 to the Sisters of the Visitation, Baltimore. This transfer of Robert, described as a blacksmith, and Fanny with her two children, provides important evidence that not only did the Georgetown house benefit from enslaved labor, but so too did this other house, which was started by Sisters from the mother house. Talent and wealth—in this case, human property—subsidized the Visitation Order’s expansion to other parts of the country at mid-century. This introduces the question as to whether enslaved people could have been brought from Georgetown to set up new communities. The following were founded before emancipation: Mobile, AL, in 1833; Kaskaskia, IL, also in 1833 (but removed to St. Louis, MO, in 1844); Frederick, MD, in 1846; Wheeling, WV, in 1848; the Washington Academy in D.C. in 1850; Catonsville, MD, in 1852; and Brooklyn, NY, in 1855. All of these were slave states except Illinois and New York.
THE 1850s AND 1860s: MANUMISSION, EMANCIPATION, AND ENSUING LITIGATION

The 1850 Census counts the enslaved community at Georgetown Visitation as 8 children and 9 adults. This was the first census to record separate slave schedules, which gathered more precise ages of the enslaved. This data provides better evidence that can be cross-referenced with other documentation from the years leading up to the Civil War. In the late 1850s, the Convent manumitted four women in quick succession. On April 28, 1858, Sharlot Mahorney bought her freedom from the Convent for $10 when she was 31 years old. Almost exactly a year later, on April 14, 1859, Elizabeth Weldon at age 24 bought her freedom for $1. On August 1 of that year, Jane Mahoney (age 22) and Sidney Tilghman (age 26) each paid $5 for their freedom. These now freed women had male family members who remained enslaved on campus, two of whom had building experience, and thus provided a much-needed type of labor at the Convent. Lay sisters and out sisters provided them with the kind of housekeeping work that women typically performed. This redundancy, then, probably contributed to their being manumitted first.

As was so often the case, what was happening outside the Convent was also occurring within Visitation’s walls. As popular opinion was shifting, and as the divide over slavery increased between the North and South, slaveholders started manumitting less as a source of revenue and more as a way of divesting themselves of this issue. In fact, a template with the appropriate language for manumission with blank spaces for the people’s names still survives today in the Monastery Archives—the same wording used in the above-described manumissions in the late 1850s.

These manumissions in the 1850s foreshadowed a sea change of slaveholding in the District of Columbia. On April 16, 1862, President Lincoln signed the District of Columbia Emancipation Act, which freed the federal District’s over 3,000 enslaved people 20 months before the Emancipation Proclamation. This law offered money to newly freed men and women to voluntarily emigrate to places outside the United States. It also mandated that owners declare the people they were holding and that, in return, they would be compensated for them. This was an attempt to ease the transition from an economy dependent on free labor to one without.

Documents related to the District of Columbia Emancipation Act are meticulous in their assessment of the value of an enslaved person, uncomfortable to read but at the same time valuable in providing detailed documentary evidence of Visitation’s enslaved community. Because they are so specific, they enable a partial reconstruction of the lives of those listed. Following the law, Mother Superior Sr. Mary Angela Harrison declared 11 enslaved people on a government form as having a total value of $7,800. It lists Susan and Ignatius Tilghman, their 6 children, and three young men: Benjamin Mahoney, Thomas Weldon, and Joseph Dixon. A month later, the Convent submitted a statement to the government describing these now-emancipated people, plus another child just born to the Tilghmans, appraising a higher value of $8,500.

A few months later, litigation arose between Sr. Mary Angela Harrison, representing the Convent, and Ignatius Tilghman. He filed a counter-petition, citing an 1856 agreement between himself and the Convent to pay them $500 to buy his freedom and that of his wife and children. He provided payment receipts signed by the Sisters amounting to $298.76. He further insisted that his son John’s death should have changed the agreement’s terms and that his latter two children, born since
1856, had not yet been appraised. Tilghman clarified that after their agreement, he had maintained his family without expense to the Convent. He conceded that the government pay the remaining $201.25 to the Convent and further clarified that he was not asking for the value of himself, in compliance with the law. The portion for him, based on the original agreement at 6 ½ percent interest, would be $65. Subtracting this from the already-paid amount, he therefore asked for $233.75 to be paid to him for his wife and children.

The Convent then filed a counter-petition, insisting that the law provided compensation to owners, not slaves, and that there was nothing in its terms accounting for previous agreements. They asserted that the 1856 arrangement had been an act of charity that could have been revoked at any time. The law did not regard slave valuations as being depreciated by any promise of future emancipation; moreover, the Convent maintained that Tilghman had made a slow effort to fulfill his side of the agreement, taking 6 years to pay only 4 dollars a month. They insisted that he and his family had cost them 12 to 13 dollars a month for their care—that, in fact, he had simply paid them their own money. They, therefore, requested that the government pay Tilghman nothing and fully compensate the Convent instead.

Two years later, in 1864, the exact disputed amount, $298.75—the equivalent of 1 year of tuition—was subtracted from the amount the government paid the Convent. A footnote stated that this amount was “withheld as having been paid by Ignatius Tilghman for himself and family.” The Convent received $3,774.65. Unfortunately, any record of payment to Tilghman has yet to be found, if he was ever paid at all.68

There is documentary evidence supporting Ignatius Tilghman’s assertion that he had maintained his family without expense to the Sisters. The 1860 Census mistakenly notes him as free, along with Susan Tilghman and their 6 children, living also with Sidney Tilghman and Ann Green, both of whom were by this time free women working as washers. Sidney was presumably Ignatius’s sister, and Ann Green was godmother to his daughter Jane. Green was a black woman, wrongly noted on the 1850 Census as free, living at the Convent. Surviving in the Monastery Archives is a copy of her “Certificate of Freedom” by manumission from Mary A. Fenwick in 1853, the same year she was Jane’s sponsor for baptism. It may be that she had been hired out by Fenwick but eventually was freed and worked as a paid servant at the Convent.69 Ignatius’s occupation is noted as being a whitewasher: a job using a mixture of lime and water to improve the appearance of buildings in lieu of painting them. He must have earned the extra money to pay toward buying his freedom and to support his family by performing this work. The Tilghmans and Ann Green were living in a residence separate from the Convent, for the 1860 Census was taken in a different ward within the city. This confirms that the Tilghmans, though still legally enslaved, were living elsewhere and maintaining bonds with freed family and close friends.70

The 1860 Census at the Convent also wrongly notes that Benjamin Mahoney, Thomas Weldon, and Joseph Dixon were free, along with another possible relation to Benjamin Mahoney, perhaps a son, born at the Convent, named Stanislaus Mahoney, who was 11 years old.71 These 3 young men and Stanislaus, who is included with them, are noted as farmers, as is a man named Patrick O’Connor, born in Ireland, perhaps serving as the overseer. They are all noted along with other white servants, but they were still enslaved. Stanislaus poses a researcher’s problem: He is not listed on the Convent’s petition two years later. Perhaps he died before this record was taken, but the 1870 Census does have a “Stanley Mohoney” of the correct age, born in Washington, D.C., and
living in Friars Point, Coahoma County, Mississippi. If this is Stanislaus, then perhaps he was manumitted before emancipation in 1862, or maybe he was indeed free at that time.

Census miscounts and manumissions characterize the period when the scales were tipping toward the abolitionists’ cause. The rising tensions prior to the Civil War also affected Visitation’s economic viability. Several students from Southern states did not return; in fact, 1862 marks a low point for enrollment: only 99 students, with more than 80 nuns in residence. The financial situation is indicated by the steep increase in tuition. Between 1862 and 1863, it increased from $200 to $300. The school struggled to remain solvent in a dramatically changed, wartime economy, and the Sisters were not alone. Those freed by the federal government also faced an uncertain future. The Tilghmans continued to live with their children in the city, awaiting the return of their son, Theodore, who had fled from his enslavement. Joseph Dixon also could finally emerge from hiding to escape capture, as now he had papers to document his status as free. Benjamin Mahoney and Thomas Weldon walked out of Visitation’s front gate as freed men, but faced the unknown prospects of finding a place to live and work.
RECOVERING THE IDENTITIES

Susan Nalezyty, Ph.D., School Archivist
LIVES OF FREE BLACK AND ENSLAVED FAMILIES IN GEORGETOWN

The neighborhood into which these newly freed people from Visitation stepped was a diverse place, and this can be partially reconstructed by carefully looking at the sacramental records at Holy Trinity, a Roman Catholic parish sponsored by the Jesuits and a block away from Visitation. The record keeper there between 1835 and 1853 was exceptionally diligent in describing the parents who brought their children to be baptized (Table 1). These records are like looking through the key hole of a time passed just down the street. They tell a vivid story, documenting that the lives of free African-Americans and enslaved people were varied and interwoven.

![Table 1. African-American families baptizing their children at Holy Trinity, Georgetown, 1835-1853.](image)

The most numerous baptisms were children of free black couples. The next most common family structure was a free, single woman with no mention of a father. The status of parents could be mixed. Quite often a father was enslaved, and the mother was free; this logically follows, since a child’s status would follow the mother’s. A family would typically work to acquire the mother’s freedom first to guarantee her children’s. Equally as frequent in these records was an enslaved mother with no mention of a father. Often enslaved parents had the same owner, but slightly more families were composed of parents enslaved by different owners, likely, in part, because of forced migration. Other noteworthy records were two families with free-born parents, two sets of enslaved parents, but whose children were free, and even a black father and a white mother; evidence of the record keeper’s judgment survives with the insertion of an exclamation point into this entry. Collectively these numbers portray the experiences of enslaved lives in an urban space like Georgetown, which at least enabled some degree of interaction with free blacks and other people outside the houses in which they were enslaved. This contrasts with the popular notion that sees enslaved people as residing only on isolated, rural plantations in the deep South. Enslavement in a city—though no better or worse than in rural locales—was somewhat of a different experience.

THE TILGHMANS

Like others in Georgetown, the Tilghman family, who was enslaved at Visitation, also brought their children to be baptized at Holy Trinity. These records, as well as other public documents, enable a partial recovery of some of the people enslaved at Visitation prior to the Civil War. Ignatius Tilghman was 40 years old at emancipation, described by the Convent as “smart [and] healthy.” In 1860, he was wrongly noted as free but as living with Sidney Tilghman, presumably his sister, who had been manumitted in 1859. This census also documents him and Sidney as illiterate. After emancipation, Ignatius lived in Washington, D.C., working as a laborer, as noted in a Civil War Draft document. He also worked as a gardener and a porter in the District for 22 years, eventually having moved by 1897 to Philadelphia, where he worked as a plasterer and gardener. He can be traced to 1902 at age 79. He never learned to read or write.
Susan Tilghman, sometimes called by her baptismal names, Mary Elizabeth, was 41 at emancipation, described by the Convent as a “very intelligent, stout, active woman [who is] perfectly heathy.” She worked as a nurse, as a servant, and as a cook and sometimes stayed home to care for the family. She learned to read and write between 1870 and 1900 and might have died between 1900 and 1902. Susan and Ignatius Tilghman are described as married in an 1846 addendum to Notley Young’s 1845 gift. Here it is clarified that she commonly was called Susan but that her legal name was Mary Elizabeth. This document also discloses that forced migration to Visitation occurred together for Ignatius and Susan as a married couple and that Ignatius’s father, Charles, remained enslaved at Young’s plantation, laboring without freedom as a carpenter. The 1900 Census documents that Ignatius and Susan were married in 1845, so they were together for at least 55 years, and all their children were born at Visitation. Rosalie, their youngest child, was only 6 months old when she was freed.

Their eldest child was Mary Elizabeth, given her mother’s baptismal names, which was commonly done by enslaved people to retain familial ties with earlier generations—important if they were separated through forced migration. Mary Elizabeth Tilghman was 17 years old when freed. She worked as a servant and in 1870 is documented as literate. She worked for a time as a teacher and later moved with her parents to Philadelphia.

Ignatius and Susan Tilghman named their first son Charles, presumably after Ignatius’s father. Charles was 15 at emancipation. He is not listed on the 1870 Census with his family, but might be listed in the 1873 and 1884 city directories as living in Washington, D.C., working as a laborer. Theodore Tilghman, sometimes called Ignatius, was 13 in 1862. He was baptized at Holy Trinity, with the names of both his mother and father, and his godmother was Elizabeth Weldon, who was also enslaved at Visitation and was manumitted in 1859. Theodore Tilghman self-emancipated to fight on the Union side, though a record of a Tilghman, with no first name, is reported in the 23rd Regiment U.S. Colored Infantry as absent in September 1864. He reunited with his family after emancipation, for he is noted as literate and living with his parents in 1870. He moved to Philadelphia with them, and by 1900 he had a two-year old son, Charles Thomas, named for his grandfather and his uncle, who may have been deceased by then. Theodore worked as a cook, and in 1902 he was living with his father.

His little sister, Jane Tilghman, was freed at 10 years old. She learned to read and write by 1870. She was baptized at Holy Trinity, and her godmother was Ann Green, a friend of the family noted on the 1860 Census as living with the Tilghmans. John Tilghman died at age 7 before emancipation. He was baptized at Holy Trinity but is not listed on the Convent’s petition and is mentioned as deceased in Ignatius Tilghman’s counter-petition. Cecelia Tilghman was 5 when freed, baptized at Holy Trinity, and could read and write by 1870. Her little sister, Josephine, was just 2 years old at emancipation. She was baptized at Holy Trinity on June 29, 1859; her godmother was Mary Jane Mahoney, who was also enslaved at Visitation and who bought her freedom for $5 just a couple of months later, on August 1, 1859. In 1870, Josephine Tilghman attended school and lived in Washington, D.C., with her parents; in 1884, she was working as a servant. The Tilghmans were emancipated on April 16, 1862, except for John, who died before he experienced freedom, and Theodore, who had fled from his enslavement.

**The Mahoneys**

Like Ignatius, Susan, and presumably Sidney Tilghman, Benjamin Mahoney was taken to Visitation from Notley Young’s plantation in
1841 or 1845, though he was much younger at age 4. He shared a surname and was the same age as Jane Mahoney. They may have experienced forced migration together, presumably as brother and sister, as they were too young to be married. Alternately, they could have been married later at Visitation, which would explain why they share a last name. This also might suggest something about Stanislaus Mahoney’s identity, described as 11 years old in 1860. Perhaps he could have been their enslaved son, wrongly described as free like his father on this census count.

Equally unclear is their relationship to Elizabeth Mahoney whose 1895 obituary states that she had been formerly enslaved by the Convent and that she bought her freedom before the Civil War. She, therefore, may have experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate as property inherited by Martha Young, possibly being taken to Visitation with her four-year-old son, Benjamin, and possibly her four-year-old daughter, Jane. Or Elizabeth Mahoney could be Jane Mahoney’s mother-in-law.87

Benjamin was 25 when freed, and the Convent described him as having excellent carpentry skills and a superior moral character. In June 1864, he enlisted for a 3-year term as a landsman in the U.S. Navy, noted on the muster records on the ships, the USS Adolph Hugel and the USS St. Lawrence. Cross referencing this with the Convent’s description and the information on his enlistment papers, a rudimentary picture of his appearance can be formed. He was a light-skinned man with hazel eyes and stood 5 feet, 6 inches tall. From April 8 to 18, 1866, he was admitted to the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia, for coughing up blood, with remark notes “C.O.D.,” which stands for “condition of discharge.” He was discharged from the Navy altogether, but any record of his whereabouts after that have yet to be found.88 A fascinating aside is that he stayed part of this time on the USS Constellation, which was a receiving ship docked near the hospital. This ship had an extraordinary history, having in the late 1850s captured three ships off the coast of Africa, one containing 700 captured people who were set free. This is a significant parallel: a formerly enslaved man spent time and maybe even convalesced on a ship that had saved many people from lives of enslavement.89

**The Weldons**

Thomas Weldon also experienced forced migration in 1841 or 1845 from Notley Young’s plantation as a seven-year-old child. Because Thomas and Elizabeth share surnames and are close in age to one another, it is likely that they both came from Notley Young’s plantation as brother and sister. Thomas Weldon was freed at age 28. The emancipation documents describe him as having a good understanding of gardening. The 1880 Census has him as an unemployed laborer in St. Inigoes, Maryland, with his wife, Charlotte, and 4 children; neither he nor his wife could read or write.90

**Joseph Dixon**

In 1842, Joseph Dixon experienced forced migration to Visitation as a one-year-old child, acquired by gift from John Neale to his daughter, Margaret Neale, later Sr. Regina. Joseph Dixon was 21 in 1862 but had self-emancipated. The Convent describe him as “rather sulky and has a bad countenance. He ran away after the battle of Manassas and is now with the Federal Army.” The name here chosen to describe this battle may reveal the Southern disposition of Sr. Mary Angela Harrison, who notes the name for this battle used by Confederate forces. Union forces called this the First Battle of Bull Run. In 1863, the U.S. Civil War Draft Registration documents Joseph Dixon working as a sailor in Denton, Maryland. The 1880 Census has him as an unemployed laborer in Hillsborough, Caroline County, Maryland, with his wife,
Harriet, and their 5 children. Neither could read or write.91

LITERACY AND THE ENSLAVED COMMUNITY

In her 1975 published history of Visitation, Elenore Sullivan wrote, “an oral tradition in the monastery has it that the sisters taught the children of the slaves living on the property.”92 Census records provide information such as literacy levels, and the 1860 Census notes that Sidney, Ignatius, and Susan Tilghman were illiterate. Susan learned how to read and write between 1870 and 1900, but Ignatius remained illiterate his whole life. The 1870 Census, the first after the Emancipation Act in 1862, documents again that Ignatius and Susan were illiterate and records the literacy of their children born at Visitation. Mary, Theodore, Cecelia, and Jane Tilghman could read by this date—8 years after emancipation. Whether they learned at Visitation or within the intervening years is unclear, but the 1870 Census documents that they were enrolled in a school. Charles Tilghman is not listed in the 1870 Census, and data cannot be found for Benjamin Mahoney. Josephine and Rosalie Tilghman would have been too young to be taught before they were freed. The 1880 Census notes that Joseph Dixon and Thomas Weldon could not read or write. Therefore, of the 14 people who can be traced and were manumitted or emancipated 1859–62: data cannot be found for 2; another 2 were too young to be taught; 5 were illiterate; and documentary evidence for the other 5 is inconclusive. No documentary evidence has been found supporting that enslaved children were taught at the Convent.

This suggests that the enslaved community at Visitation in the late 1850s and early 1860s had not been taught to read or to write. An account in the Lathrops’ first published history, however, tells of Sr. Stanislaus Jones:

Little negroes received from her as much attention as though they had to be the brightest offspring of rich and favored educated people. Besides her regular Sunday instruction for them, she kept a night class in which the catechism was explained: and this the aged as well as the younger men and women attended.93

By this account, which had been recorded years after this Sister’s death, then, some of the nuns may have taught the catechism to some of the enslaved people. This, of course, is distinct from teaching reading and writing.

It is documented that the Convent was charitable to others’ efforts at educating black children. An 1871 Special Report of the Commissioner of Education states that in 1827 they helped Anne Marie Becraft, a free woman of color, who had founded a school for black girls across from the Convent on 35th Street:

The sisters of the Georgetown convent were the admirers of Miss Becraft, gave her instruction, and extended to her the most heartfelt aid and approbation in all her noble work, as they were in those days wont to do in behalf of the aspiring colored girls, who sought for education, withholding themselves from such work only when a depraved and degenerate public sentiment upon the subject of educating the colored people had compelled them to a more rigid line of demarcation between the races.

This report, written about 40 years later, implies that negative public opinion about educating black girls forced the Convent to stop assisting Becraft.94

The Convent had had almost a decade’s worth of experience with a free school, having opened the Benevolent School by 1819. A newspaper, The Georgetown Directory, published that by 1822 the Convent had established a school for poor students where 100 girls received instruction. It grew to about 200, as noted in an 1829 magazine article. A year later, The Georgetown Directory again mentioned the
“poor school,” where 300 to 400 girls were taught, along with 60 to 70 being clothed and 30 to 40 being fed. In a petition to have Lingan Street (formerly Gay Street, now 36th Street) closed to traffic, Sister Gertrude White stated that the Convent taught 400 poor children in two buildings, separated by that street.\(^5\) In 1844, the Convent bought the Adam Robb House (today called Lalor House) to house this school. As to whether any children of color were educated, we simply cannot know, as the Monastery Archives contain no record of the children who attended the Benevolent School.\(^6\)
CAMPUS ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Susan Nalezyty, Ph.D., School Archivist
RENOVATIONS IN THE LATE 1850S AND EARLY 1860S

The site of the former Benevolent School was modified to its present size in 1860 and probably was reused as the little girls’ boarding student class area (Figure 2). This period had been a moment of more architectural changes on campus. In 1857, the South Wing of the Convent was added, and the East Wing was enlarged by removing the dormers (Figure 4) to add a full-sized top floor.

Figure 7. Façade of the Chapel of the Sacred Heart, Georgetown Visitation Monastery and Preparatory School.

Consecrated in 1821. Upper level (three small windows and pediment) added in 1857.

In the same year, the Chapel was also raised one story taller and a row of three short windows added (Figure 7). More ornament was added to its façade, including dentils decorating the triangular pediment and the pilasters bearing Ionic capitals with egg-and-dart motifs. The original façade had been much less adorned in the plain Doric order, and simple moldings composed the pediment (Figure 4). The year of 1857 marks the time when the bell tower was enclosed. These improvements around campus in the late 1850s coincide with a time when Ignatius Tilghman, Joseph Dixon, Thomas Weldon, and Benjamin Mahoney were enslaved at Visitation. In fact, the Convent characterized Mahoney as a good carpenter. Ignatius Tilghman knew how to whitewash and plaster buildings, so these enslaved men may well have had some part in the architectural improvements. And ironically, their skills were probably what kept them from being manumitted like their sisters. It might be safe to conclude, then, that they walked on scaffolding erected on 35th Street working to expand these residential and sacred spaces. These men were modifying buildings that had likely been built and partially funded by the sale of enslaved people. Today, these campus buildings preserve layers of history that, until now, has gone unacknowledged.

THE “SLAVE CABIN”

The oldest building still standing on campus pre-dates the Convent’s establishment in Georgetown in 1799. This late eighteenth-century structure has an oral tradition attached to it as the place where the Convent housed the people they enslaved (Figure 8). Much of the eighteenth-century outbuilding’s historical evidence has been removed by alterations not adhering to its original design. Some of the window openings and one of the doors are likely not original and certainly not the windows or doors themselves. The interior floor is a later addition, as are the interior and exterior fireplaces, which were added between 1938 and 1953. The original 7-inch by 7-inch attic joists remain, though possibly re-arranged; but the 4 x 4 rafters are not original, and neither is the roof. This structure was still counted as a contributing historic building on the 1990 National Park Service’s Register of Historic Places but described as largely a twentieth-century structure that refers to an earlier time. The 1969 Historic American Buildings Survey states that the structure pre-dates the Convent as part of the Burleith estate and that it likely...
did not house enslaved people but may have been an overseer’s office.\textsuperscript{102}

Figure 8. Brick outbuilding that stands just north of tennis courts on the north side of Visitation’s campus. Late 18th century with 20\textsuperscript{th}-century modifications. Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School.

Since the building can no longer disclose its complete history today, other types of evidence can bring us closer to understanding its original use. It dates to the late eighteenth century, the time of the area’s early settlement. An Englishman who had immigrated there before the Revolution by the name of Henry Threlkeld owned 1,000 acres of land in this region, called Burleith, which ran from the Potomac River north and included Georgetown University, Visitation’s grounds, and north of Reservoir Road. His only son, John Threlkeld, inherited this land in 1781, the year of Henry’s death. John eventually became mayor of Georgetown, as did later John Cox, who married Threlkeld’s daughter, Jane. It was from this family that the Convent incrementally acquired much of its land holdings.\textsuperscript{103} The foundation of the Threlkeld estate’s main house is said to survive under Visitation’s tennis courts, which were installed in 1939 (Figure 9).\textsuperscript{104} Erected during the mid-eighteenth century by Matthew Hopkins, this house may have burned during the Revolution and was later re-built on the same site. The 1826 obituary of John’s wife, Elizabeth Threlkeld, who graduated from Visitation in 1816, and John Threlkeld’s 1830 obituary both confirm that they were still living in the manor house at the time of their deaths.\textsuperscript{105} It might have been torn down before the Convent acquired the property at an unknown date.\textsuperscript{106}

Figure 9. Bird’s-eye view of Georgetown Visitation’s campus. Upper left: The Threlkeld estate’s foundation is under the tennis courts. The Threlkeld’s outbuilding, possibly a dairy, still stands just north of the courts.

Large dwelling houses, as they were called at the time, usually had adjacent outbuildings, their uses determined by the estate’s activities, some of which can be recovered in an unpublished 1782 inventory of Henry Threlkeld’s possessions when they were conveyed to his son, John, after Henry’s death in 1781. It lists the names and ages of 38 enslaved people and a room-by-room description of the main house as well as surrounding outbuildings: the kitchen, a storehouse, and a few dwelling houses, which contained no furniture other than at least 18 beds, presumably for the enslaved community.\textsuperscript{107} A tax assessment from 1783 lists, in addition to the main dwelling house, a barn, which is probably the storehouse noted on the inventory, and slave quarters, which stood on 563 acres of land, 250 of which had been cleared but that were characterized as thin and stony.\textsuperscript{108}

One building not mentioned on the tax assessment but described in detail on the
inventory is a “milk house,” which stood near the main house. A common outbuilding in the Chesapeake region was a milk house, more commonly called a dairy, which was a one-room building, often with floors below grade for maintaining a constant, cool temperature. A dairy still stands on Visitation’s Monastery grounds (Figure 10). This little building is typical of its type, with a sunken floor and a trough into which water was channeled through a series of ceramic conduits for moving water into the interior for cooling. It stands roughly where a stream originally flowed, so surface water is likely abundant in this area of campus.

Figure 10. Dairy outbuilding still standing on Georgetown Visitation Monastery grounds.

In dairies, fresh milk would sit in shallow pans so cream could rise to the top and be collected, as is demonstrated at Colonial Williamsburg (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Peyton Randolph dairy. Fresh milk is poured into shallow pans to allow cream to rise to the top. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Often dairies would be in spring houses, as in an example in Kentucky, which use water from an underground spring for cooling (Figure 12). Spring houses were contingent on the underwater source’s location. An archaeological evaluation of Visitation’s campus confirms that it is watered by several springs, which would have fed the stream from which the fish pond was made in the 19th century.¹⁰⁹


The original use, then, of the late eighteenth-century outbuilding on campus could conceivably have been as a dairy, cooled by a spring (Figure 8). The presence of a dairy on a property in this region was a visible symbol of a house’s wealth, and the Threlkelds were one
of the most affluent in the area. Sweet cream and fresh milk were luxuries, indicators of prestige, and these structures were often built in expensive brick masonry, like this outbuilding. Henry Threlkeld raised cattle here, once selling a specific kind of English breed to George Washington. John Threlkeld raised merino sheep. The 1782 inventory lists 26 heads of cattle and 62 sheep; numerous dairy livestock would have produced much milk. The same inventory lists inside the dairy: a kettle, for boiling water to sterilize utensils, and 34 pewter basins—certainly also an indicator that there was a good deal of milk to be processed and stored. Moreover, the tax assessment describes the land as thin and stony, not conducive for large-scale planting of crops, and elsewhere on the property was a meadow, where presumably the livestock could graze.

Structures on a circa 1799 map of the area coincide precisely with what is described in this documentary evidence (Figure 13). At lower right, a stream bisects campus with the original Academy on its west bank and Convent on its east bank. At upper left, the narrow, horizontally oriented rectangle represents the Threlkeld main dwelling house. As the 1782 inventory describes, the dairy stood close to the main house, therefore it must be the small rectangle to its west. The proximity to the surviving foundation under the tennis courts suggests, then, that the outbuilding standing on campus today was the dairy as do its shape and materials and the fact that it originally lacked a fireplace, as would have been found typically in a kitchen. This means the Threlkeld kitchen stood slightly south of the big house, near the quarters for housing enslaved people and the barn. The larger rectangle southwest of the main house then likely represents the barn. The other two squares to its east were the slave quarters and kitchen.

Certainly, the life and times of those enslaved by the Threlkelds are of interest to this project, and related documents illustrate just how prevalent slaveholding was in this time and place. The 1800 Census records John Threlkeld holding 28 enslaved people. Interviews with formerly enslaved people confirm buildings like these stored dairy products. Those who worked in the dairy were usually women and considered highly skilled, as this place needed to be kept exceptionally clean so as not to contaminate the milk. While the 28 enslaved individuals lived without freedom and labored...
everywhere on the property, a logical way to envision their sleeping quarters—which are described on the tax assessment and inventory from the early 1780s and pictured on the circa 1799 map—would be in a residential building closer to the barn and kitchen. Enslaved people often slept in barn and kitchen lofts, so living quarters likely would have been contiguous to each other, as is documented on the Convent’s grounds in 1819 (Figure 3). People enslaved by the Convent lived next to the chicken coop and stables, which would have been roughly where today a parking lot stands between the Cub Shop and the Senior Lodge.

After the Convent acquired the Threlkeld outbuilding, it could have been used for all manner of things, not just a dairy. Whether they may have reused it as living quarters hinges on precisely when they acquired this specific part of the property, a crucial piece of documentary evidence that has yet to be located. The Convent incrementally increased its land holdings between 1808 and 1845. As an 1830 map illustrates, the platted lots had been acquired as far west as lot #163 on Third Street (now P Street), as far north as lot #200 on Fayette Street (now 35th Street), and everything in between on that corner (Figure 14). Important here is that these records still have the campus not this far north in the interior part of the grounds—that is, where the Threlkeld manor house foundation and outbuildings resided. Lots on Fayette Street were only one lot wide; they did not extend beyond their lot boundaries.

The Threlkeld Addition to Georgetown, which substantially augmented the city’s land, did not include the Threlkeld main dwelling house; no streets were laid out in this area, as is shown in the inset of the 1830 map. The year this map was published was the year of John Threlkeld’s death, and The Georgetown Directory of 1830 provides no numbered address, only a description of its being near the Catholic College. John Threlkeld’s land went to his daughter, Jane, and her husband, John Cox, who may have sold the land with the outbuilding before his death in 1849. What can be confidently surmised is that the Convent did not acquire this land until after 1844 or 1845, so the outbuilding would have been theirs to reuse between those years and 1862, the year of emancipation. A close look at the documentary evidence throws into question the long-held assumption that it served the singular purpose of housing the Convent’s enslaved community. Just when this oral tradition began calling this outbuilding a “slave cabin” is unclear. The earliest indication is a 1938 photographic album with a hand-written label (Figure 15).
A report of the building committee in the 1940 *Alumnae Notes* mentions the “discovery” of a “little slave house” beyond the tennis courts, which had been obscured by chicken coops that had since been removed. It also reports that the building was badly in need of repairs and that the Sisters hoped to see it renovated into a field or picnic house. A 1949 yearbook pairs a photograph of a long-time school tradition with the caption “Marshmallow roast at the Slave Cabin” (Figure 16).

That it was appropriate to call it a “slave cabin” speaks to the times when segregation was still legal, on the eve of the African American civil rights movement. By 1953, the alumnæ had raised the funds to renovate the building, as evidenced in an issue of *National Geographic* that pictures it with a new roof and external fireplace that had been added to accommodate cookouts for the students. The image caption calls it an “old cabin,” speculating that servants or slaves may have occupied the building (Figure 17). Elsewhere in the magazine article, however, the phrase “slave cabin” is still used.

Following an anthropological approach, historians call this shift in perception of a historical object or building its “afterlife.” This concept acknowledges that a thing has a social life that continues after its creation and that its value changes as time passes. History adheres to that object and determines how it is perceived today. Think of this afterlife as a yellow sticky note that represents the label attaching the structure to slavery. Slavery equals oppression, so today it is perceived as a monument to institutional racism. This case of bad PR—its afterlife—has led to its unpopularity since the 1950s, when it was a place to have a picnic. Today its association with slavery is unseemly. What may have been considered a label to designate its many years in existence might really have taken hold as a
fundraising strategy that resulted in a renovated building for recreational use.

This name “slave cabin” took hold, but it is not found in any documentary evidence contemporary to Visitation’s slaveholding past. It is no more a building associated with slavery than any other on campus before 1862. The Benevolent School, the dormitory, and the west Academy building (all called Gallerie today), the Chapel, Lalor House, and the eastern and western wings and annex of the Convent are all buildings where the enslaved would have labored.

Perhaps the label “slave cabin,” which now sounds inappropriate, was an unpolished way to acknowledge this school’s slaveholding history. We now know most of this history was not so far north on the hill but, rather, in the buildings where teaching and praying take place today. Part of the reason for preserving these buildings on the National Historic Register can prompt conversation of this institution’s past, to envision these spots on campus as also documenting enslaved lives. They can become places of conscience. An emerging trend in historic preservation is the engagement with and restoration of “difficult places.” We can now better reflect on the layers of history at Visitation and address all the stories that accrue around such places.
APPENDIX 1:
THE ENSLAVED COMMUNITY OF GEORGETOWN VISITATION
Susan Nalezyty, Ph.D., School Archivist
ENSLAVED PEOPLE BOUGHT, SOLD, AND HIRED OUT BY THE CONVENT

1. **Unnamed person**: Noted in 1800 Census.  
2. **Unnamed man** (before 1817–?): Hired out to a brickmaker, owned by Archbishop Leonard Neale, mentioned in *A Story of Courage*.  
3. **George**: In 1801 bought by Archbishop Leonard Neale from a Georgetown College boarder.  
4. **Stace**: In 1811 bought by Archbishop Leonard Neale.  
5. **George**: In 1811 bought by Archbishop Leonard Neale; 1818 letters from Mother Teresa A. Lalor to Bishop Ambrose Marechal, Third Archbishop of Baltimore.  
6. **George’s wife**: 1818 letters from Mother Teresa A. Lalor to Bishop Ambrose Marechal, Third Archbishop of Baltimore.  
7. **George’s child**: 1818 letters from Mother Teresa A. Lalor to Bishop Ambrose Marechal, Third Archbishop of Baltimore.  
8. **Michael**: In 1819 sold by the Convent as inherited property of Catherine Lancaster for $450.  
9. **Milly**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (with Charles and Naas) for $720.  

**Unnamed person**

1. **Unnamed person**: Noted in 1800 Census.  
2. **Unnamed man** (before 1817–?): Hired out to a brickmaker, owned by Archbishop Leonard Neale, mentioned in *A Story of Courage*.  
3. **George**: In 1801 bought by Archbishop Leonard Neale from a Georgetown College boarder.  
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5. **George**: In 1811 bought by Archbishop Leonard Neale; 1818 letters from Mother Teresa A. Lalor to Bishop Ambrose Marechal, Third Archbishop of Baltimore.  
6. **George’s wife**: 1818 letters from Mother Teresa A. Lalor to Bishop Ambrose Marechal, Third Archbishop of Baltimore.  
7. **George’s child**: 1818 letters from Mother Teresa A. Lalor to Bishop Ambrose Marechal, Third Archbishop of Baltimore.  
8. **George’s child**: 1818 letters from Mother Teresa A. Lalor to Bishop Ambrose Marechal, Third Archbishop of Baltimore.  
9. **Mockey**: In 1819 sold by the Convent (with her two children) as inherited property of Catherine Lancaster for $520.  
10. **Mockey’s child**: In 1819 sold by the Convent (with mother and sibling) as inherited property of Catherine Lancaster for $520.  
11. **Mockey’s child**: In 1819 sold by the Convent (with mother and sibling) as inherited property of Catherine Lancaster for $520.  
12. **Spincers**: In 1819 sold by the Convent as inherited property of Catherine Lancaster for $450.  
13. **Michael**: In 1819 sold by the Convent as inherited property of Catherine Lancaster for $450.  
14. **Charles**: In 1819 sold by the Convent and described as a carpenter for $475.  
15. **Unnamed boy**: Under 14, documented in the 1820 Census.  
16. **Unnamed boy**: Under 14, documented in the 1820 Census.  
17. **Unnamed young man**: Age 14 to 26, documented in the 1820 Census.  
18. **Unnamed man**: Age 26 to 45, documented in the 1820 Census.  
19. **Unnamed mature man**: Age 45 or over, documented in the 1820 Census.  
20. **Unnamed mature man**: Age 45 or over, documented in the 1820 Census.  
22. **Unnamed girl**: Under 14, documented in the 1820 Census.  
23. **Unnamed woman**: Age 26 to 45, documented in the 1820 Census.  
24. **Unnamed mature woman**: Age 45 or over, documented in the 1820 Census.  
25. **Unnamed mature woman**: Age 45 or over, documented in the 1820 Census.  
26. **Unnamed mature woman**: Age 45 or over, documented in the 1820 Census.  
27. **Unnamed mature woman**: Age 45 or over, documented in the 1820 Census.  
28. **An “old woman”**: In February 1820 sold by the Convent.  
29. **Milly**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (with Charles and Naas) for $720.  
30. **Milly’s child**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (with sibling, mother, Charles, and Naas) for $720.  
31. **Milly’s child**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (with sibling, mother, Charles, and Naas) for $720.  
32. **Naas**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (with Charles, Milly, and her children) for $720.
33. **Charles**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (with Naas, Milly, and her children) for $720.153
34. **Monaca**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (with Mary and Eliza) for $520.154
35. **Mary**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (with Monaca and Eliza) for $520.155
36. **Eliza**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (with Mary and Monaca) for $520.156
37. **Leon**: In 1820 sold by the Convent (but returned, so no money was exchanged). In 1832 sold by the Convent to Helen Louisa Stewart for $100.157
38. **Ned**: In 1820 sold by the Convent as inherited property of Elizabeth Lancaster for $400.158
39. **Minty**: In 1821 sold by the Convent as donated property of Gerard Boarman.159
40. **Minty’s child**: In 1821 sold by the Convent as donated property of Gerard Boarman.160
41. **Unnamed man**: In 1821 described as a brickmaker and sold by the Convent as donated property of Gerard Boarman.161
42. **Rose**: In 1823 sold by the Convent as inherited property of Elizabeth Lancaster for $200.162
43. **Betty**: In 1823 sold by the Convent (with her 3 children: Cletidus, George, and unnamed child) as inherited property of Elizabeth Lancaster for $550.163
44. **Cletidus**: In 1823 sold by the Convent (with his mother, Betty, his brother, George, and unnamed sibling) as inherited property of Elizabeth Lancaster for $550.164
45. **George**: In 1823 sold by the Convent (with his mother, Betty, his brother, Cletidus, and unnamed sibling) as inherited property of Elizabeth Lancaster for $550.165
46. **Unnamed child**: In 1823 sold by the Convent (with his mother, Betty, his brothers, George and Cletidus) as inherited property of Elizabeth Lancaster for $550.166
47. **Harriet**: After 1822 was sold by the Convent for $300 as inherited property of Elizabeth Lancaster.167
48. **Prudence**: In 1822 sold by the Convent (with her child) for $150.168
49. **Prudence’s child**: In 1822 sold by the Convent (with his/her mother) for $150.169
50. **Ruth (?–1823)**: In 1823 documented in Holy Trinity’s Burial Records.170
51. **Eliza**: In 1823 hired out by the Convent to Bernard Spalding for $1.25 per month for unstated length of time.171
52. **Edward Shorter**: 1825–1828 bought his freedom for $560.172
53. **Nelly**: In 1828 purchased by the Convent.173
54. **Susan**: In 1828 was sold by the Convent as payment for merchandise bought from the merchant T[I?] J. Nichols.174
55. **Susan’s child**: In 1828 sold by the Convent as payment for merchandise bought from the merchant T[I?] J. Nichols.175
56. **Susan’s child**: In 1828 sold by the Convent as payment for merchandise bought from the merchant T[I?] J. Nichols.176
57. **Susan’s child**: In 1828 sold by the Convent as payment for merchandise bought from the merchant T[I?] J. Nichols.177
58. **Unnamed man**: Age 36 to 55, documented in the 1830 Census.178
59. **Unnamed man**: Age 36 to 55, documented in the 1830 Census.179
60. **Unnamed mature man**: Age 55 or over, documented in the 1830 Census.180
61. **Unnamed man**: Age 55 or over, documented in the 1830 Census.181
62. **Unnamed young woman**: Age 10 to 24, documented in the 1830 Census.182
63. **Unnamed young woman**: Age 10 to 24, documented in the 1830 Census.183
64. **Unnamed young woman**: Age 10 to 24, documented in the 1830 Census.184
65. **Unnamed mature man**: Age 55 or over, documented in the 1830 Census.185
66. **Unnamed man**: Age 55 or over, documented in the 1830 Census.186
67. **Unnamed young woman**: Age 10 to 24, documented in the 1830 Census.187
68. **Unnamed young woman**: Age 10 to 24, documented in the 1830 Census.188
69. **Unnamed woman**: Age 24 to 36, documented in the 1830 Census.  
70. **Unnamed woman**: Age 24 to 36, documented in the 1830 Census.  
71. **Unnamed woman**: Age 24 to 36, documented in the 1830 Census.  
72. **Unnamed woman**: Age 36 to 55, documented in the 1830 Census.  
73. **Joe**: In 1831 mentioned as being sold to Mr. Brent but later returned to the Convent with his wife and children.  
74. **Joe’s wife**: In 1831 mentioned as being sold to Mr. Brent but later returned to the Convent with her husband, Joe, and children.  
75. **Joe’s child**: In 1831 mentioned as being sold to Mr. Brent but later returned to the Convent with parents.  
76. **Joe’s child**: In 1831 mentioned as being sold to Mr. Brent but later returned to the Convent with parents.  
77. **Sophia**: In 1834 purchased by the Convent from Catharine Kuhns for $300.  
78. **Fanny**: In 1847 sold by the Georgetown Convent (with her two children and Robert) as inherited property of Martha Young to the Visitation Academy in Baltimore for $5.  
79. **Fanny’s child**: In 1847 sold by the Georgetown Convent (with sibling, mother, and Robert) as inherited property of Martha Young to the Visitation Academy in Baltimore for $5.  
80. **Fanny’s child**: In 1847 sold by the Georgetown Convent (with sibling, mother, and Robert) as inherited property of Martha Young to the Visitation Academy in Baltimore for $5.  
81. **Robert**: In 1847 described as a blacksmith and sold by the Georgetown Convent (with Fanny and her two children) as inherited property of Martha Young to the Visitation Academy in Baltimore for $5.  
82. **Unnamed girl**: Under the age of 10, documented in the 1840 Census.  
83. **Unnamed young woman**: Between the ages of 10 and 23, documented in the 1840 Census; possibly also the 1850 Census described as a mulatto woman (1831–?).  
84. **Unnamed man**: Between the ages of 36 and 54, documented in the 1840 Census, possibly also the 1850 Census described as a black man (1805–?).  
85. **Stephen**: In 1844 purchased by the Convent from John Hughes for $600.  
86. **Eliza**: In 1847 sold by the Convent to Harriet Lancaster, who planned to immediately manumit her after the sale.  
87. **Unnamed boy**: Documented in the 1850 Census (1843–?).  
88. **Unnamed woman**: Documented in the 1850 Census (1810–?).  
89. **Unnamed young man**: Documented in the 1850 Census (1831–?).  
90. **Sharlot Mahorney** (1832–?): Bought her freedom on April 28, 1858, for $10 from the Convent at age 31.  
91. **Elizabeth Weldon** (1835–?): Bought her freedom on April 14, 1859 for $1 from the Convent at age 24; possibly Thomas Weldon’s sister; may have experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate as property inherited by Martha Young, who joined the Convent as Sr. Mary Ellen; was Theodore Tilghman’s godmother.  
92. **Jane Mahoney** (1837–?): Bought her freedom on August 1, 1859, from the Convent at age 22 for $5; may have experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate as property inherited by Martha Young; possibly Benjamin Mahoney’s sister or wife and possibly Stanislaus Mahoney’s mother; was Josephine Tilghman’s godmother.  
93. **Sidney Tilghman** (1833–?): Bought her freedom on August 1, 1859, from the Convent at age 26 for $5; likely Ignatius Tilghman’s sister; likely experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate.
94. **Ignatius Tilghman** (1823–?): Experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate with his wife, Susan; entered into agreement with Convent in 1856 to buy his and his family’s freedom for $500; emancipated at age 40 on April 16, 1862; counter-sued Convent to recoup his $298.75 paid toward manumission, an amount removed from the government’s payment to the Convent in 1864; lived in Washington, D.C., for 22 years after emancipation; moved to Philadelphia by 1897; worked as a porter, gardener, and a whitewasher; never learned to read or write.214

95. **[Mary Elizabeth] Susan Tilghman** (1822–?): Experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate with her husband, Ignatius, to whom she was married for at least 55 years; emancipated at age 41 on April 16, 1862; worked as a cook, servant and nurse; moved to Philadelphia by 1897; learned to read and write between 1870 and 1900.215

96. **Mary Elizabeth Tilghman** (1845–?): Susan and Ignatius Tilghman’s eldest daughter born at Visitation; emancipated at age 17 on April 16, 1862; worked as a servant and teacher; moved to Philadelphia by 1897; learned to read and write by 1870.216

97. **Charles Tilghman** (1847–?): Susan and Ignatius Tilghman’s eldest son born at Visitation; emancipated at age 15 on April 16, 1862; worked as a porter in Washington, D.C.217

98. **[Mary Ignatius] Theodore Tilghman** (1849–?): Susan and Ignatius Tilghman’s child born at Visitation; baptized at Holy Trinity with Elizabeth Weldon as his godmother; self-emancipated before 1862; re-united with his family and learned to read and write by 1870; worked as a cook; moved to Philadelphia by 1897; his son was Charles Thomas Tilghman (1898–?).218

99. **[Mary] Jane [Frances] Tilghman** (August 26, 1853–?): Susan and Ignatius Tilghman’s child born at Visitation; baptized at Holy Trinity with Ann Green as her godmother; emancipated at age 10 on April 16, 1862; learned to read and write by 1870.219

100. **John [Mary Joseph] Tilghman** (baptized July 8, 1855–before April 1862): Susan and Ignatius Tilghman’s child born at Visitation; baptized at Holy Trinity; died before emancipation on April 16, 1862.220

101. **[Maria] Cecelia Tilghman** (March 14, 1857–?): Susan and Ignatius Tilghman’s child born at Visitation; baptized at Holy Trinity; emancipated at age 5 on April 16, 1862; worked as a servant; could read and write by 1870.221

102. **[Mary] Josephine [Elizabeth] Tilghman** (June 29, 1859–?): Susan and Ignatius Tilghman’s child; born at Visitation; baptized at Holy Trinity with Jane Mahoney as her godmother; emancipated at age 2 on April 16, 1862; worked as a servant.222

103. **Rosalie Tilghman** (October 1861–?): Susan and Ignatius Tilghman’s youngest child born at Visitation; emancipated at age 6 months on April 16, 1862.223

104. **Benjamin Mahoney** (1837–?): Experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate; possibly Jane Mahoney’s brother or husband and possibly Stanislaus Mahoney’s father; emancipated at age 25 on April 16, 1862; described by the Convent as a carpenter; enlisted in the U.S. Navy; admitted to Navy Hospital in Portsmouth, VA, for coughing blood and discharged from the Navy on April 17, 1866; may have died shortly after discharge.224

105. **Thomas Weldon** (1834–?): Experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate; emancipated at age 28 on April 16, 1862; described by the Convent as a gardener; described in 1880 Census as illiterate, living with his wife and 4 children in St. Inigoes, MD.225

106. **Joseph Dixon** (1841–?): Experienced forced migration from John Neal’s estate, property inherited by Margaret Neal, who joined the Convent as Sr. Regina; self-emancipated by age 21 to fight for the Union during the Civil War; described in 1880 Census as illiterate, living with his wife and 5 children in Hillsboro, MD.226
107. Elizabeth Mahoney (1816–1895): July 1, 1895, obituary states that she had formerly been enslaved by the Convent and that she bought her freedom before the Civil War; may have experienced forced migration from Notley Young’s estate as property inherited by Martha Young; could be a relation (mother?) to Benjamin Mahoney and Jane Mahoney (mother or mother-in-law?).227
ENSLAVED PEOPLE HIRED (NOT OWNED) BY THE CONVENT

1. **Zealeam**: July 15, 1800, hired by the Convent from Georgetown College for 3 days’ labor.\(^{228}\)
2. **Harry**: In 1828, the Convent hired from Mr. Warring for a year at $5 a month.\(^{229}\)
3. **Ann Green** (1830–?): 1850 Census lists her as living at the Convent, but not counted as a slave; was likely being hired out by Ann Fenwick; manumitted by Fenwick in 1853; was Jane Tilghman’s godmother; 1860 Census documents her as living with the Tilghman family in a city ward different from the Convent.\(^{230}\)
APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH SUMMARY

Susan Nalezyty, Ph.D., School Archivist
Research Summary
Documentary evidence found in public repositories and the Monastery Archives provides an essential historical context for understanding that Georgetown Visitation subsidized its mission by the forced labor and the sale of enslaved people, from a year after its founding in 1800 to when slavery was made illegal by the federal government in the District of Columbia in 1862. This new research enriches Visitation’s already-known history and corrects long-held traditions that were not based on primary sources. Careful study of archival materials enables understanding of specific interactions between the spiritual directors, the mother superiors, and the persons whom they enslaved. To date, 107 enslaved people have been identified, either by name or brief description, as having been owned by the Convent between 1800 and 1862. The stories that the documentary evidence tell are as varied as the people described. For example, 4 enslaved people gifted to the Convent by Gerard Boarman never set foot on the Convent’s property, but their sale in Southern Maryland contributed to a building fund for construction projects on campus. Generalizations about the enslaved community and the nuns who enslaved them need no longer prevail, other than that the Convent was deeply typical of its time and place. Closely examining historical evidence can show the human side of Visitation’s past without justifying or embellishing it.

Historiography
The authors of Visitation’s first written history, published in 1895, mention that the school and Convent’s early founders used enslaved labor on campus, that they hired out a person they had enslaved, and that one nun taught the catechism to the enslaved community. The second history of 1975 mentions that an oral tradition in the Monastery has it that the Sisters taught enslaved children living on the property, and that enslaved people were brought to the Convent as part of the dowries of women who joined the Order. And one passage briefly describes documentary evidence of a legal dispute between the Convent and a man whom they had enslaved and had been freed by the federal government on April 16, 1862. Since this publication, however, Visitation’s enslaved community did not go unstudied. Many documents related to its slaveholding history in the Monastery Archives were assembled together in 1996 during a systematic re-organization of its contents by Sr. Mada-anne Gell, VHM, and Sr. Dolores Liptak, RSM. Sr. Mary Paula McCarthy, VHM, also analyzed Monastery documents and others related to this history found in public repositories. The present study draws a good deal from this reorganization and is indebted to the Sisters’ efforts to gather these documents. Sr. Mada-anne’s sharing these papers provided crucial evidence of Visitation’s slaveholding past.

Slaveholding 1800 to 1850
The 1800 Census lists one enslaved person living with this institution’s founders, “the pious ladies.” Documents from Georgetown University tell of Father Leonard Neale’s purchasing enslaved people for himself and buying and selling enslaved people at the College and plantations in Southern Maryland. Early letters also tell of Mother Teresa Lalor purchasing the wife and children of a man named George who was enslaved by the Convent. His wife was owned by a neighbor, who planned to sell her and her children, so Mother Lalor hired-out this woman to someone nearby to recoup her money and keep George’s family nearby.

Visitation’s slaveholding history is well-documented during Father Clorivière’s tenure in the early 1820s because the Convent enlisted the services of a slave dealer in Southern Maryland. This geographic distance required much correspondence that survives today. These primary sources assembled together offer a picture in which enslaved people inherited by nuns from their fathers and
solicitations for donations of enslaved people were made so they could be sold to subsidize an ambitious building campaign. Between 1819 and 1822, for example, 25 enslaved people were sold to contribute to the building fund for the Benevolent School and the Chapel, and for future projects to build the “New Academy” and the Odeon. Four buildings were built in eight years during this decade. Fr. Cloriviére donated much of his family’s fortune, but these construction plans stretched resources so thin that the school and Convent were nearly bankrupted. The 1830s, however, brought an increase in student enrollment, the religious community’s size, and the enslaved community’s numbers. How many enslaved people were living on campus, however, varied greatly depending on the year. In 1840 it was as small as 3 enslaved people. By 1841 (or 1845) a large inheritance would bring many more to campus, 17 noted in the 1850 Census. Four of these people would eventually be given to the Visitation Academy in Baltimore to subsidize its mission.

**Slaveholding in the 1850s and early 1860s**

Primary sources tell of manumissions, self-emancipations, and the freeing of all of Visitation’s enslaved community. Documents reveal a quick series of manumissions of four women, who each bought their freedom from the Convent for small sums of money. One woman paid only $1 for her liberty. The 1860 Census wrongly recorded as free the Tilghman family, who were presently enslaved by Visitation. They were living in another ward within the city with other people formerly enslaved by the Convent. Census workers in 1860 also wrongly noted as free three men presently enslaved on campus. This was on the eve of emancipation in the District of Columbia on April 16, 1862, a day on which a law liberated over 3,000 enslaved people in the federal district by compensating slaveholders for releasing people whom they were holding. Following this act, the Convent reported to the government, describing each person they had enslaved in detail, wherein self-emancipations of a teenage boy and young man are cited, as well as the places from which these individuals had come before forced migration to Visitation. Here also documented is litigation that ensued between the Convent and Ignatius Tilghman. He filed a counter petition, citing an 1856 agreement between him and the Convent to pay $500 to buy his and his family’s freedom. It is unclear whether Tilghman ever recouped his money, but the Convent was not allotted the exact amount that he had paid them when the government eventually paid the Convent for their slaves in 1864.

**Recovering the Identities**

Georgetown between 1835 and 1853 was a diverse place, and this neighborhood can be partially reconstructed by carefully culling data from sacramental records at Holy Trinity, a Catholic parish a block away from Visitation. Many free black couples and single mothers brought their children for baptism. Families’ statuses could often be mixed, that is, enslaved fathers and free mothers or vice versa, enslaved mothers and free fathers. Also, somewhat common were single enslaved mothers raising their children alone. These records tell a vivid story, documenting that the lives of free African-Americans and enslaved people were varied and interwoven.

Documents from the years approaching the Civil War’s beginning and the 1862 emancipation records provide excellent evidence to partially recover the identities of some who were enslaved by the Convent. Susan and Ignatius Tilghman and their seven children went on to live in the District of Columbia for over 20 years, until some of them moved to Philadelphia around the turn of the century. Assembled evidence also tells stories of lasting bonds among families and people unrelated to each other, but who had endured enslavement together. Friends, for example, served as godmothers to each other’s children. Others took different paths. Benjamin Mahoney joined the U.S. Navy and
served during the Civil War as a landsman, eventually becoming quite ill, after which he was discharged from service and may have died shortly after. Thomas Weldon and Joseph Dixon both married and raised their families in Southern Maryland, though seemed to struggle to find work.

Information about literacy levels from census records can provide evidence-based conclusions about the oral tradition which has it that enslaved children at Visitation were taught. Fourteen people can be traced and were manumitted or emancipated from 1859 to 1862. For two of these people, literacy data cannot be found; another 2 were too young to have been taught; 5 were illiterate; and documentary evidence for the other 5 is inconclusive. No documentary evidence has been found supporting that enslaved children were taught at the Convent.

**Architectural History**
Documents from the late 1850s and early 1860s tell of many building renovations. The site of the former Benevolent School was modified to its present size in 1860. In 1857 the South Wing of the Convent was added, and the East Wing enlarged. This same year the Chapel was raised one story taller, its façade altered to be more highly ornamented, and the bell tower enclosed. These improvements coincide with a time when Ignatius Tilghman, Joseph Dixon, Thomas Weldon, and Benjamin Mahoney were enslaved. In fact, the Convent characterized Benjamin Mahoney as a good carpenter. Ignatius Tilghman knew how to whitewash and plaster buildings, so this suggests that these enslaved men might have had some part in these architectural improvements. Today, these campus buildings preserve layers of history that, until now, has gone unacknowledged.

The oldest building on campus, standing much farther north on the property, has an oral tradition attached to it as the place where the Convent housed people enslaved on campus. Much of the building’s historical evidence has been removed by alterations not adhering to its original design. Since the building can no longer disclose its complete history today, assembled documentary evidence can inform as to its original use. It dates to the late eighteenth century associated with the area’s early settlement by Henry Threlkeld. Early maps and unpublished archival material strongly suggest that it was a dairy, a dedicated building on the Threlkeld plantation for processing milk produced by numerous sheep and cattle kept on the considerable acreage owned by this family. No evidence has been found to support the oral tradition that it was ever used as a living space for people enslaved by the Convent. Also considered here is just when the label of “slave cabin” took hold, which is documented as early as the late 1930s, and especially in the early 1940s when alumnae raised funds for its renovation for use as a recreational field house, likely the time when it became the site for the Marshmallow Roast.

Individuals enslaved by the Convent lived much further south on campus next to the chicken coop and stables, as documented in an 1819 map drawn by Father Cloriviére. Today those living quarters would roughly be in the parking lot between the Cub Shop and the Senior Lodge. This research on campus architecture confirms that most of Visitation’s slaveholding history was not so far north on the hill, but, rather, in the buildings where teaching and praying take place today.
APPENDIX 3: HISTORICAL TIMELINE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mid-1700s</td>
<td>Construction of a manor house and associated buildings, eventually bought by Henry Threlkeld. Foundation of this house is thought to be under Visitation’s tennis courts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late 1700s</td>
<td>Brick outbuilding, extant today on campus, likely built next to manor house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>Henry Threlkeld dies, and John Threlkeld inherits his father’s estate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td>Inventory of Henry Threlkeld’s house, including a description of the outbuilding extant today on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1783</td>
<td>Tax assessment of John Threlkeld’s possessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1799</td>
<td>Father Leonard Neale, S.J., becomes Georgetown College President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1799</td>
<td>Alice Lalor, Maria Sharpe, and Maria McDermott found Georgetown Visitation with Fr. Leonard Neale as spiritual director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Census counts 1 enslaved person at the school and the Convent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Fr. Leonard Neale is elevated as Bishop of Gortyna and Coadjutor to the Bishop of Baltimore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Bishop Leonard Neale retires as Georgetown College President and moves to the Convent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>Bishop Leonard Neale is elevated to Archbishop of Baltimore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>Archbishop Leonard Neale dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>Father Pierre-Joseph Picot de Cloriviére becomes the Convent’s spiritual director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>New building constructed to house the Benevolent School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>Census counts 13 slaves at the Convent. Chapel construction begins, designed by Fr. Cloriviére.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>Chapel of the Sacred Heart consecrated on All Saints Day (November 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>“New Academy” building constructed, designed by Fr. Cloriviére.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>The Odeon constructed, designed by Fr. Cloriviére.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>Anne Marie Becraft founds a school for black girls across the street on 35th Street, assisted by Georgetown Visitation nuns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>John Threlkeld dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>Census counts 10 enslaved people at the school and the Convent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Census counts 3 enslaved people at the school and the Convent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Census counts 17 enslaved people at the school and the Convent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>Ignatius Tilghman, enslaved at Visitation, enters an agreement with the Convent to pay $500 for his and his family’s freedom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Renovations to the Chapel, bell tower, and East Wing of Convent. South Wing of Convent also constructed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1860 Census wrongly declares no enslaved people at the Convent, though at least 11 people were still enslaved, some living on campus and some living in another part of the city.

1861 Start of the Civil War.

1862 Slavery is abolished in the District of Columbia, freeing 12 people enslaved at Visitation. Ignatius Tilghman counter-petitions the government to recoup the money he had paid to the Convent for his and his family’s freedom.

1864 Federal government pays Convent for 12 enslaved people, minus the exact amount Ignatius Tilghman had paid them for his family’s freedom. No evidence found that Tilghman recouped this money.

1865 The Thirteenth Amendment abolishes slavery.


1975 Visitation’s second history, *Georgetown Visitation since 1799*, is published.

1996 Documents related to Visitation’s slaveholding history in the Monastery Archives are assembled together during a systematic re-organization of its contents.

2016 Georgetown Visitation convenes steering committee and tasks the St. Jane de Chantal Salesian Center to sponsor research, reflection, and teaching of the *History of Enslaved People at Georgetown Visitation* by facilitating meetings and researching this history.
APPENDIX 4: COMMITTEE MEMBERS
The History of Enslaved People at Georgetown Visitation
Steering Committee Members

Max Bindernagel, Teacher, Religion Department
Mary Kate Blaine, Principal
William Farquhar, Teacher, History Department
Peggy Judge Hamilton ’85, Teacher, English Department, Diversity Co-Coordinator
Caroline Coleman Handorf ’96, Director of Communications
Sr. Mary Berchmans Hannan ’48, ’50, VHM, Mother Superior, President Emerita
Raynetta Jackson-Clay, Director of Student Activities, FASF Coordinator, Diversity Co-Coordinator
Olivia Wills Kane ’85, Director, St. Jane de Chantal Salesian Center
Daniel M. Kerns, Jr., Head of School
Jenny Mayo, Director of Communications (served until June 30, 2017)
Susan Naleyzyty, Ph.D., School Archivist, St. Jane de Chantal Salesian Center
ENDNOTES

1 I would like to thank Sr. Mary Berchmans Hannan for sharing this observation.
7 Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation Since 1799*, 125, 130, and 195.
8 I would like to thank Lyla Ward, my research assistant, for her help with these documents.
12 National Archives and Records Administration [NARA], 1800 United States Census, Georgetown, Washington, D.C., p. 858; Microfilm M32, roll 5. “Mary McDermit.”
13 Booth Family Center for Special Collections [BFCSC], Georgetown University Archives [GUA], Georgetown College accounts ledger B-1, 1800–1803; Georgetown Slavery Archive [GSA], GSA119.
14 BFCSC, GUA, Day Book for Ledger C, July 7, 1803–Nov. 1808; GSA, GSA120.
15 Georgetown Visitation Monastery Archives [GVMA], RGII, s10, Box 1, f2, Id934#1, #2.
16 BFCSC, Maryland Province, Archives, Society of Jesus, Box 57.5, File 15, item 7; GSA, GSA103.
17 BFCSC, GUA, Vault Collection, box 1; GSA, GSA67.
18 BFCSC, GUA, Georgetown College accounts ledger C, 1803–1813; GSA, GSA98.
19 BFCSC, GUA, Georgetown College accounts ledger B-1, 1800–1803, fol. 87; GSA, GSA118.
20 BFCSC, GUA, Georgetown College accounts ledger A-3, 1796–1799, April 16, 1798, through January 5, 1802; Georgetown College accounts ledger B-1, 1800–1803; GSA, GSA96, 109, 117, 110.
21 Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Associated Archives at St. Mary's Seminary and University [AAB], Lalor/AAB, 1818–1832, Marechal 18B22, Marechal 18B23. Cited in Mannard, “We are Determined to be White Ladies,” 145.
22 AAB, Lalor/AAB, 1818–1832, #18B23.
25 I would like to thank Claire Brinkmann for her assistance with translating this plan’s legend from the original French.
26 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f8, Id940#5, #7.
27 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f4, Id936#1.
28 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
correspondence between George Neale and the Convent concerns delinquent accounts for nonpayment of money owed for the purchase of slaves.  

31 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.


32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.


38 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.

39 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f6, Id938#5.

40 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f6, Id938#6.

41 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f8, Id940#2.


43 BFCSC, Holy Trinity Church Archives, Death Registers, 1818–67, p. 17, January 24, 1823, “Col’d Woman at the Visitation,” p. 26, February 17, 1825, “----- a child from the people belonging to the Monastery.” They were both buried in Old College Ground, a cemetery that had been on Georgetown University’s campus but that was relocated in 1953. Juliana Brint, “Six Feet Under GU,” The Georgetown Voice, October 29, 2009. I would like to thank Sr. Mada-anne Gell for bringing this evidence to my attention.

44 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f7, Id939#1, #2, #3.

45 Sullivan and Hannan, Since 1799, 86.

46 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f9, Id941#3.

47 Sullivan, Since 1799, 73.

48 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f11, Id943#1–#10.


GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f19, Id951#1.


Sullivan and Hannan, Since 1799, 125–26.

Catalog of Pupils of the Georgetown Academy of the Visitation for the Academic Year 1861–62 (Baltimore: Kelly, Hedian & Piet, 1862), 5.

Catalog of Pupils of the Georgetown Academy of the
Visitation for the Academic Year 1863–64
(Baltimore: Kelly, Hedian & Piet, 1862), 5.

76 BFSC, Archives of Holy Trinity Church, Holy Trinity Baptismal Records (1835–1858).


District Court for the District of Columbia


83 BFCSC, Holy Trinity Baptismal Records, 1835–58, p. 348. “baptized John Mary Joseph son of Ignatius Tilghman and Susan his wife servants of the Sisters of the Visitation. Jas Curley.” John is not noted on the 1860 Census with others of his family, so he must have died before June 21, 1860. NARA, Records of the Board of Commissioners for the Emancipation of Slaves in the District of Columbia, 1862–1863; Microfilm M520, Record Group 217, Case 569.


86 “Affairs in Georgetown. Many Local Notes of Interest from Across Rock Creek,” Evening Star July 1, 1895, 12, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1895-07-01/ed-1/seq-12/ “Elizabeth Mahoney, seventy-nine years of age, colored, died suddenly last night. She was taken ill at Jefferson and K streets at 8 o’clock, and died immediately after having been taken to her home, 101G Jefferson street, by Officer Morgan. Deceased is said to have been reared at the Georgetown Convent as a slave. She secured her liberty before the war through purchase.” I would like to thank Adam Rothman for sharing this source with me.


89 Footner, Geoffrey M., USS Constellation: from Frigate to Sloop of War (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 258–59. Today, this ship is docked at the Baltimore Inner Harbor.

On the highest point of the Convent grounds once stood a Georgian mansion, as revealed by the outline of the foundation, on an estate owned by John Threlkeld. The mansion was razed or demolished before the nuns acquired the property. At the rear of the house were slave quarters. It was the last one of the houses which the Alumnae restored. With its old fireplace, the students use it for picnics and as an outdoor recreation center.”

Maryland State Archives [MSA], Montgomery County Register of Wills, C1138-2, fols. 81–82 and 89–92. Henry Threlkeld’s 1764 will names John Threlkeld his heir, and the 1782 inventory taken the year after his death lists his possessions. Folio 91 lists the outbuildings and their contents: the milk house, the kitchen, and the dwelling houses. I would like to thank Joseph Leizear and his colleagues for their generous help.

MSA, General Assembly House of Delegates, Assessment Record, S1161-76, fol. 21. “Salop, John Threlkeld, 563 acres, 845 value, good dwelling house room adj/kitchen Barn Quarters 250 acres cleared soil thin and stony some meadow lies near G.T.”


115 Map in Monastery Archivist’s office indicates that the Sisters acquired the lot from John Cox in 1844, and it was taxed as lot 03 Square 1821.

116 GVSA, Corrine Carhart, Photographic Album, 1938, 62.


121 Wherever possible, evidence that may overlap has been cross-referenced to avoid double counting. For example, the 11 people documented in the Emancipation documents of 1862 were cross-referenced with people of similar sex and age on the 1850 Census. NARA, 1800 United States Census, Georgetown, Washington, D.C., p. 858; Microfilm M32, roll 5, “Mary McDermit.”


123 BFCSC, GUA, Georgetown College accounts ledger B-1, 1800–1803; GSA, GSA119.

124 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f2, Id934#1, #2.

125 AAB, Loral/AAB, 1818–1832, #18B22, #18B23.

126 AAB, Loral/AAB, 1818–1832, #18B22, #18B23.
148 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f4, Id936#1.
149 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
150 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
151 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
152 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
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162 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
163 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
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168 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
169 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
170 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f3, Id935#1.
171 BFCSC, Holy Trinity Church Archives, Death Registers, 1818–67, p. 17, January 24, 1823, “Col’d Woman at the Visitation.”
172 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f5, Id937#2.
173 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f6, Id938#6.
174 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f6, Id938#6.
175 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f6, Id938#6.
176 BFCSC, Holy Trinity Church Archives, Death Registers, 1818–67, p. 26, February 17, 1825, “----- a child from the people belonging to the Monastery.”
177 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f7, Id939#1, #2, #3.
178 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f9, Id941#2.
179 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f9, Id941#3.
180 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f9, Id941#3.
181 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f9, Id941#3.
182 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f9, Id941#3.

192 NARA, 1830 United States Census, Georgetown, Washington, D.C., p. 188; Microfilm M19; roll 14. “Convent of the

193 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f10, Id942#1;; RGII, s10, Box 1, f11, Id943#11.
194 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f10, Id942#1;; RGII, s10, Box 1, f11, Id943#11.
195 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f10, Id942#1;; RGII, s10, Box 1, f11, Id943#11.
196 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f10, Id942#1;; RGII, s10, Box 1, f11, Id943#11.
197 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f13, Id945#1.
198 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f18, Id950#1.
199 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f18, Id950#1.
200 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f18, Id950#1.
201 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f18, Id950#1.
205 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f15, Id947#1, #2.
206 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f16, Id948#1.
215 GVMA, RGII, s11, Box 4, f2, #1; NARA, 1860 United States Census, Georgetown, Ward


like to thank Joseph P. Reidy for his sharing this evidence with me. NARA, Department of the Navy, Records of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, 1812–1975, Case Files for Patients at Naval Hospitals and Registers Thereto: Registers of Patients 1812–1929. Series A4097. Group 52, vol. 9 (1862–1869), unpaginated, alphabetized by last name. NARA, Department of the Navy, Records of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Hospital Tickets and Case Papers, compiled 1825–1889, Group 52, 1864–1866, roll 112.


227 “Affairs in Georgetown. Many Local Notes of Interest from Across Rock Creek,” Evening Star July 1, 1895, 12, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1895-07-01/ed-1/seq-12/ “Elizabeth Mahoney, seventy-nine years of age, colored, died suddenly last night. She was taken ill at Jefferson and K streets at 8 o’clock, and died immediately after having been taken to her home, 101G Jefferson street, by Officer Morgan. Deceased is said to have been reared at the Georgetown Convent as a slave. She secured her liberty before the war through purchase.” I would like to thank Adam Rothman for sharing this source with me.

228 BFCSC, GUA, Georgetown College accounts ledger B-1, 1800–1803, fol. 87; GSA, GSA118.

229 GVMA, RGII, s10, Box 1, f7, Id941#1.