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Susan Nalezty

The popular portrayal of enslaved persons in the U.S. depicts them laboring in fields on large plantations owned by affluent masters in the Deep South. How slavery manifested itself at Georgetown Visitation, a religious community and school in the District of Columbia, contrasts with this limited view. Here, religious women, who had taken vows of poverty, collectively owned slaves in an urban context. Documents assembled from public repositories and the Georgetown Visitation Monastery Archives tell of enslaved people who were inherited, bought, sold, hired-out, manumitted, or emancipated. This evidence enables a partial recovery of the identities of some of whom the Sisters of the Visitation had enslaved, including their relationships to one another, their literacy levels, and their contributions to the development of the campus's buildings. Their identities and contributions provide a vital context for understanding slavery at Georgetown Visitation from 1800 to 1862, when the federal government abolished slavery in Washington, D.C.

Keywords: female religious; nuns; slavery; Washington, D.C.; Georgetown; manumission; emancipation; secondary education; women's education

In 1799 three women moved to Washington, D.C., determined to lead a devout life and to open a school for young women, an institution still in existence: Georgetown Visitation. Its campus has fourteen buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. The school and convent opened near Georgetown College (later University). Georgetown's fourth president, Father Leonard Neale, S.J. (later a bishop and finally archbishop), co-founded the academy and convent, the first of the Visitation Order in the New World. He invited Alice Lalor, whom he had known in Philadelphia, and soon after she was joined by two other candidates for religious life, Maria McDermott and Maria Sharpe.¹ Initially, they boarded with the Poor Clares,

1. Eleanore C. Sullivan and Susan Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation Since 1799: Revised and Expanded*, 2nd edition (Washington, DC: Georgetown Visitation Monastery, 2004), 50–54.

refugees displaced by the French Revolution who had opened an academy in 1798. In 1805, the Poor Clares' abbess died, and the remaining two nuns returned to France. Maria Sharpe had died in 1802, but Lalor and McDermott purchased the Poor Clares' house, adding to another house they owned, which became the academy. When Neale's term as college president expired in 1806, he moved next to the convent, and they eventually discerned that the Visitation Order fit their needs in their plan to serve as educators and religious. Founded in 1610 by St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal in Annecy, France, this cloistered order valued contemplative life, but required no severe asceticism. It could be modified to enable the founding sisters to practice the Order's virtues: gentleness, humility, and amiability, all suitable qualities for teaching. In 1816 the Holy See granted permission to form the Visitation Order in Georgetown. Neale, then serving as archbishop of Baltimore, presided over the founding sisters' taking of solemn vows along with twelve other women.²

From these modest beginnings, the founders of Georgetown Visitation depended on enslaved labor. The 1800 census has a "Mary McDermit" as head of household living with two other women (presumably Lalor and Sharpe) and two girls. Also recorded is one slave.³ This earliest document of slaveholding at the convent illustrates the challenges of writing a history of institutionally-owned slaves. The mother superior or chaplain might answer a census, negotiate a sale, or hire-out a slave, but this was one person within a corporation of many, making it difficult to ascertain the community's approach to slavery. Institutional slaveholding usually took one of two forms (or both): the slaves either worked directly for the organization or the institution profited by renting them to another.⁴ At Visitation, slavery took both forms and, in some cases, slaves donated to the community were sold immediately for additional revenue. Institutional slavery differed from individual slave ownership in that an owner might protect that investment by adequately caring for his or her slaves. Institutional ownership complicates the common, but often unanswerable, questions regarding how slaves were treated, fed, clothed, or housed. At Georgetown Visitation, these questions remain unanswered. This study has uncovered no such evidence, but it has assembled documents that confirm slavery persisted until the federal government outlawed it in the District of Columbia on April 16, 1862. At the time of this writing,

2. Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 68.

3. "Mary McDermit," 1800 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, Washington, D.C., 858; microfilm M32, roll 5, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA).

4. Jennifer Oast, *Institutional Slavery: Slaveholding Churches, Schools, Colleges, and Businesses in Virginia, 1680–1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–13.



James Alexander Simpson, *Georgetown Visitation Convent, View from P Street Looking North* (detail), 1846, oil on canvas, Georgetown Visitation Collection. Shown left to right is 1) convent east wing with dormers before its 1857 elevation; 2) chapel's original two-story façade, designed by Father Clorivière and consecrated in 1821; 3) bishop's house; and 4) "new academy," designed by Father Clorivière and built in 1824 (All images courtesy of Georgetown Visitation Monastery/ Georgetown Visitation Monastery Archives).

107 people enslaved by the Visitation Order in Georgetown between 1800 and 1862 have been identified, either by name or brief description.⁵

Historiographical Context of Slavery at Georgetown Visitation

That the sisters owned slaves is found in both of the institution's published histories, but the reality of slavery within the community has been little studied until now. Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, daughter of the promi-

5. This article is part of a larger project which was initiated by a committee composed of monastery members; school administrators; faculty and staff; and parents and alumnae. Documents with evidence of slaveholding were assembled in the 1990s during a reorganization of the monastery archives by Sister Mada-anne Gell, VHM, and Sister Dolores Liptak, RSM. Sister Mary Paula McCarthy, VHM, analyzed documents in the monastery and public repositories. The present study is indebted to them. I thank the Sisters of the Visitation for their support of this work, especially Sisters Mada-anne Gell, Mary Berchmans Hannan, and Joanne Gonter. For a digital archive of monastery documents and the full research report, see <https://www.visi.org/about/history-of-georgetown-visitation/history-of-enslaved-people-at-visitation> and Susan Nalezty, *The History of Enslaved People at Georgetown Visitation: Learning, Reflecting, and Teaching* (Washington, DC: St. Jane de Chantal Salesian Center, 2018), 1–62.

ment writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, wrote Visitation's first published history with her husband, George Parsons Lathrop, in 1894. Its title, *A Story of Courage*, discloses their approach: to tell a heroic story of the early founders who established the convent and school. The authors twice mention enslaved people on campus, including:

[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.⁶

A Story of Courage described a man enslaved by Archbishop Neale:

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.

Here, the authors imply the bricks paid to this enslaved man slowly amassed a supply that eventually was used to erect the chapel, which was consecrated in 1821 and is extant today.⁷

The school's second history by Eleanore Sullivan, *Georgetown Visitation Since 1799*, was first published in 1975 and revised and expanded by Susan Hannan in 2004. It treats slavery at the convent three times.⁸ Sullivan wrote that "an oral tradition in the monastery has it that the sisters taught the children of the slaves living on the property." Another reference mentioned that enslaved people were brought to the convent as part of the dowries of sisters who joined the Order. And one paragraph described a legal dispute between the convent and a man whom they had enslaved, Ignatius Tilghman.

Sullivan observed in the introduction to the first edition: "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."⁹ The nuns organized themselves into four distinct classes, a practice

6. George Parsons Lathrop and Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, *A Story of Courage: Annals of the Georgetown Convent of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1894), 156.

7. Lathrop and Lathrop, *A Story of Courage*, 207.

8. Eleanore C. Sullivan, *Georgetown Visitation Since 1799*, 1st edition (Baltimore: French-Bray Printing Company, 1975). See the updated edition, Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 125, 130, and 195.

9. Sullivan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 8.



Chapel of the Sacred Heart, façade, Georgetown Visitation Monastery and Preparatory School, Consecrated in 1821. The upper level (three small windows and pediment) was added in 1857. Construction was likely carried out by enslaved labor.

informed by the Order's Old World traditions, as historian Joseph Mannard has convincingly argued.¹⁰ At the top were "choir sisters" who sang the Divine Office, were literate, and were usually native born from middle-class or elite families. Next, "associate sisters" met the literacy requirement for choir sisters yet were unable to uphold that responsibility, usually for health reasons. Third were "lay sisters," usually illiterate and often not native born, who performed housekeeping chores. The last were "out sisters" who lacked full membership, lived in separate quarters, and could leave enclosure.

As Mannard determined, the Visitation Order in the New World had a distinctly Southern character in the antebellum period. All but two Visitation houses (Kaskaskia, Illinois and Brooklyn, New York) 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 the

10. Joseph G. Mannard, "'We are Determined to Be White Ladies': Race, Identity, and the Maryland Tradition in Antebellum Visitation Convents," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 109, no. 2 (Summer 2014), 135–152.

localities of their monasteries, the Visitation nuns may have accepted that enslaved people were at the bottom of the hierarchy. According to 1850 and 1860 census records, 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, had family connections to slaveholding and followed cultural standards that saw slavery as necessary and acceptable, and as professed nuns, their Catholic identity did not provide a clear path away from those norms.

In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI's apostolic letter, *In Supremo Apostolatus*, condemned the African slave trade, but New World customs challenged the Church; views on slavery were by no means homogenous on these shores or in Rome.¹¹ The abolitionist view was overwhelmingly Northern and Protestant and saw Catholic hierarchy as antithetical to the country's Republican ideals. Catholics perceived the antislavery movement as led by radicals who were nativist and anti-Catholic. In the interest of preserving unity, Church leaders discouraged taking sides on the slavery question. Personal opinion was to be private and public opinion neutral.¹² Even Catholic voices who questioned slavery acknowledged that only legislatures, not bishops or ministers, could eradicate slavery.¹³

As minorities, Catholic religious assimilated by adopting cultural norms, and in the South, many were slaveowners, finding financial dependency in slavery. Some Southern orders, usually with Irish or German origins, were not slaveholders: the Dominican Sisters, School Sisters of Notre Dame, and Mercy Sisters. However, French orders often incorporated slavery into their communal lives: the Ursulines, Daughters of Charity, Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and Sisters of Mount Carmel.¹⁴ At Visitation, few French women joined the community, but Archbishop Neale's replacement as chaplain, Father Pierre-Joseph Picot de Clorivière, S.J., was a French nobleman and Royalist who vigorously sought donations for an expansion in the 1820s.¹⁵

11. Kenneth J. Zanca, ed., *American Catholics and Slavery: 1789–1866: An Anthology of Primary Documents* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 27–29, 33–37; Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990), 29–93.

12. William B. Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union: How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 29–51, 92–107.

13. Robert Emmett Curran, *Shaping American Catholicism: Maryland and New York, 1805–1915* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 92–110.

14. Virginia Gould, "'Oh, I Pass Everywhere': Catholic Nuns in the Gulf South during the Civil War," in *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*, eds. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 44–47; Catherine O'Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton: American Saint* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 220–221, 290–291.

15. Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 92–96.

As will be considered below, some of these gifts were bondspople who were promptly sold to satisfy construction costs.

During the Civil War, the Visitation sisters received guidance from Baltimore Archbishop Francis Patrick Kenrick. The bishop advised neutrality, lamenting the conditions in which the enslaved lived but urging acceptance of the fact that anti-slavery efforts were not in accord with the law.¹⁶ As the Civil War commenced, he advised the convent not to take sides, share supplies, or quarter troops. Unlike Holy Trinity Church and Georgetown College, which the government requisitioned as military hospitals, Visitation never housed soldiers. The convent called upon the favor of General Winfield Scott, Chief of Staff of the Army, who was anxious about the possible desecration of the grave of his daughter who had been a professed nun and was buried in Visitation's cemetery.¹⁷

Slaveholding in Georgetown and at Georgetown Visitation, 1800–1850

Maryland, founded by English Catholics seeking haven, was the center of Catholicism's colonial origins. Connections between southern Maryland and Georgetown were strong. Georgetown had become a center for Catholic life with the Jesuits' founding of Holy Trinity Church (1787) and Georgetown College (1791). The Jesuit's institutions were united by faith but also by the proceeds from tobacco grown on six Jesuit-owned plantations. Georgetown became a thriving port, a destination for the "rolling roads" on which wagons pulled tobacco-filled casks that were off-loaded, warehoused, and re-loaded onto sea-going ships bound for Europe. As will be explored below, Visitation benefited from this same network.

Georgetown's wealth from tobacco sales was partially linked to slavery. Enslaved persons planted and harvested this labor-intensive crop in southern Maryland, and at Georgetown, freighted the cargo for distribution. Prosperity brought increasing slaveholding. By 1800 Georgetown had 1,449 enslaved persons out of a total population of 5,120, fueling the ancillary system of slave hiring.¹⁸ Contingent labor was high in demand with the arrivals and departures of cargo ships. As time passed, the free black population slowly increased in Georgetown. Holy Trinity Church, shepherded by

16. John Francis Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church: The History of Catholic Teaching Concerning the Moral Legitimacy of the Institution of Slavery* (Chichester, UK: Barry Rose Publishers, 1975), 110–111.

17. Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 126–128.

18. Valerie Babb and Carroll R. Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 1–4.

the Georgetown Jesuits, permitted the black community to worship in segregated pews and to receive the sacraments after white parishioners.¹⁹ Parish records show the baptism of numerous children of mixed-status. A mother and her children might be free, but the father still enslaved, or vice-versa. Free and enslaved blacks sat shoulder-to-shoulder in the pews. The children of Visitation slaves were also baptized at Holy Trinity.²⁰ Holy Trinity buried free-of-charge members of the free black and enslaved communities, including a woman named Ruth and an unnamed child, both of whom had been enslaved by Visitation and died in 1823 and 1825, respectively, a time when the convent was struggling financially.²¹

The decisions of Father Neale as president of Georgetown College (1799-1806) provide evidence of the intertwining of Catholicism, tobacco, and slavery at Georgetown. In 1801 he bought a man named George from a college boarder for £67, about the cost of a year's board and expense at the school.²² In 1808, an enslaved man (also named George) was hired-out to a cobbler for twenty months at \$35 per month; some of his wages were paid in shoes.²³ In 1811, Neale paid \$176 for two enslaved persons: George and Stace.²⁴ Neale also periodically hired enslaved people held by Ann Fenwick to work on the Georgetown College campus between 1804 and 1806.²⁵

As Georgetown president, Neale managed the Jesuits' tobacco plantations. An 1805 letter to his brother, Father Francis Neale, in St. Inigoes, Maryland, reports that a man named Spalding had fled from his enslavement. Here Bishop Neale advised him to keep another enslaved man named

19. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

20. For the makeup of black families who had their children baptized at Holy Trinity and baptismal records of Visitation slaves, see Nalezty, *History of Enslaved People*, 21–22; Tera W. Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 20, 28.

21. Entries for “Col’d Woman at the Visitation,” fol. 26, February 17, 1825 and “_____ a child from the people belonging to the Monastery,” fol. 17, January 24, 1823, Holy Trinity Death Registers, 1818–1867, Holy Trinity Church Archives, Booth Family Center for Special Collections (hereafter BFCSC), Georgetown University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter GUA). Both were buried in Old College Ground, a cemetery on Georgetown University’s campus from 1817 to 1953. See Laurence J. Kelly, S.J., *History of Holy Trinity Parish, Washington, D.C., 1795–1945* (Baltimore: John D. Lucas Printing Company, 1945), 112–113, and Juliana Brint, “Six Feet Under GU,” *The Georgetown Voice*, October 29, 2009, <https://georgetownvoice.com/2009/10/29/six-feet-under-gu/>.

22. Georgetown College Accounts, Ledger B-1, 1800–1803, GSA119, Georgetown Slavery Archive (hereafter GSA), BFCSC, GUA.

23. Day Book for Ledger C, July 7, 1803–November 1808, GSA120, GSA, BFCSC, GUA.

24. Bill of sales between John Wiseman and Leonard Neale, March 14, 1801, RGII, s10, box 1, f2, Id934#1, #2, Georgetown Visitation Monastery Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter GVMA).

25. Georgetown College Accounts, Ledger C, 1803–1813, GSA98, GSA, BFCSC, GUA.

Stephen in St. Inigoes but “to dispose of the unhappy girl.”²⁶ Another letter records Neale purchasing a man named Wat from Charles Boarman for \$400, and Wat was then promptly resold for \$500 via George Fenwick to the Jesuit plantation at St. Inigoes.²⁷

Georgetown College and Georgetown Visitation were always separately incorporated, but their early histories were intertwined during Neale’s tenure as president. In 1800, the college ledger book showed regular debits to the account of “Mrs. [Maria] McDermott” (one of the convent’s founders, later Sister Mary Frances). She purchased pedagogical items: quills, books, and slates and paid for pew rental fees and received assistance with driving the convent’s cows, presumably to market. Buried in these mundane accounting records is the convent’s hiring of a man named Zealeam whom the college enslaved for three days’ labor, starting on July 15, 1800.²⁸ The college did not own Zealeam; he was hired out by the Fevrier family in exchange for their two sons’ education.²⁹

Archbishop Neale died in 1817, and Mother Teresa A. Lalor (Alice Lalor) became the convent’s only leader on campus. The next year she mentions an enslaved man, George, in a letter to Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal, Neale’s successor as archbishop of Baltimore. Since Neale had owned more than one enslaved man named George, the identity is unclear. She asked if she might purchase George’s wife, a woman owned by a neighbor. Her master 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 Re[veren]ce thought well of us to buy her and hire her out. I humbly request your Re[veren]ce 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.³⁰

26. Leonard Neale to Francis Neale, July 15, 1805, box 57.5, file 15, item 7, GSA, GSA103, from Maryland Province Archives, Society of Jesus, BFCSC, GUA.

27. Bill of sale between Leonard Neale and Charles Boarman, 1802, Vault Collection, box 1, GSA67, GSA, BFCSC, GUA.

28. Georgetown College Accounts, Ledger B-1, 1800–1803, fol. 87, GSA118, GSA, BFCSC, GUA.

29. Georgetown College Accounts, Ledger A-3, 1796–1799, April 16, 1798 through January 5, 1802, BFCSC, GUA; Georgetown College Accounts, Ledger B-1, 1800–1803, GSA96, 109, 110, 117, GSA, BFCSC, GUA.

30. Mother Superior Teresa Lalor to Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal, October 27, 1818, Lalor/AAB, 1818–1832, Maréchal 18B22, Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Associated Archives at St. Mary’s Seminary and University, Baltimore, Maryland (hereafter AAB), cited in Mannard, “We are Determined to be White Ladies,” 145.

Maréchal apparently did not reply, but a postscript to a letter sent later indicated that Mother Lalor had purchased George's wife and children.³¹ She acted swiftly and pragmatically, recouping her money by hiring out George's wife. 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 governed by the principles of property law.

In Neale's absence, Mother Lalor now made decisions on her own. She had emigrated from Ireland to Philadelphia, and therefore, likely had little firsthand experience of slavery. She was unlike Neale, who, born in Port Tobacco in southern Maryland, had been raised in proximity to the plantation system. When Mother Lalor wrote to Archbishop Maréchal in 1818, he was embroiled in a conflict with the Jesuits, which had begun the previous June with a letter demanding that they pay him the stipend that his two predecessors had received. This initiated a protracted struggle between the Jesuits regarding their obligation to support the local Church. Years later, the 1838 sale of 272 enslaved persons from Jesuit estates finally enabled closure, with a lump-sum payment of \$8,000 to Maréchal's successor, taken from the sale's \$110,000 profit.³²

After Neale's death, the college and convent became more independent of one another. Father Clorivière, Neale's successor, initiated a major building campaign to establish the school as a prominent institution for the education of young women. His accomplishments in such a short time (from his arrival in 1819 until his death in 1826) earned him the unofficial title of the school's "second founder."³³ His first achievement was to open a second school, the Benevolent School, dedicated to teaching, feeding, and clothing orphans and disadvantaged children in the neighborhood, which was separate from the boarding school.³⁴

An accomplished painter, Clorivière sketched a plan of the convent grounds to visualize his strategies for architectural changes. At the upper left, he drew the Benevolent School, which he had built near the first academy building, chicken coops, stable, and slave quarters. At middle right, he marked the site for the future chapel, next to his living quarters and the convent buildings.

31. Mother Superior Teresa Lalor to Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal, November 10, 1818, Lalor/AAB, 1818–1832, #18B23, AAB.

32. Curran, *Shaping American Catholicism*, 13–29; Adam Rothman, "Georgetown University and the Business of Slavery," *Washington History* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2017), 18–22.

33. Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 73–77.

34. Georgetown Visitation Convent and Preparatory School, Washington, D.C., 1990, section 7, p. 6, National Register of Historic Places (hereafter NRHP), <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/230edb15-ec9-4b84-8572-82d75cf8d193>; Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 106–108.



Father Pierre-Joseph Picot de Clorivière, *Convent grounds on corner of 35th Street and P Street* (rotated to orient top edge as north), 1819, ink and watercolor. Upper left depicts academy (O), Benevolent School (P), slave quarters (Q Q Q), shed, chicken coop, and stable (R S T T). Lower right depicts convent buildings (B C D E F), bishop's house (L), and future site of chapel (M).

During Clorivière's tenure, Visitation's slaveholding was well documented. The sisters employed a solicitor in southern Maryland to sell their slaves. This geographic distance required a significant amount of correspondence, much of which survives. Their dealer, George W. Neale, had ties to the convent; his sister, Elizabeth, and daughter, Emily, both lived there.³⁵ A February 1820 letter mentions an "old woman" whom he was arranging to have brought from Georgetown to Port Tobacco to be sold.³⁶

Another document from Neale summarizes the sale of twenty-one enslaved people between 1819 and 1822.³⁷ Cross-referencing this with other

35. George W. Neale to Sister [Mary] Magdalen [Neale], October 1, 1827; George W. Neale to Sister Ann Combs, February 26, 1832, RGII, s10, box 1, f8, Id940#5, #7, GVMA.

36. George W. Neale to Mother Superior [de Sales Neale], February 10, 1820, RGII, s10, box 1, f4, Id936#1, GVMA.

37. Account ledger reconciled between Sister Johanna Frances Neale and George W. Neale, March 25, 1824, RGII, s10, box 1, f3, Id935#1, GVMA.

documentation reveals the enslaved people who were inherited wealth brought by two women who joined the convent: Elizabeth Lancaster (later Sister Mary Felicita) and Catherine Lancaster (later Sister Clare Agnes).³⁸ Upon her father's death, Elizabeth Lancaster inherited \$1,542 of "negro property." As part of dividing the siblings' inheritance, the will dictated that her brother pay her an additional \$17 in "negro property" to keep a mother with her child. Seven names of enslaved individuals are noted, and other correspondence tells that a woman named Rose was sold for \$200. Betty and her three 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 convent was nonetheless financially responsible for their care until their sale. An account book from George Neale lists the services of a midwife charged to the convent for Betty. Since Harriet's sale did not occur for nearly two years, she was placed in rental quarters before being hired out for \$50, though the sisters were 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.³⁹ Reading between the lines of these business transactions can be found the disquieting circumstances of those awaiting their sale, separated from the community with whom they had lived.

Catherine Lancaster also brought proceeds to the convent from the sale of enslaved people who were part of her inheritance. She brought Charles, a carpenter, whom the convent sold for \$475. Milly and her two children, who also came from Lancaster, were sold with two other men (Naas and another man named Charles, both of whom were not from the Lancaster inheritance) for \$720. In this case, however, the convent only received a down payment of \$570 and sued to recover the balance. Lancaster also inherited Mockey and her two children, whom the sisters sold for \$520, as well as Spincers and Michael, sold for \$450 each. In Michael's case, the convent received only a \$200 deposit and sued the buyer, Robert Diggs, for the balance. Lawrence Posey, another delinquent buyer, after some delay finally paid in full for Mockey and her children but paid only \$200 of the \$550 he owed the sisters for his purchase of Betty and her children.⁴⁰

38. RGIV, s7, "Lists of Community Members, 1800–1850," GVMA.

39. Letters between George W. Neale and the convent, 1819 to 1825, RGII, s10, box 1, f3, Id935#1, #2, #3, GVMA; RGII, s10, box 1, f5, Id937#1, GVMA; RGII, s10, box 1, f6, Id938#1, #3, #7, GVMA; RGII, s10, box 1, f4, Id936#3, #9, GVMA; RGII, s10, box 1, f8, Id940#1, #11, GVMA.

40. Letters between George W. Neale and the convent regarding delinquent accounts for nonpayment of money owed for slave purchases, 1819 to 1836, RGII, s10, box 1, f3, Id935#1, #2, #3, GVMA; RGII, s10, box 1, f4, Id936#7, GVMA; RGII, s10, box 1, f6,

Interspersed throughout this list of enslaved people from the Lancaster estate, George Neale notes eleven others, whose origins are not identified here or in any other known documents. 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, though he was subsequently sold in 1832 for \$100. And last on this list, in 1822, Neale sold a woman named Prudence with her child for \$150.⁴¹ The total value of these sales was \$3,915, but, as the sisters would learn, receiving proceeds in full would require a good deal of litigation.

These transactions coincided with the Panic of 1819, wherein the U.S. economy experienced a profound collapse. Recovery would take years, perhaps explaining why those individuals could not pay. These sales also overlap with the July 1820 groundbreaking for the convent's Chapel of the Sacred Heart, which was consecrated on November 1, 1821 (see the images on pages 25 and 27). Father Clorivière designed the building and helped raise \$9,748 for its construction. A portion of the money was raised by his donating his French military pension. In 1814, he initiated the sale of his family estate in Brittany, but the final transaction was not completed until 1823. Monastery documents confirm that between 1820 and 1826 Father Clorivière donated a total of \$9,354, nearly the complete cost of the chapel, but most of the funding did not arrive until after 1823—two years after the chapel's completion.⁴²

Two letters, both written onto the back of a printed announcement soliciting donations for the chapel's building, demonstrate the substantial undertaking of funding its construction. Titled, "To the Friends of the Religious Female Institutions," the printed announcement described the sisters' charitable works benefiting orphans, the poor, and women. Making the case that a chapel would further their sacred cause, they sought "any gifts, bequests and donations for the above purposes."⁴³ Written on the back of this fundraising publication is a communication from Mother Superior

Id938#2, #3, #4, #5, GVMA; RGII, s10, box 1, f8, Id940#1, #2, #7, #8, #12, GVMA; RGII, s10, box 1, f14, Id946#1, #4, #5, #6, GVMA.

41. Account ledger reconciled between Sister Johanna Frances Neale and George W. Neale, March 25, 1824, RGII, s10, box 1, f3, Id935#1, GVMA; Bill of sale between Mother Superior Madeleine Augustine D'arregre and Miss Helen Stewart, April 6, 1832, RGII, s10, box 1, f12, 944#1, GVMA.

42. Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 75–78; Georgetown Visitation Convent and Preparatory School, Washington, D.C., 1990, 6–8, section 7, NRHP; P. Jacques Terrien, *Histoire du R. P. de Clorivière de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Paris: Librairie Ch. Poussielgue, 1892), 44–47.

43. Copy of a letter from Mother Superior Agnes Brent to Gerard Boarman, early November 1821 [from context of letter], RGII, s10, box 1, f14, Id946#3, GVMA.

Agnes Brent from early November 1821 which discusses a promised gift of enslaved people owned by the family of two young women at the convent, Mary Ann, a student, and Susan Boarman, a professed nun (Sister Mary Angela). Addressed to the women's father, Gerard Boarman, Mother Agnes wrote, "The community will feel much gratified by the generosity of y[ou]r proposal giving to y[ou]r daughters these negroes."⁴⁴

A second letter copied below this text from Mother Agnes to George Neale asked him to clarify Boarman's intentions as to whether he was proposing to give four enslaved people or only the two children of a woman named Minty. She asked him to collect the enslaved people and provide them to the Order; however, if they could not be sold, she stated, their presence would be an unwelcome expense to the community, not a source of 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.⁴⁵

Her unvarnished candor disclosed the community's financial situation after a major building campaign. Another letter from George Neale to Mother Agnes clarifies that by asking for Boarman's enslaved people, the sisters were calling in a promise made during "Bishop Neale's times" (before 1817). George Neale, reporting from Cobb Neck, Charles County, informed her that he had collected four slaves from Boarman, among them a thirty-year-old woman who already had two small children and was soon expecting another and a thirty-five- or forty-year-old man who earned a good wage working in the Georgetown brickyards. Neale further reported that the sale of the woman could not happen until she had given birth, so he furnished her with provisions and asked for further direction from Mother. Her response, penned in different handwriting, stated that the enslaved people should be sold.⁴⁶ Another letter in May of the following year implies that these five people were sold to a Captain Moffit.⁴⁷ These exchanges about the Boarman

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

46. George W. Neale to Mother Superior [Agnes Brent], November 30, 1821, RGII, s10, box 1, f4, Id936#6, GVMA.

47. George W. Neale to Sister Louis Gonzaga Jones, May 19, 1822, RGII, s10, box 1, f4, Id936#9, GVMA.

slaves strongly suggest that the chapel's construction had caused an economic strain that could be partially remedied through selling enslaved persons.

The Lathrops, authors of Visitation's first published history, imply that a brickmaker enslaved by Archbishop Neale brought the bricks he manufactured from elsewhere in the city to build the chapel's brick foundation—visible in the crypt today. Published about thirty years after emancipation, this text is more poetic verse than historical writing. The authors cite no sources but perhaps had researched documents in the monastery archives describing the brickmaker enslaved by Boarman. The story parallels are noteworthy. The man enslaved by Boarman could not have fabricated the bricks for the chapel's foundation, however, because he was acquired after its completion. He likely never came to campus, but his sale may have offset residual costs for the chapel's construction after its consecration, and his sale could have funded other buildings built in the years following. This artful tale based on the documentary source could have been the authors' attempts at conveying that Visitation was indebted to the sale and labor of enslaved people. The details were wrong but, perhaps, the sentiment was right.

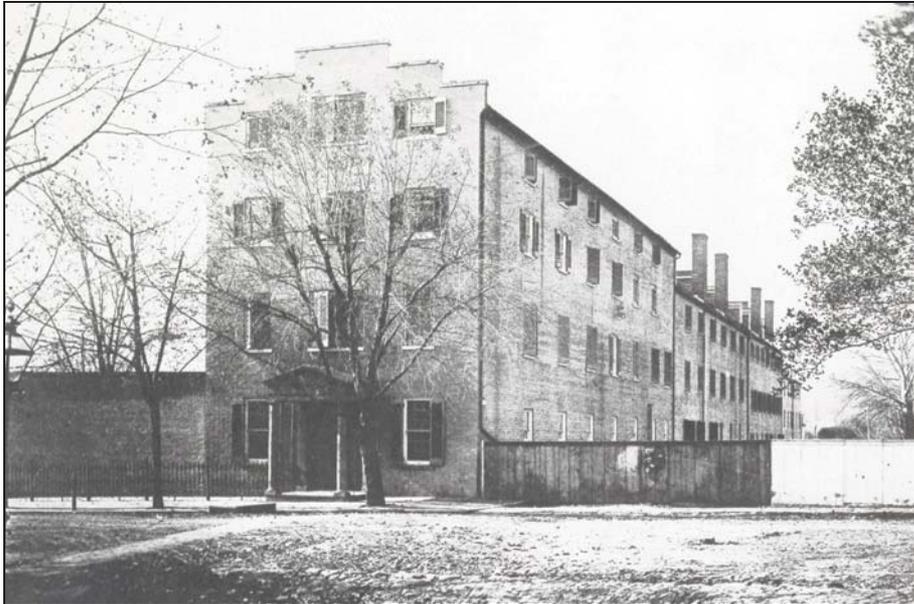
In 1823, the sisters hired out a woman they owned named Eliza to Bernard Spalding for \$1.25 a month, an agreement expected to be lengthy, as it specifies that he provide her with summer and winter clothing; this contract was not very profitable but reduced the number of enslaved persons for which the Order provided care.⁴⁸ The urgent tone in correspondence regarding the sale of enslaved people in these years confirms that the convent must have eagerly awaited funds from the sale of Father Clorivière's property in France, which arrived in 1823. This new infusion of cash fueled another construction project. In 1824, the "New Academy" was built to replace the dilapidated original academy building.⁴⁹ But in 1824, the convent's poverty became so extreme that it "came to resolution of dispersing." Relief, however, arrived in the form of pre-payment of tuition for two students from a parent in New York, John B. Lasaler.⁵⁰

The school's overstretched resources can also be detected in the urgent tone of Mother Agnes's 1824 correspondence with George Neale. A lengthy letter conveys frustration with the accumulating debt owed to the convent from the sale of enslaved people. Mother lamented that those not paying—often themselves Catholics with a family member professed at the convent—

48. Agreement between the convent and Bernard Spalding, June 13, 1823, RGII, s10, box 1, f5, Id937#2, GVMA.

49. This 1824 building stood where Founders Hall is today, at Volta Place and 35th Street.

50. Richard P. Jackson, *The Chronicles of Georgetown, D.C., from 1751 to 1878* (Washington, DC: R. O. Polkinhorn, Printer, 1878), 227.



The “New Academy” that stood at Fayette and Fourth Streets (35th St. and Volta Place, presently Founders Hall). Designed by Father Clorivière and built by Libby and Marden in 1824, it was used until 1872 when it was demolished.

did not recognize their responsibility to pay for the upkeep of their family, nor did they acknowledge that the Georgetown house was entirely dependent on their support. The end of the letter expressed 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.⁵¹

A January 1824 letter from George Neale summarized six lawsuits which the sisters brought against those who had bought enslaved people but who had not paid in full.⁵² Another letter to Neale informed him that, because of

51. Copy of letter from Mother Superior Agnes Brent [from context] to George W. Neale, 1824 [from context], RGII, s10, box 1, f14, Id946#4, GVMA.

52. George W. Neale to Sister Johanna Frances Neale, January 26, 1824, RGII, s10, box 1, f6, Id938#5, GVMA.

his delay in responding, the sisters had sold “the boy & girl to a gentleman in town” and that they agreed to sell a woman named Stacy for \$25 to a Mr. Slaughter, whom Neale had found as a buyer.⁵³ The Mother Superior complained that it would be at the convent’s expense to send Stacy to Neale in southern Maryland but confessed that “our object in selling her is not [to] make money, [but] to diminish the number of mouths at our charge.” She further insisted that his last conveyance of charges did not match their books, and having researched the usual commission for selling slaves, his fee of ten percent was “by far too much.”⁵⁴ Almost a year later, Neale sent a letter to Sister Anne Combs defending his fees.⁵⁵ The business acumen communicated here 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.

Amidst these dealings, an enslaved community remained on the campus in Georgetown. The 1820 census counted thirteen enslaved persons.⁵⁶ In 1825, Mother Agnes Brent and Father Clorivière entered into a manumission agreement with a man enslaved by the convent, Edward Shorter. The three letters were signed by W.A. Bradley, likely William A. Bradley, a cashier at the Bank of Washington, a director at the Franklin Insurance Office, and a city alderman.⁵⁷ Bradley negotiated the terms on Shorter’s behalf, 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 due in six years, not four, which would have given Shorter time to raise the necessary money. Mother Brent was firm, and with little leverage to negotiate, Shorter agreed to these terms, which obliged Bradley to advance him the difference to make timely payments, charging interest along the way. In the end, Shorter paid \$560 plus \$5.86 for clothing—that is, \$166 above the original asking price, which had been above market.⁵⁸ In Shorter’s case, his manumission made a profit not only for the sisters but also for Bradley as the middleman.

53. The surname, believed to be Slaughter, is not clearly written in the document.

54. Copy of a letter from Mother Superior Agnes Brent [from context] to George W. Neale, March 10, 1824, RGII, s10, box 1, f6, Id938#6, GVMA.

55. George W. Neale to Sister Anne Combs, February 12, 1825, RGII, s10, box 1, f8, Id940#2, GVMA.

56. “Monastery,” 1820 United States Federal Census, District of Columbia, Washington, Georgetown, microfilm M33, 61, NARA.

57. Judah Delano, *Washington Directory* (Washington, DC: William Duncan, 1822), 19, 89, 129; Maud Burr Morris, “William A. Bradley: Eleventh Mayor of the Corporation of Washington,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 25 (1923): 107.

58. W. A. Bradley to Father Clorivière, March 31, 1825; W. A. Bradley to Father Clorivière, April 14, 1825; W. A. Bradley to Miss Agnes [Brent], March 3, 1828, all in RGII, s10, box 1, f7, Id939#1, #2, #3, GVMA.

Proceeds from this manumission likely contributed to the convent's ongoing building 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. It also housed spaces for bathing, dressmaking, and scientific laboratories.⁵⁹ Father Clorivière did not see this building's completion before his death in 1826, but it opened the following year.⁶⁰

The sisters' new chaplain, Father Michael Wheeler, carried out his predecessor's intentions to enhance science instruction. In 1828, he ordered from abroad a scientific "apparatus" costing \$2,447. A portion of this sizable expenditure came via an additional student fee, but also the sale of enslaved persons. An 1828 document records the convent's sale of Susan and her three children, serving to clear a debt.⁶¹

The years from 1819 to 1827 were extraordinary in Visitation's history. Four buildings were constructed in eight years: the Benevolent School, the chapel, the "New Academy," and the Odeon. Although records are scant for enrollment, there seems to have been only sixteen paying students in 1820. By 1826, this number had increased to at least forty-eight.⁶² Father Clorivière's and Mother Brent's bold agenda turned the school around, but it moved at an aggressive pace, perhaps overly so. He contributed much of his family's fortune, which partially paid for these improvements, but the building initiatives forced the convent to seek revenue as never before. One of the most trusted sources of revenue was the inheritances of professed women, bringing money, land, and enslaved people to the community.

By the late 1820s, the economic strains from the previous decade were waning. According to the 1830 census, the school and convent were thriving. There were twelve grammar school students, fifty-one middle school students, and thirty-seven of high school age. Also, on campus were fifty-seven nuns. With this growth, however, the need for enslaved labor increased. The 1830 census counted ten slaves on campus: four young to middle-aged men, five young to middle-aged women, and one mature woman.⁶³ In 1828, the convent hired a man named Harry owned by a Mr. Warring at a rate of \$5 a month for a year. That same year, the sisters bought

59. This building likely stood where Fennessey Hall stands today, facing 36th Street when it was open to traffic.

60. Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 86.

61. Agreement between Mr. [J.T.?] Nichols and Miss Elizabeth Matthews, November 13, 1828, RGII, s10, box 1, 19, Id941#3, GVMA.

62. Sullivan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 73.

63. "Convent of the Visitation/Revd Michl F. Wheeler/Director," 1830 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, Washington, D.C., 188, microfilm M19, roll 14, NARA.



The Odeon, engraved on circa 1875 stationery. The building was designed by Father Clorivière and completed in 1827. Now demolished, it likely stood where Fennessey Hall is today, facing 36th Street when it was open to traffic.

a woman named Nelly for \$100.⁶⁴ She might have been noted in the 1830 census, but another enslaved family—Joe, his wife, and their children, who had earlier been bought by a Mr. Brent—was likely not counted. In 1831 Brent returned them to the convent, though Joe was to remain with Mr. Brent to work for an unspecified 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 1834.⁶⁵

These stories of the convent's buying, selling, or hiring out of enslaved people provide evidence of forced migration's social fragmentation. The enslaved community at Visitation varied in number by year. The 1840 census counted the number of enslaved as only three: a girl under ten years old, a young woman, and a middle-aged man.⁶⁶ In 1844, the convent purchased

64. Lease agreement between Henry Warring and the Sisters of the Visitation, December 1, 1828; Sales agreement between Thomas Hyde and Sister Elizabeth Matthews, February 25, 1828, RGII, s10, box 1, f9, Id941#1, #2, GVMA.

65. Cancellation of agreement between William Brent and the Ladies Academy, Georgetown, May 27, 1831, RGII, s10, box 1, f10, Id942#1 and ID943#11 (2 copies), GVMA; Purchase agreement between the Sisters of the Visitation and Catherine Ruhns, April 22, 1834, RGII, s10, box 1, f13, Id945#1, GVMA.

66. "Academy of the Visitation," 1840 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, Washington, D.C., 179, microfilm roll 35, NARA.

Stephen for \$600.⁶⁷ An 1847 letter to Sister Mary Magdalen Neale from Henrietta Lancaster, possibly the sister of Elizabeth Lancaster (Sister Felicita), noted monthly payments for the convent's purchase of an enslaved woman named Eliza for \$325.⁶⁸

In 1845 (or possibly 1841), another inheritance brought at least eight enslaved people, but possibly as many as eleven. A young married couple, two boys, a man, and a woman with two children experienced forced migration from the estate of Notley Young, the father of Martha Young, who joined the convent as Sister Mary Ellen.⁶⁹ They presumably came from Young's plantation on the Potomac River, which was situated on what is today the south side of the National Mall. Young had considerable acreage there, and the 1840 census recorded his enslaving twenty-six people.⁷⁰

Shortly after arriving in Georgetown, four individuals experienced forced migration to the Academy of the Visitation, Baltimore. Sister Mary Ellen Young signed over ownership of a man and a woman with two children to the Baltimore convent for \$5.⁷¹ This transfer of Robert, a blacksmith, and Fanny, a mother with two children, provides evidence that not only did the Georgetown house benefit from enslaved labor, so too did other religious houses, including the Baltimore convent which was started by nuns from Georgetown. Talent and wealth—in this case, human property—subsidized the Visitation Order's expansion.

The 1850s and 1860s: Manumission, Emancipation, and Litigation

The 1850 census, the first to include a separate slave schedule, counted the Georgetown Visitation enslaved community at seventeen: eight children and nine adults.⁷² Other federal documents confirm that the convent manumitted four women in quick succession. On April 28, 1858, Sharlot Mahor-

67. Purchase agreement and bill of sale between Robert Diggs and the Sisters of the Visitation, June 17 and July 23, 1844, RGII, s10, box 1, f15, Id947#1, #2, GVMA.

68. Sales agreement between Henrietta Lancaster and Sister Mary Magdalen Neale, August 8, 1847, RGII, s10, box 1, f16, Id948#1, and RGII s10, box 1, f3, Id935#2, GVMA.

69. An addendum to Young's deed states they were conveyed in 1845; the petition claims 1841. See RGII, s11, box 4, f2, #1, GVMA; 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, NARA.

70. "Notley Young," 1840 United States Federal Census, Washington, D.C., 149, microfilm roll 35, NARA.

71. Purchase agreement between Sister Mary Ellen Young and the Sisters of the Visitation, Baltimore, April 14, 1847, RGII, s10, box 1, f18, Id950#1, GVMA.

72. "Monastery," 1850 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, Washington, D.C., 184 A & B, microfilm roll M432_57, NARA; "Sisters of the Visitation," 1850 United States Federal Census, Schedule 2: Slave Schedules, West of 7th St. Turnpike, Washington, D.C., M432, NARA.

ney, age thirty-one, bought her freedom from the convent for \$10.⁷³ A year later, on April 14, 1859, Elizabeth Weldon, age twenty-four, was manumitted for \$1.⁷⁴ On August 1 of that year, Jane Mahoney, age twenty-two, and Sidney Tilghman, age twenty-six, were each freed for \$5.⁷⁵ As popular opinion was shifting, and as the divide over slavery increased, slaveholders began manumitting, less to obtain revenue and more as a way of divesting themselves of their participation in a complicated moral issue. In fact, a template with the appropriate language for manumission with blank spaces for names survives in the monastery archives. The convent used this document to manumit several times.⁷⁶ Slavery was increasingly questioned; what was happening outside the convent was also occurring within its walls.

These manumissions foreshadowed a sea change of slaveholding in the District of Columbia. As a prelude to the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation which freed all slaves in the secessionist states, on April 16, 1862, the District of Columbia Emancipation Act freed 3,100 enslaved people in the federal district. This law offered incentives to newly-freed men and women to voluntarily emigrate outside of the United States. In an attempt to ease the transition from an economy dependent on free labor to one without, it mandated that owners declare their bondspersons and, in return, they could be compensated for them.⁷⁷

The detailed records from the act's implementation show the value of enslaved persons. They provide the most significant and detailed primary sources documenting Visitation's enslaved community. Following the act's passage, Mother Mary Angela Harrison declared eleven enslaved persons: Susan and Ignatius Tilghman, their six children (Mary Elizabeth, Charles, Theodore, Jane, Cecelia, and Josephine), and three young men (Benjamin Mahoney, Thomas Weldon, and Joseph Dixon).⁷⁸ A month later, the convent submitted to the government a statement describing these now-emancipated people, plus the young Rosalie, just born to the Tilghman family.⁷⁹

73. "Sister Mary Joseph Keating" (owner), Records of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia Relating to Slaves, 1851–1863, microfilm M433, roll 3, NARA.

74. *Ibid.*

75. "Mother Superior Mary Perpetua Mitchell" (owner), Records of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia Relating to Slaves, 1851–1863, microfilm M433, roll 3, NARA.

76. Deed of manumission template, 1849, RGII, s10, box 1, f19, Id951#1, GVMA.

77. Department of State, Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789–2011, group 11, General Records of the United States Government, 1778–2006, *An Act of April 16, 1862 [For the Release of Certain Persons Held to Service or Labor in the District of Columbia]*, 299814, NARA.

78. Form signed by Sister Mary Angela Harrison, "Sisters of the Visitation of Georgetown," May 31, 1862, Records of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia Relating to Slaves, 1851–1863, microfilm M433, roll 2, NARA.

79. Narrative description filed by Sister Mary Angela Harrison, June 2, 1862, 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, NARA.

A few months later, litigation arose between the convent and Ignatius Tilghman. He filed a counter-petition, citing an 1856 agreement between himself and the sisters in which he was making payments for his future freedom and that of his wife and children.⁸⁰ He provided receipts signed by the sisters amounting to \$298.75—more than half of the agreed upon value of \$500, upon receipt of which the family was to be manumitted. Tilghman claimed that after this agreement he had maintained his family without expense to the convent. He requested that the government pay the remaining \$201.25 to the sisters, but 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 6½ percent interest, would be \$65. Subtracting this from the already-paid amount, he therefore asked that the government pay him \$233.75 for his wife and children.

The convent filed a response, insisting that the law provided compensation to owners, not slaves, and that there was nothing in its terms accounting for previous agreements.⁸¹ 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, they observed that Tilghman had made a slow effort, paying only \$4 a month over six years. They insisted that he and his family had cost them \$12 to \$13 a month for their care and consequently, he had simply paid them their own money. They, therefore, requested that the government pay Tilghman nothing. Two years later, in 1864, the disputed amount of \$298.75—the approximate equivalent of one year of tuition at the boarding school—was subtracted from the amount the government paid the convent for their manumitted enslaved persons. A footnote in the government record stated that this amount was “withheld as having been paid by Ignatius Tilghman for himself and family.” The convent received \$3,774.65. Unfortunately, no record of payment to Tilghman has been found, if he was ever paid.⁸²

Evidence supports Tilghman’s assertion that he had maintained his family without expense to the sisters. The 1860 census mistakenly noted him as free, along with Susan Tilghman and their six children, living off-campus

80. Narrative counter petition filed by Ignatius Tilghman, August 15, 1862, *Ibid.*

81. Narrative response to Tilghman’s counter petition filed by Sister Mary Angela Harrison, December 12, 1862, *Ibid.*

82. Emancipation in the District of Columbia, Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, List of Petitions Filed, 28th Cong., 1st sess., February 17, 1864 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1864), 49. This case is cited in Mary Beth Corrigan, “It’s a Family Affair: Buying Freedom in the District of Columbia, 1850–1860,” in Larry E. Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 163–165; Mary Elizabeth Corrigan, “A Social Union of Heart and Effort: The African-American Family in the District of Columbia on the Eve of Emancipation” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, 1996), 280–282.

with Sidney Tilghman (presumably Ignatius's sister) and Ann Green (godmother to Ignatius Tilghman's daughter Jane), by then both freed. Surviving in the monastery archives is a copy of Ann Green's "Certificate of Freedom" by manumission in 1853 from Mary A. Fenwick, likely a slaveholder in Charles County, Maryland with twenty-four slaves at the time of the 1850 census.⁸³ Green may have been hired out by Fenwick but eventually was freed and worked as a paid servant at the convent.⁸⁴ On the 1860 census, Ignatius's occupation was noted as a whitewasher, likely how he earned money to support his family and pay for his and his family's freedom. This confirms that the Tilghmans, though still legally enslaved, were residing away from the campus and had forged bonds with freed family and friends.⁸⁵

The 1860 census of the convent residents also wrongly recorded that Benjamin Mahoney, Thomas Weldon, and Joseph Dixon were free, along with another possible relation to Benjamin, perhaps a son, born at the convent, a Stanislaus Mahoney who was eleven years old.⁸⁶ These young men and Stanislaus are noted as farmers, as is a man named Patrick O'Connor, born in Ireland, perhaps their overseer. They are recorded alongside white servants, but they were yet enslaved. Stanislaus is not listed on the convent's petition to the federal government for compensation two years later; he had either died or had been freed by 1862.⁸⁷

83. "Mary A. Fenwick," 1850 United States Federal Census, Allens Fresh, Charles, Maryland; microfilm roll 432_290, 275A, NARA; "Mary A. Fenwick," 1850 United States Federal Census, Schedule 2: Slave Schedules, Allens Fresh, Charles, Maryland, M432, NARA.

84. 1850 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, Washington, D.C., microfilm roll M432_57, 368, 184B, NARA; Holy Trinity Baptismal Records, BFCSC, GUA, 311. Jane was baptized on September 4, 1853: "Baptized Mary Jane Frances Tillman (colored) of Ignatius & Mary Tillman, born on August 26, 1853—Sponsor Ann Green/G. E. Pollhubers"; "Ignatius Tilghman," 1860 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, ward 4, Washington, D.C., 188, dwelling 1213, family 1315, microfilm roll 653_101, NARA; Certificate of Manumission of Ann Green by Mary A. Fenwick, October 5, 1853, RGII, s10, box 1, f20, Id952#1, GVMA; Addendum to Young's gift, RGII, s11, box 4, f2, #1, GVMA. Here Mary being Susan's formal name is confirmed.

85. "Ignatius Tilghman," 1860 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, ward 4, Washington, D.C., counted on June 26, 1860, post office, Georgetown, D.C., dwelling 1213, family 1315, microfilm roll 653_101, 188, 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, NARA; "Sister Mary Joseph Keating" (owner), Records of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia Relating to Slaves, 1851–1863, microfilm M433, roll 3, NARA.

86. "Monastery of Sisters of the Visitation" and "List of Pupils at the Academy of the Visitation who remain during vacation," 1860 United States Federal Census, Washington, ward 4, Washington, D.C., counted on July 23, 1860, post office, Tennleytown, microfilm roll M653_103, 47–50, NARA.

87. The 1870 census documents a "Stanley Mohoney" of the correct age, born in Washington, D.C., and living in Friars Point, Coahoma County, Mississippi. See "Stanley Mohoney," 1870 United States Federal Census, Friars Point, Coahoma, Mississippi, dwelling 55, microfilm roll M593_727, 3B, NARA.

Census miscounts and manumissions characterize the period when the scales were tipping toward the abolitionists' cause. The rising tensions before the Civil War also affected Visitation's economic viability. Several students from the South did not return. 1862 marked a low point for enrollment: only ninety-nine students, with more than eighty sisters in residence.⁸⁸ As a result, tuition was increased steeply from \$200 to \$300 between 1862 and 1863.⁸⁹ The school struggled to remain solvent in a dramatically changed wartime economy.

The Enslaved Community after Emancipation

The Tilghmans, Benjamin Mahoney, and Thomas Weldon walked out of Visitation's front gate as freed persons in 1862. They faced an uncertain future, as did Joseph Dixon and Theodore Tilghman, who had self-emancipated.⁹⁰ They did not likely have the advantage of education before their emancipation. Visitation's 1975 published history cited an oral tradition that the sisters taught enslaved children.⁹¹ The truth of the tradition is difficult to ascertain, but federal census records indicating literacy provide hints. Of the fourteen people freed between 1859 and 1862: data cannot be found for three; another two were too young to be taught; five were illiterate; and documentary evidence for the other four is inconclusive.⁹² No primary sources have been found supporting that the enslaved were educated at the convent, suggesting that the enslaved community had not been taught to read or write. While the enslaved may not have been literate, an account in *Visita-*

88. Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 125–126.

89. *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, 1864), 5.

90. For a partial reconstruction of the lives of some who were enslaved at Visitation, see Nalezty, *The History of Enslaved People*, 21–23, 34–41.

91. Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 195.

92. The 1860 census shows, for instance, that Sidney, Ignatius, and Susan Tilghman were illiterate. See "Ignatius Tilghman," 1860 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, ward 4, Washington, D.C., 188, dwelling 1213, family 1315; microfilm roll 653_101, NARA. Susan Tilghman learned how to read and write between 1870 and 1900, but Ignatius remained illiterate his entire life. See "Ignatius Tilghman," 1900 United States Federal Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ward 24, 4A, 335 State Street, dwelling 65, family 77, microfilm 1466, NARA. The 1870 census, the first after emancipation, provides literacy levels for the Tilghman children, all born at Visitation. Mary, Theodore, Cecelia, and Jane Tilghman could read by 1870. Whether they learned at Visitation or within the intervening eight years is unclear. See "Ignatius Tilghman," 1870 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, ward 4, Washington, D.C., 527A, dwelling 340, family 383, microfilm roll 593_127, NARA. The 1880 census notes that Joseph Dixon and Thomas Weldon were illiterate. See "Joseph Dixon," 1880 United States Federal Census, Hillsborough, Caroline County, Maryland, 242C, dwelling 53, family 54, microfilm roll 506, NARA; "Thomas Weldon," 1880 United States Federal Census, St. Inigoes, St. Mary's, Maryland, 4A, dwelling 15, family 18, microfilm roll 135, NARA.

tion's first published history tells of Sister Stanislaus Jones teaching the catechism to enslaved people on campus.⁹³

Lacking formal education, to find work, the freed men and women leveraged the skills they had learned during their enslavement. Records of architectural changes at Visitation suggest something of their abilities. In the emancipation documents, the convent characterized Benjamin Mahoney as a good carpenter. Ignatius Tilghman whitewashed buildings according to the 1860 census. These men may well have had some part in architectural improvements at the convent.⁹⁴ In 1857, the convent's south wing was added, and the east wing enlarged by removing the dormers (see image on page 25), which added a full-sized fourth floor, as it is today. In the same year, the chapel was raised one story taller and a row of three short windows added, as it remains (see image on page 27). More ornament was added to its façade, including dentils decorating the triangular pediment and the pilasters bearing Ionic capitals with egg-and-dart motifs. In 1857 the free-standing bell tower adjacent to the chapel was enclosed.⁹⁵ And in 1861 the site of the former Benevolent School was modified to accommodate an infirmary.⁹⁶

Thus, right up to their emancipation, the enslaved were likely renovating buildings to accommodate the growing school and religious community.⁹⁷ They were modifying structures that had been likely built at least partially by slaves and funded by the sale of enslaved people. Today, these campus buildings preserve layers of history that, until now, have gone unacknowledged. The Benevolent School (built 1819/renovated 1861), the "New Academy" (1824, now destroyed), the Odeon (1827, now destroyed), the dormitory (1829), the west academy building (1838), the chapel (1821/renovated 1857), Adam Robb House (bought by the convent for the Benevolent School in 1843), and the convent's eastern wing (1832/renovated 1857), southern wing (1857), and annex (1836) are buildings where the enslaved

93. Lathrop and Lathrop, *A Story of Courage*, 266.

94. 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, NARA; "Ignatius Tilghman," 1860 United States Federal Census, Georgetown, ward 4, Washington, D.C., 188, dwelling 1213, family 1315, microfilm roll 653_101, NARA.

95. Sullivan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 71–72, 74, 100; "Georgetown Visitation Convent," Historic American Buildings Survey, DC-211, 1969, 1, 12–14, <https://cdn.loc.gov/master/pnp/habshaer/dc/dc0100/dc0122/data/dc0122data.pdf>; Georgetown Visitation Convent and Preparatory School, Washington, D.C., 1990, 5, section 7, NRHP; Georgetown Visitation Convent and Preparatory School, Washington, D.C., 1990, 15, section 8, NRHP.

96. Georgetown Visitation Convent and Preparatory School, Washington, D.C., 1990, 11, section 8, NRHP.

97. Sullivan and Hannan, *Georgetown Visitation*, 116–117; Georgetown Visitation Convent and Preparatory School, Washington, D.C., 1990, 6–8, 11, section 7.

labored.⁹⁸ These structures that survive—where teaching and praying take place today—can prompt conversation of this institution’s past.⁹⁹ Included here as well, should be the sites where enslaved people were quartered near the chicken coop and stables, delineated on Father Clorivière’s 1819 campus plan (see image on page 33).¹⁰⁰

Often histories do not include the stories of those who cleaned buildings or harvested crops, yet Georgetown Visitation’s history must do so since many of those who performed these tasks in the first six decades of its 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 or what the sisters thought about the people that they collectively owned must remain in the realm of speculation. No primary sources provide this kind of insight. However, the study of documents in the monastery archive and other records enables understanding of specific interactions between the chaplains, the mother superiors, the nuns, and the persons whom they enslaved. These stories are as varied as the people described. Generalizations, then, need no longer prevail, for by closely examining historical evidence, the presence of persons enslaved by Georgetown Visitation can be shown without justification or embellishment.

98. Nalezty, *The History of Enslaved People*, 27–33. The oldest structure still on campus (called the “slave cabin” since the early twentieth century) pre-dates the convent’s 1799 establishment. According to oral tradition, the convent housed slaves there, but its original purpose was not for quartering slaves, but, rather, as a dairy for storing milk. Before acquisition by the convent sometime after 1830, it was owned by the Threlkeld family who farmed and raised sheep and cattle. Primary sources confirm that a dairy stood near the Threlkeld’s manor house, the foundation of which survives under tennis courts installed in the 1930s. The location near the house, its physical design, and documentary evidence indicate that the Threlkeld’s slaves likely worked in this building.

99. Max Page, *Why Preservation Matters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 129–161.

100. These three outbuildings stood between what today is the Senior Lodge and Cub Shop.

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