

Enslaved People

During the antebellum years, black people in Maryland--slave and free--experienced the agony of slavery's slow death, but not the deliverance. The middle ground [Maryland] imparted an extra measure of bitterness to enslavement, set close boundaries on the liberty of the ostensibly free, and played havoc with bonds of love, friendship and family among slaves and between them and free black people.

Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Gound: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century*, 1987, p. 24.

Expansion of Slavery at Epsom

In 1829, Henry Banning Chew and his wife Harriet Ridgely Chew were bequeathed 19 enslaved people and hundreds of acres of land under the terms of the will of Governor Charles Carnan Ridgely. According to the will, these enslaved individuals were to be manumitted once they reached the age of 25 (women) and 28 (men).

Over the next three decades, Henry Chew altered his population of enslaved people through purchase, sale, and temporary hiring. Between 1830 and 1835 Chew purchased and hired at least 12 enslaved people from nearby slaveholders and his father, and he received two young women after further divisions of the Ridgely estate. Between 1830 and 1840, he sold at least 7 people. In at least one case, Chew held as “collateral” an enslaved man Perry, whose documented slaveholder, Patrick Lynch, owed Chew \$100. He was held and forced to work at Epsom until the debt was paid. Enslaved black women at Epsom also gave birth to children, who were to remain enslaved until they reached the age of manumission. Although a number them passed away at very young ages, sometimes mere months after their birth, between 1830 and 1848, at least 24 children were born into slavery at Epsom.

Henry Chew’s management of the enslaved labor force was shaped by several factors, including his need for additional labor, the needs of neighboring farm owners for additional labor, and the desire to rid himself of difficult or problematic enslaved workers. At Epsom, as throughout the South, enslaved people were treated as pieces of property, human chattel to be bought and sold.



Perry Hall Slave Quarters with Fieldhands at Work by Francis Guy, ca.1805 . Maryland Historical Society. Perry Hall, located about 11 miles east of Epsom, was owned after 1822 by Harry Dorsey Gough Carroll, who was married to Harriet Ridgely Chew’s sister, Eliza Ridgely Carroll, and was a frequent Epsom visitor.

Separation of Families

For enslaved African American families, slavery represented a cycle of continuous displacement and loss. The enslaved at Epsom were people who had been separated from their families at Hampton. Each of the 20 people who was taken to Epsom in 1829 had lost a mother, sister, friend, or partner. 4 year-old Henry, bequeathed to Chew and his wife in 1829, was separated from his mother Phoebe Cummins, who in 1829 was sent, not to Epsom with him, but to an estate of one of Charles Carnan Ridgely’s numerous heirs.

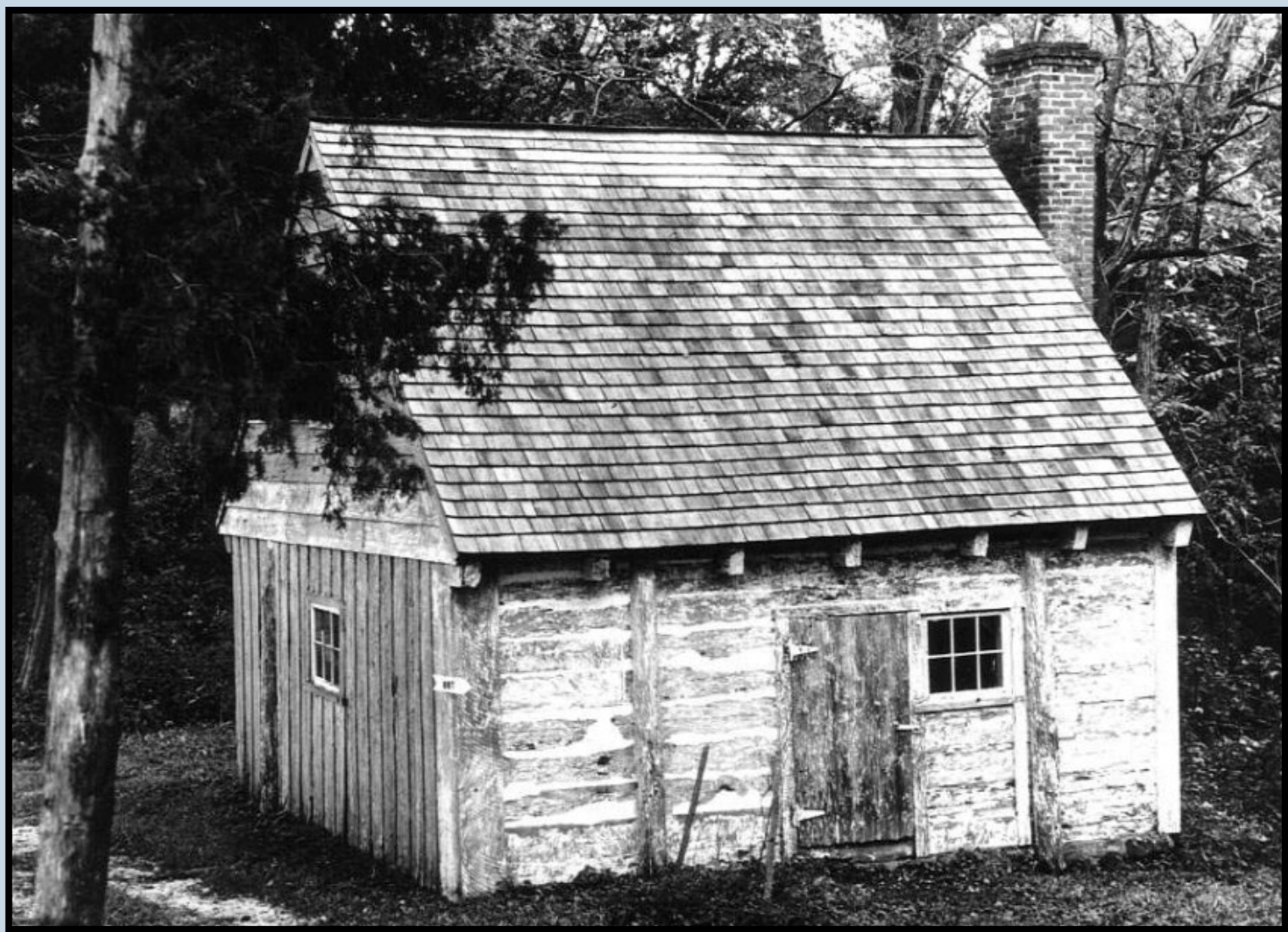
At Epsom, families were also separated. When Chew sold Delia, she was separated from her young daughters. Her daughter Sally, was sold one month after her. When Chew sold George, Dick, Shade Brown, and “rented” out Milly’s daughter, Sally, their absences were felt and mourned by those they labored, lived, and built relationships with. The practice of gradual manumission continued to separate families, even as some people were freed. Daniel and Anne Harris, a free black couple who were formerly enslaved at Hampton and gardened and did laundry for wages at Epsom, were forced to leave their 3 year old daughter, Mary, until they could purchase her freedom from Ridgely heir, Harry Dorsey Gough Carroll. Anne Sophia Potter, manumitted in 1835, was separated from her son, John, for one year until she was able to purchase his freedom.

Day-To-Day Resistance

Henry Chew learned early as a slaveholder that solidarity existed among free and enslaved black people in Baltimore County. In this letter to his father, Chew describes an instance of resistance among both free and enslaved African Americans at the Ridgely Forges:

“I find that the negroes appear determined to declare their independence and set Dorsey at defiance. I hear the abolition Society have taken them by the hand and also that the free negroes here joined to protect them. And today Henry the inefficient manger has come in from the Forges saying every one between 25 and 28 to 45 has left the Forges with every thing they could lay their hands on in his absence.”

Henry B. Chew to Benjamin Chew, Jr. August 4, 1829, *Chew Papers*, HSP.



A slave quarter from Sotterly Plantation, Saint Mary’s County.

Enslaved people at Epsom resisted slavery, and Henry Banning Chew, every day. Various expressions of resistance emerge from Chew’s entries in his Account and Memoranda books,

where Chew would note who was absent and when, who was “pretending” to be sick, who was “pretending” to work, or who ran away. Unexplained events which enraged Chew, when hams went missing, when fences were left open and livestock escaped, and when the Chews’ cellar was broken into, may have been other expressions of defiance as well. Between 1829 and 1840, at least three men—Shade Brown, John, and George-- ran away.

MANAGER WANTED, as Overseer on a farm near Baltimore. A married man, whose wife is capable of taking charge of the dairy, would be preferred. Apply to **HENRY B. CHEW**, Epsom, 7 1/2 miles on the York Turnpike. Who offers a **REWARD OF TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS** for the apprehension and return to him of a Mulatto Boy named **JOHN**, who ran away from him on Sunday week. He is of very light complexion, blue eyes, and has light brown hair, which is long: is about 5 feet 7 or 8 inches high, and has the joint off the fore finger of his hand. n333.*

Baltimore Sun, 23 November 1840.

Four Enslaved Lives at Epsom

Delia

Tuesday 14 July
Went to the Andre Barnes (Northampton) for father's share of the Plant
Grove - purchased a negro female named Delia - 12 years old, and
a white male for \$24.35 - returned after dark - this afternoon
B. Richardson came back from Chestertown with negro Delia
and 3 children - female, 4 years of age -

February 14, 1832

This afternoon B. Richardson came back from Chestertown with negro Delia & her 3 children, Sarah, Lydia & John.

Delia was enslaved on Epsom farm from February 14, 1832, until September 27, 1834. Before she was relocated to Epsom, Delia was enslaved on an estate owned by the Chew family in Chestertown, Md. She and her children, Sarah, Lydia, and John were sold to Henry B. Chew by his father, Benjamin Chew, Jr., as “slaves for life,” a status that distinguished them from the rest of Henry Chew’s enslaved population, who were all “term slaves.” The family was decimated by the early deaths of Lydia and John. Delia and Sarah were then split up, as Henry Chew sold them to different slaveholders.

Excerpts from the *Chew Papers*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

- **Delia and Shade Brown:** *Henry B. Chew, Account Book, 1831-1833.*
- **Phoebe Blackson:** *Henry B. Chew, Blotter or Memoranda Book, 1827-1837.*

Shade Brown

Tuesday 3 July - this morning Chas. Carnan came to Epsom stating he had sold my negro Shade Brown to Austin Woolfolk for \$125 - & delivered him to my written authority given by me yesterday.

July 3, 1831

This morning Chas. Carnan came to Epsom stating he had sold my negro Shade Brown to Austin Woolfolk for \$125, & delivered him to my written authority given by me yesterday.

It is likely that on the night of May 6th, 1831, Shade Brown made his attempt towards freedom, and fled from Epsom Farm. Roughly two months passed before, on Friday July 1, 1831, Charles Carnan captured and arrested Brown. Two days later Carnan sold Shade for \$125 to the notorious Baltimore City slave trader, Austin Woolfolk, with written authority from Chew. Punished for running away, Shade Brown was most likely sold to slave traders in the South, a dreaded destination for the enslaved people of this period.

Phoebe Blackson

Thursday July 11. clear mild thawing day
Hands cutting & sledding Kiln wood - Negro Phoebe's child
Jacob died last night supposed to have been overlaid by her
Friday July 12. cloudy damp - rain falling at
dark froze as it fell - Phoebe's child buried this morning
- 4th burial - hands cutting & sledding wood -

February 11, 1836

Hands cutting & sledding Kiln wood. Negro Phoebe’s child Jacob died last night supposed to have been overlaid by her.

Phoebe Blackson was enslaved at Ridgely’s Forge until June 10, 1835, when a number of enslaved people were distributed to Chew under the terms of the Ridgely will. Phoebe was 18 years old when she was taken to Epsom and arrived with 9 year old Mary. On December 23, 1835 she gave birth to triplets named Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. By February 24, 1836, all of the triplets had died. Jacob, may have been accidentally smothered by his mother during the night of February 11. The deaths of Abraham and Isaac, on the 20th and 24th, respectively, prompt questions of whether this is also a story of infanticide committed by a woman who decided to spare her children from the violence she had endured in her 18 years. In October 1836, Phoebe married Lewis, a free black man who had also been enslaved at Ridgelys’ iron forges, but began working for wages at Epsom after his manumission. In 1840, Phoebe gave birth to a son, Giles Williams. In 1842, at age 25, Phoebe was manumitted, and in that year she took her two year-old son, Giles, with her to freedom.

Kitty Barton

NEGRO COOK FOR SALE.--A healthy young WOMAN 21 years of age, to serve nearly 4 years; has been the cook for a gentleman in the county for some time. Is sober and honest--has two children, one a girl 3 years old, to serve until she is 25; the other, a boy, to serve until he is 28; price of all three \$200. Apply at the office of the Sun. 11*

Baltimore Sun, 25 January 1844.

NEGRO COOK FOR SALE— A healthy young WOMAN 21 years of age, to serve nearly 4 years; has been a cook for a gentleman in the county for some time. Is sober and honest—has two children, one a girl 3 years old, to serve until she is 25; the other, a boy, to serve until he is 28; price of all three \$200. Apply at the office of the Sun.

Kitty came to Epsom from Hampton as a child under the terms of the Ridgely will. In 1844, at the age of 21, she requested a different “situation” for herself and her two children, a daughter named Sarah and a son named John Wesley. Chew attempted to sell her together with her two children, and advertised in the Baltimore *Sun* for the sale of a 21 year old woman for \$200, skilled as a cook, and her 4 year-old daughter and 2 year-old son. In private correspondence, Chew indicated that Kitty’s children “were not to be separated from their mother.” Kitty, however, was not sold, and remained enslaved at Epsom with her children until her manumission in 1848. Chew’s account records indicate that Kitty was working at Epsom into the mid-1850s at \$5 per month. Kitty’s son, John Wesley, became free when he enlisted in the Union Army in March, 1864.