

Updates to 2021 Features

November 2021

When Belle Grove began publishing features on enslaved individuals in January 2021, it was done so with the commitment to move ahead with the research completed to date, hoping more information would come to light. This was preferable to never starting the project for fear that all possible information was not known. Happily, more information has indeed turned up, and it forms the basis of this update feature. There are updates on Shadrach, Lucy, Suckey, Frank, and Molly. These derive from information from Montpelier, Isaac Hite Jr.'s Commonplace Book, Federal Slave Census Records, and family letters.

SHADRACH (January 2021)

New information shifts the interpretation of Shadrach's job at Belle Grove. In the first feature, the interpretation of the available evidence from Montpelier's records pointed to his being highly valued and perhaps being in a supervisory position. James Madison Sr. had written down distribution lists of shoes given to certain enslaved workers. That little scrap of paper was initially interpreted as being "the" list of "expensive" shoes given to enslaved people who worked in public-facing roles. Therefore, it was suggested he might have been a steward in the house at Belle Grove. After publishing, a second list became available and it was realized he received shoes that were "regular price."

Further information also firmed up in the mention in Montpelier records of "Shadrach's tract"—a land-management unit, likely of tobacco—was smaller than a quarter. White overseers managed Quarters, which bore their names. (An exception is Sawney's Quarter, Sawney being a well-known, high-visibility, enslaved person at Montpelier.) A "driver," a term meaning a slave driver, worked a "tract." There is unpublished evidence of "Shadrach's tract" at Montpelier, which means his supervisory skills were employed in the field, not in

SCHEDULE 2. Slave Inhabitants in District 16ⁿ in the County of Fredrick 17ⁿ State of Virginia, enumerated by me, on the 21st day of Oct, 1850. James G. Carter Ass't Marshal.

Number of Slaves	DESCRIPTION.			Fugitives from the States.	Number manumitted.	Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic.
	Age.	Sex.	Color.			
1	7	M	W			
2	8	M	B			
3	20	M	B			
4	6	M	B			
5	83	M	B			
6	18	M	B			
7	21	M	B			
8	21	M	B			
9	64	M	B			
10	49	M	B			
11	16	M	B			

the house. With Isaac Hite Jr. just establishing his cultivation of Belle Grove lands, including experimenting with tobacco, Shadrach was a valuable addition to the skill set of people Hite had to start up his plantation operations.

LUCY (February 2021)

One of the greatest challenges to researchers working on the 1700s and 1800s is readability of handwriting in old records, faded ink, and discolored paper. An entry in the Commonplace Book for 1834 had been interpreted as an enslaved woman named "Liney," bearing a child named Thornton. Given that name was not correlated anywhere else, and Thornton's birth was being researched, the original handwritten entry was reexamined and revealed the mother's name to be Lucy.



Isaac Hite Jr.'s Commonplace Book, Virginia Museum of History and Culture (Ms5.5.H67375.1_27a).

One theme of the February newsletter was the "Lucy" name being documented back to 1733 at Montpelier, and how the re-use of family names, especially of the first generation of the enslaved,

Excerpt of 1850 Slave Schedule of the U.S. Census

provided a sense of stability to the established enslaved communities. In the 1840s, Belle Grove community had two Lucys, and either could have been Thornton's mother. This name is used at Montpelier and Belle Grove for 100 years, which makes it special.

The 1850 Federal Slave Census of Ann Hite at Belle Grove confirms Lucy's older brother Abraham was alive and age 50 (see more in Thornton's entry) as he is listed as one of the few Black persons (as opposed to "M" for "Mulatto") on the property at that time. Born from the same mother, at a time when the enslaved population at Belle Grove was small, it is possible Lucy herself was Black. That census is shown above for the

enslaved men. The lines of this census form listing females is blurred and illegible.

SUCKEY (May 2021)

Initially, the last date found for Suckey was stated as the birth of her child in 1797, and there was no conjecture on how long she might have lived. Now, mentions of her have been correlated in letters from Ann Hite to her newly married daughter Ann Hite William in 1826, Her name also appears in an 1827 Frederick County certificate exempting her enslaver from paying property tax on her, along with nine others, who were aged. Therefore, we know she lived until at least age 64.

Mrs. Hite’s eldest daughter had married attorney Phillip Williams and was living in Woodstock. The mother was loaning her daughter enslaved Belle Grove people to set up her housekeeping routine. Suckey was 63-years-old—three years past the age when the Virginia enslaved were permitted to stop working.

On May 10: “Old Sucky too has requested me to let her pay you a visit as she thinks she can help you and Eveline.”¹ A week later, on May 17, “We have sent Frank up for the girls and Suky, who we now want to make cheese.”² Frank Thornton, the Belle Grove

carriage driver, was running people back and forth. By mid-May milk was available from sheep and cows who had produced young that spring. Suckey may have worked with the dairy cows, or in the kitchen, but it can be affirmed that Suckey was a talented cheese maker.

1 and 2 168 WFCHS Box 1, Correspondence 1821-1826, Stewart Bell Jr. Archive, Handley Regional Library.

FRANK THORNTON (June 2021)

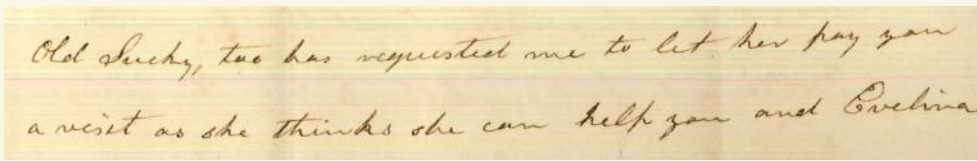
At the time of the newsletter that honored Frank, the last known date for Frank was the January 1837 estate inventory at age 70. Researchers of Ann Hite focused on the few enslaved people mentioned in her 1851 estate inventory and he was not there. However, the October 1850 Federal Census Slave Schedule found Mrs. Hite owning 26 enslaved persons. These census forms only list age, sex, and race categories, but an 83-year-old man born the same year as Frank was listed. This indeed must be Frank as no others fit the criteria. He achieved a grand age but he is not in her 1851 estate inventory. If he had been given to a relative, the chances of his living to 93 to be recorded on the 1860 census are slim. The Slave Schedule also lists Frank as “M” for “Mulatto,” which will be useful in research on his twelve children.

MOLLY (September 2021)

This issue’s discussion around Molly’s origins raised the possibility she entered the Valley already enslaved in 1731 with the Hite caravan from Pennsylvania, thus suggesting she was a founding Black settler of the Valley. The Hites are the acknowledged first legal European heritage settlers to permanently live in the Valley. Scholarship on the Native American population gives 1690 as the last date for permanent settlement by Native peoples in the Valley, as shifting territorial claims by the various nations resulted in the land being used as a shared hunting ground and passageway north and south along the Great Warrior Road. There is discussion that a tiny number of isolated European heritage families might have crossed the Blue Ridge from the east to build homes in the Valley, here or there,

Belle Grove dedicates this issue in memory of John Adamson, long-time Belle Grove volunteer, docent, and Board Member. John devoted himself to studying the history of enslavement in the U.S. He made sure to include the point of view of the enslaved in his tours, and was an avid reader of these features. His unexpected passing leaves a big hole in the Belle Grove community. All of us extend condolences to his family.

This issue produced by Robin Young and Kristen Laise



NEXT MONTH WE WILL HONOR

Harry born December 4, 1787

Research is underway about the 276 men, women, and children enslaved by the Hite family at Belle Grove Plantation in Middletown (Frederick County), Virginia. Enslaved individuals made the plantation a success. Since 1967, Belle Grove has been a 501c3, nonprofit historic site and museum. [Understanding and uplifting the contributions of the enslaved community is an ongoing effort and priority.](#) If you wish to help, consider volunteering or donating to Belle Grove, Inc. at the address below or online at www.bellegrove.org/support/donate.

Belle Grove Plantation

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