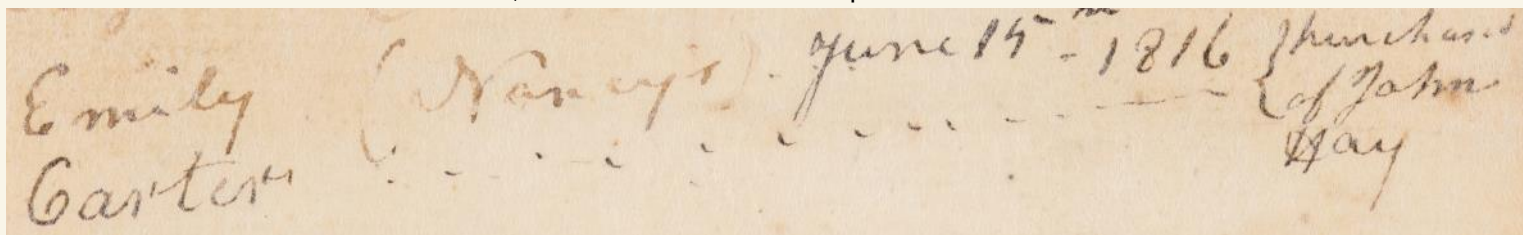


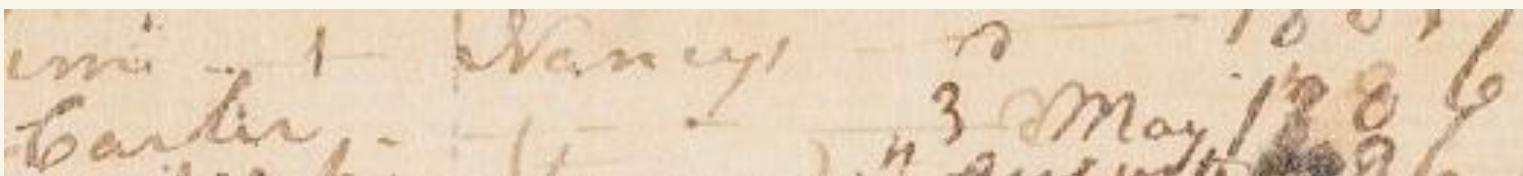
# CARTER BORN MAY 3, 1806?

May 2022

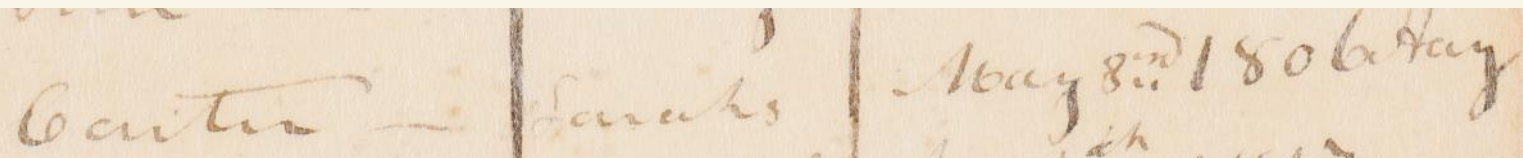
In deciding to discuss Carter's life, the first step is to determine if three mentions of the name "Carter" in the Hite records refer to one, or two, or three men of that name, who lived and died enslaved by the Hite family. The record book lists the name three times, in 1816, 1827, and sometime after 1836. These records differ in completeness and chronology. Twice his birthdate is listed as May 3, 1806, or does it read 1786? The records are shown here so you can try to decipher them. If you wish, post your interpretation on the Belle Grove Facebook page or email [info@bellegrove.org](mailto:info@bellegrove.org). Under these images are tips to help you, information on the source material, and some of the techniques we use to make decisions.



Entry from page 22b in 1816



Entry from page 24a in c. 1825



Entry from page 27a after 1836

Images from Isaac Hite Jr.'s *Commonplace Book*, Virginia Museum of History and Culture (Mss5.5.H67375.1).

## WHERE DO THESE IMAGES COME FROM?

Historically, Virginia taxed heads of households on property owned, from mirrors to buggies to horses, and also enslaved human beings. The act of taxation required record keeping and counting, and from the desire to pay only as much as necessary, property owners, particularly large land and human chattel owners, kept handwritten notes—often in thin, bound ledger books. From 1619 to 1865, such books sat on shelves, in drawers, in storage chests, and libraries around the Commonwealth.

Historic sites are lucky to have any records that survived. Given that Belle Grove was sold out of the Hite family in 1860 and was occupied as a Union headquarters in the Civil War, we are fortunate to have access

to as much as we do.

This *Commonplace Book*—a bound volume of miscellaneous notes from Isaac Hite Jr. and his family, including a ledger of enslaved people, is a key primary source. It is stained, written in various hands, amended with life events without dates, and contains conundrums. Some entries are clearly catch-up record keeping entered weeks later; others are prompt and detailed.

The ledger runs from 1783, when the Madisons deeded the main group of enslaved people were deeded to the Hites, to 1851 when Ann Hite died, a total of 63 years. It has no tidy ending, no wrap of enslaved people's fates.

*Continued next page*

## YOUR TOOLKIT OF TIPS



The *Commonplace Book* follows the pattern from left to right the name of enslaved and mother's name (if known), the date of birth, and then other notes. The entries are typically chronological and when chronology is broken, what does it mean? Sometimes purchased enslaved adults and children are entered into the date flow, breaking its sequence. Because the purchase date is often not noted, one technique researchers use is bracketing such an entry by the dates of events above and below it, to approximate a time frame. Usually, enslaved people born at Belle Grove have more complete and accurate birthdates than those purchased. Why might this be? Often the last parts of words like October read "Oct<sup>er</sup>" and numbers often 4<sup>th</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup>.

Over its range of years, the enslaved ledger was used for different functions, known only to the authors. Primarily, it was a purchase record and a birth record. It was an indifferent death ledger. It was an estate planning tool, with notations showing which enslaved people were given to Hite children reaching legal age or marry, as part of their inheritance.

At least two or three times, the succession of chronological dates is interrupted by tallies of wealth in human beings or potential people to be sold, such as in 1824 when the family needed cash. Sometimes knowing who was left after the sale of 1824 relies on the luck of seeing their name again in later lists.

The margins offer other tidbits, such as a one-off mention of Ann Hite's few separately held enslaved people, or the brief catalog of those older than 60 and thus tax exempt. The ledger offers family relationship information of only the mother's name, never the father's. If the mother's name is not listed, it could be a dead-end for researchers.

No records indicate any Belle Grove enslaved persons were sold with the land to the new owners in 1860, and while the population had dwindled, the fate and destination of the remaining few are a mystery once they pass out of the pages of the Commonplace Book.

*This issue produced by Robin Young and Kristen Laise with proofreading by Craig Morris.*

## WHO WAS CARTER'S MOTHER?



What determination would you make? In only one of Carter's records, his mother is listed as Sarah. If Carter was born in 1806, there are two Sarahs on the list to consider:

One Sarah, born at Montpelier in 1766, was 40 years old in 1806. Her first child was born in 1783, and she had six children prior to 1806, including twins born seven months before Carter's birthdate.

Another Sarah was born in 1778, was 28 years old in 1806, and had her first child George in 1798, and then Sally and Winney. Her sons Abraham and Moses were born in

1806 and 1807, so she could not have given birth to Carter in May 1806 as well. She and her children were bought from Mr. P. Flood.

Another consideration are seven children born from 1810 to 1819 with "Sarah" listed as their mother's name. By 1819, the two Sarahs in the Commonplace Book were 52 years and 41 years, respectively. Which Sarah bore these children 1810-1819? Could a THIRD Sarah have been purchased and borne Carter and the six? Sarah was a common name. Was she missed among the almost 700 entries? How would you interpret this?

## REINVESTIGATING THE COMMONPLACE BOOK

Dr. Jacob Blosser, a Belle Grove employee, first transcribed the Commonplace Book in 1991 by looking at the original document, which is in the collection of the Virginia Museum of History and Culture.

In 2019, generous donations made it possible for Belle Grove to buy high resolution digital images of the manuscript for research purposes. For the last several years, Wayne Sulfridge, a Belle Grove Board

member and researcher, has led the effort to retranscribe the lists of the people Isaac Hite Jr. enslaved, assisted by Executive Director Kristen Laise, historian Robin Young, and archaeologist Matthew Greer. Various entries are subject to different interpretations, and teamwork helps determine a final choice, which may be reevaluated if more information comes to light.

## WHAT WAS CARTER'S FATE?



Two of the entries for Carter note he was purchased from John Hay. This is a third clue.

The list where it first appears was from 1816, which means he was bought at age 10. It was uncommon to sell or buy a boy without his family, but not impossible. In Isaac Hite's estate inventory, which was done in early 1837, all his property is

listed. This included human property, and Carter is listed at age 30 with the note that he was a blacksmith. Could he have come to Belle Grove at a young age to be an apprentice?

Otherwise, we don't know if Carter had a family, what his fate was after Isaac Hite's death, or when he died. Only through further research such as this can an individual's life be reconstructed.

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 P.O. Box 537, Middletown, VA 22645 or online at [www.bellegrove.org/support/donate](http://www.bellegrove.org/support/donate).

## Belle Grove Plantation

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**NEXT MONTH WE WILL HONOR  
Daniel born December 29, 1771**