



Untold Stories

OF BLACK MONTEVALLO



Vol 2, No. 12

Ed. note: This is the second in a series of Untold Stories that begin to remember the story of slavery in the Montevallo area. Each looks at some aspect of enslavement on the King plantation. Next month's instalment tells the story of Sukey, a woman enslaved by Edmund King who went to extraordinary lengths to keep the female side of her family whole.

II. REMEMBERING SLAVERY: HONORING THE NAMES

Our ancestors who made it out of slavery are as close as we have to superheroes. . . . Their names need to be said. We need to honor them. -- Peter Datcher, Harpersville family historian, on his enslaved ancestors

An inventory of Edmund King's assets shows that at the time of his death in 1863 he owned 28 persons of African descent. They are named in Will Book H, 16, housed in the Shelby County Museum & Archives. Children under the age of twenty accounted for half of the persons sold at a public sale. Most were purchased by King's white descendants.

Emancipation would come just two years later. These young people probably made it out of slavery. Further research will surely turn up important information about the lives and experiences of these members of the first-freed generation. For now, their names at least can be said.

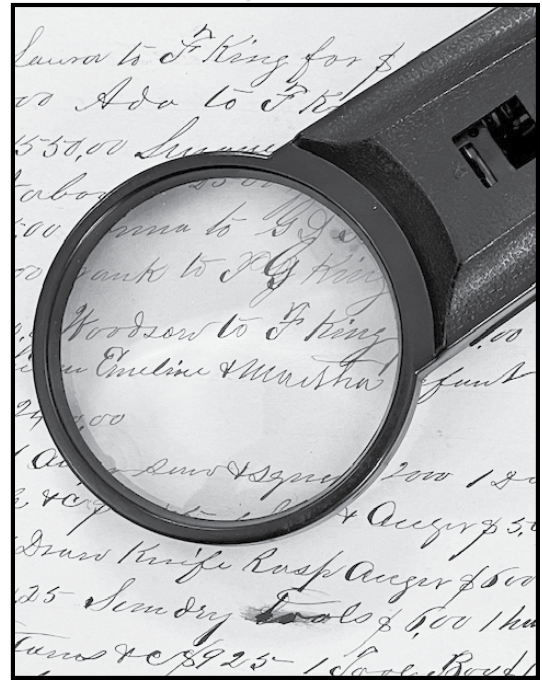
We have their names because King's executors compiled a detailed inventory of everything of value in his personal estate, from spoons to candles and table cloths, from ox carts to oxen to enslaved Africans.

These inventories make for painful reading. They display with repulsive clarity the brutality of the slavery system. Enslaved persons are listed by first name only, sex, and age right after financial assets and just before the livestock. You go directly from three-year-old Emeline ("Emeline F 3") to "3 Mules, 3 Horses. . . ." It hurts to see human beings treated as property along with spoons, table clothes, and livestock. These records evoke the trauma of enslaved families always in danger of being split apart. The risk of family separation was often at its highest when an owner died.

But they also offer glimpses of the ones who may have made it out of slavery. They are Datcher's "superheroes," and their names can now be honored.

Jim Doyle, 4, and Frizzie, 1, are the "youngest children" of Frank, 55, and Mary, 34. Their older siblings may have already been sold or perhaps gifted to King's sons and daughters when they received their "portion" at majority or marriage. Jim Doyle and Frizzie were purchased by Edmund's son, Frank Ragan King. He purchased three other children, for whom he paid \$5,000: Ada, 12, Woodson, 11, and Lora, 8. He lived his entire life in Montevallo, dying in 1884. The five children he is known to have enslaved probably came into freedom right here in Montevallo. Can some part of their stories be recovered?

The inventory of the assets of another of Edmund's sons, Nathaniel, provides names of others who probably lived to



"Simanthy and her two children Emeline & Martha Infant 10 days old." Will Book H, 16, p. 862

see emancipation. In 1863 Nathaniel owned "1 Negro man Alfred aged 35 years" valued at \$3000. (The same value was assigned to Nathaniel's carriage.) Six enslaved persons, ranging in age from 2 to 22, had previously been sent to Bienville Parish in New Orleans to be sold by Nathaniel's agent. Their stories are unknown but not their names: Aggy, 24, Tom, 22, Adam, 21, John Wily, 16, Jim, 4, Andrew 2.

Julia's "youngest children" -- Easter, 15, Ella, 2, and Georgiana, 1 -- were sold to Shelby King. He seems to have owned a cotton plantation near Montevallo around this time. Julia's descendants may still live in this area. Other young people sold for the benefit of King's heirs in 1863 include Henry, 19, Anderson, 12, Lucy, 15, Minerva, 14, Frank, 10, Fanny, 8.

A deeply sad story embedded in the bill of sale reveals a painful truth about the slavery system. Martha was just ten days old when she was sold along with her mother, Sammantha, and sister Emeline. At inventory time she was unborn. Imagine, if you can, what it would be like to deliver a daughter into the world with no hope of delivering her from enslavement.

They were born into slavery, these persons whose names can now be said. Their pain must not be forgotten. Estate records tell stories of the grief and loss of family separations, yes. But they also hold out the hope of recovering traces of the first generation to know freedom. Let us now begin to remember the lives of the newly freed.

Thanks are due to Bruce Cooper, research assistant at the Shelby County Museum & Archives, for help locating and interpreting Will Book inventories. Peter Datcher is quoted by E. Sparacino, "Saying their names: Museum's new index serves as tool for slave ancestry research," Shelby County Reporter, June 27, 2022. Submitted by Kathy King and Anita Stewart Sims on behalf of the Montevallo Legacy Project. Contact us at MontevalloLegacy@gmail.com.

