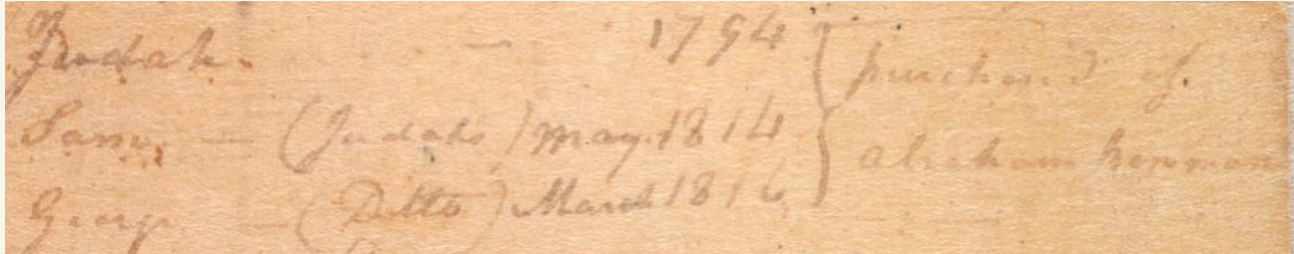


JUDAH

BORN 1794

July 2022



Judah is the only enslaved person whose death we have a record of the Hites lamenting. Interpretation of her life has been a popular Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park program by Ranger Shannon Moeck since 2016. Judah inspired Dr. Brian Johnson's 2019 novel, *Send Judah First*, with an artist's rendition of Judah by Megan Whitfield on its cover. Nearly 140 years after her death, she still draws us in. Composing this feature, we thought everything we could know was known, but we were wrong, in a very pleasant way, when we discovered Judah named her children almost exactly the same as her mother-in-law named hers. What could this mean? Read on to follow the clue.



DISCOVERING JUDAH'S FAMILY

We only know about Judah's life once she was purchased by the Hites from Isaac Hite Jr.'s cousin Abraham Bowman in 1817.

She became pregnant with her first child at 19, and delivered Sam at age 20 in May 1814. She was pregnant soon again with George, born in March 1816. She arrived at Belle Grove pregnant, between November 1816 and August 28, 1817, when Marcus was born. In the Hite records, birthdate entry including day, month, and year is most typically found for children born there.¹

Beginning in 1817, Judah named her next two children, born at Belle Grove, for Anthony and his mother Milly. Only when comparing the order, and repetition of names with Milly's, did researchers realize these were names reaching back to the start of Montpelier and newly arrived enslaved Africans.

Sam and Anthony were two of the first enslaved boys at Montpelier in 1733; and George a man on that same list. In every generation for 80 years there was an Anthony. This proclamation of kinship, of belonging and survival, was waiting for us to recognize it. There were two, possibly three, firstborn sons named Sam, the reuse of names Jonathan, and that of the great-grandfather George.²

While Anthony's family can be traced, Judah's origins are not yet known. Her mother-in-law, Milly, was also wrenched from her kin; her destiny to form a bridge across time and space between Montpelier and Belle Grove. Also, in short order, three other women who came from Montpelier, named their daughters Milly. She, too, had status. Could she have been the not-yet-found midwife? Names had discreet power.

1 Isaac Hite Jr.'s Commonplace Book, Virginia Museum of History and Culture (Mss5.5.H67375.1), p. 23a.

2 Chambers, Douglas B., *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia*, University Press of Mississippi, 2009, Appendix C.



WHAT WERE JUDAH'S JOBS?

Ann Hite's letters talk about Judah as the cook. Initially, researchers thought she replaced a cook who aged out or died; Virginia records are full of those transactions. Coinciding with births of Hite wives' children, there is a pattern of women with small children purchased to be wet nurses, and this dynamic may have affected Judah's purchase. A healthy woman of good character with small children was ideal, and how much better to obtain one from a neighbor, where her character was known, than from a newspaper ad.

When Judah came, Ann Hite had a one-year-old son and knew she was again pregnant with a child due the winter of 1818. There were eight more in the nursery and schoolroom under age 13. Ann bore 10, Judah 12, children. The difference was Ann always had help and support at hand, whereas Judah was the help and received none herself, beyond her spouse and his mother.

From the days of the first wet nurse at Belle Grove, Abba's (see virtual.bellegrove.org), testimony tells us women serving as wet nurses transitioned into kitchen duties. We know from Ann Hite's 1836 letter calling Judah "my cook" that she, too, remained in the house.

A large plantation's cook was at the center of household affairs: busy, on her feet all day, personally preparing complicated dishes, while supervising children who shelled peas, gathered eggs, and turned the rotisserie handle—no activity was automated. Bread was mixed, kneaded, set to rise, and put into the oven. Sauces and creams were hand whipped. By 1821, the weaning of the last Hite baby probably meant Judah could work full time in the kitchen because she was not breast feeding two babies at once, one white, one Black, but just her own.

In 1821, she was halfway through her childbearing—she still bore seven more over the next 15 years. At least

half that time, she performed kitchen labor with a belly swollen in pregnancy. Once born, each child required multiple feedings during the day, each lasting a half hour on average. Perhaps there was a cradle in the corner, and Judah nursed when she could, but this could take four hours off her work day.

Did women of the enslaved community help each other by nursing one another's child on occasion? It is an invisible dynamic, never mentioned in the history books—but a pertinent one. Women might have stopped by the kitchen to nurse the infant there, or gone to the quarter where the baby was being tended. Judah was probably not the only woman requiring such help, nor Anthony the first babe. Likely, personal maids and midwives who could not absent themselves to nurse, were also involved. It was to everyone's advantage for babies to survive, so likely it was a discreet, ad hoc domestic solution, tacitly tolerated.

Evidently Judah was not so elite that she could not be loaned out to Ann's married daughter one holiday season to do laundry when she was short handed. Gone a week or so, Ann writes, "Anthony is very impatient for the return of his wife as the children are very troublesome to him at night he complains that he can get no rest for them."¹

1 Documents 26 and 27, 168 WFCHS Box 1, Correspondence 1821-1826. Belle Grove collection, Stewart Bell Archives, Handley Library.



WHO WERE JUDAH'S CHILDREN?

The enslaved people at Belle Grove are on the first page of the January 1837 inventory of property for Isaac Hite's estate. Excluding eight elders, there are 34. Ten of these, or roughly a third, are Judah and Anthony's family. Imagine how this one union laid the foundation for Hite wealth in the mid-1830s! Reflect on how Judah's sweating over hot ovens and the food-prep table, and birthing a dozen babies, gained her no wealth or ease, the benefits of her labors going only to her enslavers.

The 1828-1830 deaths of Cornelius Baldwin Hite and his wife rocked Belle Grove at many levels. Not only

did they leave behind young children, but the break-up of their Cedar Grove household resulted in the sale of their enslaved people, including a six-year-old boy. Judah's ten-year-old son Elijah was bought back by Ann Hite and returned to the Manor House, but others were sold away without a trace.

Fully half of Judah and Anthony's children were given to family, baby Jonathan, died and five remained. No records of progeny trace from the boys, as usual. Maria is the only daughter known to bear: Emelia, (1844), Amanda (1847), Millie (1848), and Ann Eliza, (1850). To read profiles on Judah's daughters Milly and Mary, visit virtual.bellegrove.org.

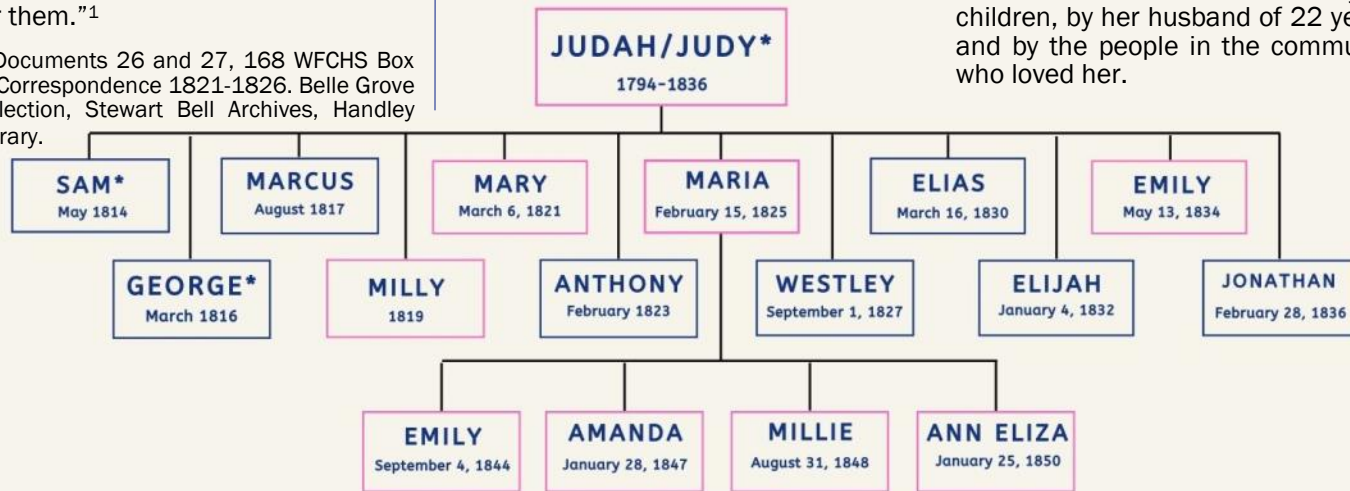
HOW DID JUDAH'S LIFE END?

In the 1800s, all childhood contagious diseases were endemic. Even smallpox vaccinations were not given until the Civil War armies needed them. Virginia records and historical databases inform of epidemics moving through its counties. A wave of influenza lingered in Frederick County during the mid-1830s.

The final time Judah is mentioned in a letter by Ann is when she laments to a cousin that her cook has died.

"During the last two weeks my Cook was dangerously ill with a complaint one of great suffering a violent pleurisy in the first instance terminating in an inflammation of the heart which was most distressing. She finally went under the disease on Saturday morning leaving 12 children; the youngest only five weeks old. I deplore her loss to her younger children more than my own inconvenience which is very considerable..." Judah died April 2, 1836.

Judah was mourned as mother by 12 children, by her husband of 22 years, and by the people in the community who loved her.



* Purchased from Abraham Bowman

This issue produced by Robin Young and Kristen Laise with proofreading by Craig Morris and family tree design by Elizabeth Dalton.

**NEXT MONTH
WE WILL HONOR
Jack and William born 1802**

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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