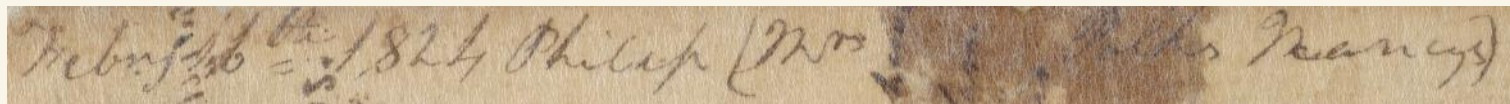


Peg born 1725
Tom born 1740
Cuffe born 1761
Little Tom born c. 1762
Penny born c. 1763
Suckey born c. 1764

Ben c. born 1765
Milly c. born 1772
Nancy c. born 1794
John born c. 1806
Phillip born 1814

January 2023



Isaac Hite Jr.'s Commonplace Book, Virginia Museum of History and Culture (Mss5.5.H67375.1_23b),

The enslaved people in the deepest shadows at Belle Grove never belonged to Isaac Hite Jr., but to his second wife, Ann Tunstall Maury, through women in her family. Eleven people legally enslaved by her grandmother, Mary Grymes, mother, Mary Maury, and Ann herself, helped raise Ann and may have come to Belle Grove with her. Our effort to trace their lives perhaps raises more questions than answers, as it demonstrates how legal tiffs and inheritance law impacted enslaved populations.

Tom, Peg, Cuffe, Little Tom, Penny, Suckey, and Ben are noted in Orange County records of 1781 deeds from Ann's grandparents' sale of 200-acre Halifarm to her parents; Milly appears in late 1790s deeds. For some individuals there are birthdates and the order of the names suggested relationships. Two people, Nancy, and son Phillip born February 16, 1814, were written in the margins of page 24a in the Isaac Hite Jr.'s Commonplace Book, sideways as an aide mémoire, but not a part of the main record.

"My Negro man John" was to be allowed to choose in his master in the January 5, 1851 will of Ann Tunstall Hite. "Man" implies someone over age 25, and John was probably the last survivor, possibly a son of a woman who arrived alongside Ann Maury to serve her. Nancy changes owners from Ann's mother, Mary Stith Maury, to her sister, Penelope Maury Polk, in 1812, as evidenced in an 1824 letter between Isaac Hite Jr. and his lawyer brother-in-law, John Hay, which discussed a like transaction for an unnamed person. If nothing changed in an enslaved person's status, there was no document that provided their name. Therefore, we can't determine family ties among the known and unknown names. There are also no death dates and the trail fades away by 1839.

BY DEED: INCREASE IN LAND...AND MISERY

Most of these 13 enslaved men, women, and infants whose names are known to us moved within the world of the Grymes-Maury-Hite families circa 1725 to 1851, but only a few facts exist. It is useful to understand the interpersonal universe of these two generations of white families, engulfed in a tempest that also tossed about the people they enslaved.

Ann T. Hite's grandfather, Ludwell Grymes, owned nearly 20,000 acres in several counties, including tracts in Fredericksburg. His wife, Mary Stith Dawson Grymes, may have held property in her own name from wealthy ancestors. The only will she makes protects an enslaved woman named Mareeah to whom she appears very attached. Their daughter, another Mary Grymes, married Rev. Walker Maury in 1776—Ann's parents.

In 1781, Ludwell Grymes gifted "for affection unto their son...seventeen slaves and their increase." Three of whom may go to daughter Hannah at her maturity.¹ The same day, November 14, Grymes sold to Rev. Walker Maury the 200 acres of Halifarm for the sum of £720, and the first seven enslaved people named above for another £200. It gave the young family a farm and buildings to operate a classical grammar school for boys. They deeded a life estate back to the Grymes to live on Halifarm.²

Perhaps the deal concealed a secret: was Maury aware that his land purchase was encumbered by mortgage bonds securing £400 in debts to two mercantile factors³ among others? The creditors soon pounced, and the county auctioned the land, which sold for £1300.⁴

Ludwell Grimes sued his son-in-law Maury. The debts were paid, the Maury family—and those they enslaved—experienced fear, turmoil, and hardship. Maury's 1788 death ended the suit in 1792, Grymes died 1795. At some point, the Orange Court ruled the Maury children should share interests in the 200-acre Halifarm, and later deeds reference a dower tract; it was divided six ways. Little Ann Maury's fortunes rose and fell repeatedly during this decade and the next.⁵

Bad blood between the generations seeps through the deed books. Mary Grymes skipped over her own daughter, Mary Grimes Maury, in favor of her granddaughter, Mary Maury Hay, when distributing Sarah, a daughter of Mareeah, who was freed outright in 1788.⁶ Still, we learn from all of this that the Grymes-Maury women had a generational tradition of owning enslaved men and women in their own names, while married.

HOW THE MAURY WOMEN BECAME ENSLAVERS

In January 1784, Rev. Walker Maury relocated his classical academy from Halifarm, Orange County to Williamsburg, in partnership with the College of William and Mary. Perhaps this opportunity seemed a more reliable prospect than a rural school on contested land. In any event, the classical academy was highly praised, employed staff, and developed a reputation for excellence with its 100 students.

Perhaps they divided the tasks of their now eight enslaved people, bringing a few with them to help with the children, and leaving the rest to labor on the farm to make a profit. And yet, in the autumn of 1786, Maury accepted the Rectorship of St. Paul's Parish in Norfolk and started another grammar school, again living in the rectory. Marshy Norfolk was ever at risk for yellow fever, and when Ann and her family were evacuated back home to Orange in the fall of 1788, she never saw her father again. He perished, heroically nursing sick parishioners, and was buried inside St. Paul's near the pulpit.

His widow endured the death of three of her children over the next decade, gathered the rest close, ran the farm and maybe her own school, keeping Little Tom, Penny, Ben, and her dignity safe from creditors. Suckey and Milly remained enslaved by her, according to records in which she hired them out for wages £110 that she kept.⁷ In 1795, Maury's estate settlement listed Tom, age 55, Peg, age 70, and Cuffy (Cuffe), age 34. They were 75% of his wealth. One male was sold to pay debts, the greatest fear of the enslaved people come true. Likely it was the most valuable, Cuffe, at £75.⁸

When widower Isaac Hite Jr. sought and won Ann Tunstall Maury's consent to marry him in 1803, "her

friends" pushed for a precontract protecting Ann from ever undergoing the jeopardy her mother had faced. Isaac's 1803 marriage agreement with Ann not only endowed her with a 331½ acre tract of land adjoining Cedar Creek, and \$10,000, if she released other claims on his estate, but stated he was "willing also that all the estate which the said Ann Tunstall Maury now hath or may acquire previous to the said intended marriage shall be held to her sole and separate use."⁹

No elite girl was sent into marriage in a distant home without a personal servant she knew, so her mother possibly deeded her one of the precious Halifarm women. Milly was a likely candidate for this role. At around twenty, she was the right age to accompany Ann so far from her home folk, into new society, as well as perform all the work of a lady's maid. Milly was also the right age to be the mother of John could have been born around 1806.

The situation repeated in 1810-1812 when Ann's mother, and marriageable-age sister, Penelope, arrived at Belle Grove to live in Old Hall. An October 17, 1812 deed irrevocably binds Nancy (perhaps Suckey's daughter) to Penelope and her heirs (in care of her brother William Grymes Maury), following Penelope's 1811 marriage to Robert Peale Polk, a D.C. Attorney. He was son of itinerant portrait painter Charles Peale Polk who fathered 18 children by three wives. Was there concern about young Polk being a suitable spouse? Or was this a routine third generation transfer of enslaved property among the Stith-Maury women? The deed explains why the Commonplace Book of Isaac Hite Jr. had a notation of Phillip's birth as issue of Nancy enslaved to Penelope, and not to Hite.

Polk dies after seven years of marriage and the birth of three children. Six years later, Penelope was engaged to Captain George Neville Blakemore, Revolutionary War veteran and esteemed local gentry. She was to move to Cedar Grove/Moreland, his estate in Berryville, where he and his late wife raised six children, including a daughter Penelope's age.

The two Maury sisters found themselves married to wealthy planters more than 25 years their senior. Penelope's wedding dress was being made in Woodstock, and Ann Hite wrote constantly about its state of readiness. Meanwhile, Mary Stith Maury engaged her lawyer to write a duplicate deed to Nancy's, to send another one of her women, bound to Penelope, off to her new abode. Had Nancy died? A completed version of that deed was not found, so we remain in the dark.

By now, the older Maury enslaved group, Peg (age 100) and Tom (age 85). were by then freed by death. Were there younger ones, perhaps with offspring, still around? We do not know. Ann's sister died from a "severe and painful disease patiently endured," in 1833,¹⁰ and their mother in 1839. Perhaps deeds still to be found in Frederick County can shed more light on those about whom we know so little.

1 colonial-settlers-md-va.us search Ludwell Grymes

2 Orange County Virginia (O.C.) Deed Book 18 pp. 73-75, 77-78.

3 Hunter and Glassell of Williamsburg and Smellie and McCall of Fredericksburg

4 Ibid. footnote 1

5 O.C. Deed Book 23:514, William G. Maury; 353, Leonard Hill Maury, each to Augustine Webb.

6 O.C. Will Book 3: 205-6.

7 O.C. Deed Book 21:131; 322-3; 333.

8 O.C. Will Book 3, 339.

9 O.C. Deed Book 23, pp 275-277.

10 Obituary at <https://tinyurl.com/mrymx9f2>

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

This monthly newsletter produced 25 issues in 2021-2023. It will now become an occasional publication.

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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