

Inspection Roll of Negroes

Commonly referred to as the "Book of Negroes," there are [two volumes](#) that list the names, ages, and descriptive information of about 3,000 enslaved African Americans, indentured servants, and freedmen that were evacuated from the United States along with British soldiers at the conclusion of the American Revolution. (Entries in the ledger were written across two pages — each image shows one side of the open ledger.)

Sir Guy Carleton, commander of British forces during the War, intended to keep the promise of freedom that was made to African Americans who joined and fought for the British in the course of the Revolution. Per the terms of the Preliminary Articles of Peace signed in 1782, however, the United Kingdom was supposed to return all property that was seized during the War, including slaves. George Washington demanded that they be returned to their former owners. Sir Carleton negotiated that this "Book of Negroes" be made to tally the loss of "property" for which the British government might compensate the United States at a later date. (No record of that payment has been found.)

These documents capture information such as where a person was held in slavery, their owner's name, and when and how the person obtained freedom. Individuals range from infants to those in old age.

The people listed were evacuated by ship from New York City, and most were taken to the British colony of Nova Scotia in Canada. In 1792, over 1,000 of the new African Canadians continued on and settled back on the continent of Africa, establishing the city of Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Notes about Book One

Included in the names in this volume [Book One] are people formerly enslaved by George Washington. The page labeled "4" (images 2-3) includes a woman named Deborah listed with her husband Harry Squash. Deborah is described as "formerly slave to General Washington came away about 4 years ago." She had escaped from Mount Vernon in 1781. Harry Washington, listed on page "36" (images 6-7) had also escaped in 1781. He and his wife were among those who resettled in Sierra Leone.

Mary Perth is listed on page "27" (images 4-5) and her husband Caesar Perth on page "38" (images 8-9). Once enslaved by John Willoughby of Norfolk, Virginia, Mary was separated from the Willoughby family during the war and ended up in New York, where she met Caesar, who had also come from Norfolk. The Perths also traveled on from Canada to Sierra Leone.

Notes about Book Two

The last two pages shown here record Sarah, age 42, described as "ordinary wench stone blind" (a serving woman who had lost her sight), formerly the slave of Lord Dunmore, who left him in 1776. It was Lord Dunmore who had issued the 1775 proclamation offering freedom to enslaved people who fought for the British.

See the [entire document](#) in the National Archives online catalog. The National Archives of the United Kingdom holds the British version of this document.

This primary source comes from the Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention.

National Archives Identifier: [17337716](#)

Full Citation: Inspection Roll of Negroes Book No. 1; 1783; Miscellaneous Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774 - 1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, Record Group 360; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. [Online Version, <https://docsteach.org/documents/document/inspection-roll-book-1>, September 23, 2022]

National Archives Identifier: [5890797](#)

Full Citation: Inspection Roll of Negroes Book No. 2; 1783; Miscellaneous Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774 - 1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, Record Group 360; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. [Online Version, <https://docsteach.org/documents/document/inspection-roll-of-negroes-book-no-2>, September 23, 2022]

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