

A SHADOW ON THE PAGE

The story of Annick, an enslaved woman at the Van Riper Property

By: Hannah Rodums, Museum Attendant at the Wayne Museum and Staff Member of the Passaic County Department of Cultural & Historic Affairs

We appeared to have been suddenly transported to the Netherlands. The Dutch are settled throughout this fertile river valley. The roads are lined with the fields of prosperous-looking farms, in some cases of hundreds of acres; they are able to maintain such large properties by the use of slaves. I saw dozens of them hoeing in the furrows, men, women and children, often singing in a deep mournful-sounding way.

—Peter Hansenclever, describing his travel up the Passaic River from Newark towards Preakness, in 1764¹.

ONE of the focal points of our tour of the Wayne Museum is the home of Uriah Van Riper, built following his marriage to Maria Berdan in 1786. It certainly feels like your quintessential “colonial homestead” upon entering: the room awash with sunlight from the south, highlighting the exposed hand-hewn ceiling beams, complimented by creaky wooden floors and a large hearth in the cozy kitchen. If you look closely on our tour, however, you’ll notice a photocopy placed upon one of the worktables in the corner of the room. The photocopy is of a page of Richard Van Riper’s “vendue book”, compiled in 1817—a list of purchases people made from Richard’s estate after his death ten years earlier. Visitors often skim the sale prices for beds and mirrors, barrels and pots; then pause at the top of the page. There, amongst the myriad household items, is a human story: Uriah’s purchase of “one Negro wench Annick” from his father’s estate for \$125, scribbled in black ink.

Item	Price
Uriah Van Riper	
one cow bell	90
two Raisin strops	51
two pewter platters	27
two keels	25
one Churn	27
one half Barrel	
one Negro wench Annick	125
	33
	128

Page six, from the Vendue Book of the Property of Richard Van Riper, deceased. Annick (or Annich)'s name is found on the last line. From the Wayne Museum.

¹ Matthews, Christopher N. "The Black Freedom Struggle in Northern New Jersey, 1613-1860: A Review of the Literature." Montclair State University. Prepared for the Passaic County Department of Cultural & Historic Affairs. July 2019. <https://www.montclair.edu/anthropology/research/slavery-in-nj/1>.

Annick (also spelled “Annich”) was one of the thousands of enslaved women and men that once formed the backbone of northern New Jersey’s agricultural communities². Her life was recorded in the language of business and finance, her humanity obscured by transaction fees and property valuations. Therefore, we acknowledge the very transactive nature of the language in how we tell her story. That we know her name, however, is already revolutionary in of itself. Annick’s very existence challenges the history that has been passed down to us about our area, a history that has become blind towards the institution that was integral to New Jersey life well into the nineteenth century. This is her story.

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ANNICK was born, enslaved, between the years 1782 – 1784, to parents whose names have been lost to history. Little is known about her upbringing or the circumstances that brought her to Richard Van Riper’s farm in Preakness, a property of 167 acres that spanned the distance between Hamburg Turnpike and the modern-day border of Wayne and Oakland³. Richard and his family most likely lived in a typical Dutch-American farmhouse close to the turnpike, a squat stone structure with two rooms and a gabled roof. The rest of the farm featured numerous outbuildings (such as smokehouses, spring houses, barns, forges, etc.) necessary for sustaining the farm and family, as well as fields for crops and grazing livestock. While hard manual labor was a common reality all people experienced and engaged in during the eighteenth century, the lion’s share of the labor needed to keep Richard’s farm operational was provided by at least six men, women, and children whom he enslaved⁴. Their names, as recorded in Richard’s estate inventory, were Annick, Dini, Hannah, Harry, Mary, and Prince. Their labor was unpaid and coerced. Punishment for disobedience ranged from fines to whippings to executions—all permissible forms of discipline under New Jersey’s slave codes⁵.

	Doll	Cent
one Negro man Harry	2	50
one Negro d. Prince	1	00
one Negro woman Mary	8	0
one d. d. Annick	1	25
one Negro girl dini	8	0
one d. d. Hannah	2	5

The names seen here--Harry, Prince, Mary, Annich, Dini, and Hannah--were written at the top of the first page of Richard's estate inventory. Notice Harry is valued at twice the monetary amount of Annich. From the New Jersey Surrogate's Court (Bergen County). Copy accessed at the Wayne Museum, Wayne, NJ

² According to Christopher Matthews, 1: “Bergen County consistently had the highest percentage of its population who were enslaved among all New Jersey counties, remaining close to 20% of the total in censuses take between the 1726 and 1820. Hodges (1999:109) estimates that slaves made up 40% of the Bergen's labor force, a fact that led most landless and tenant whites to leave the county for opportunities elsewhere.”

³ What is now Passaic County was actually the extreme western territory of Bergen County—Passaic County would not become its own entity until 1837. Preakness—as this area was colloquially called—formed part of the much larger Saddle River Township, which itself took up most of Bergen County in the 18th century.

⁴ As shown in the accompanying photo, these six names appear in an 1807 estate inventory of Richard’s property, at the top of the first page. It’s plausible that Richard may have owned other enslaved men and women who had either been sold or had passed away before the inventory was completed.

⁵ Slave codes became progressively severe throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—by 1713, virtually all aspects of an enslaved person’s life (including marriage, social activities, and religious affiliation) were dictated by their enslavers. For more, read Matthew’s “Appendix B: Selected New Jersey Laws Related to Slavery and Free People of Color, 1682-1846”.

Annick's labor was likely a mix of agricultural and domestic tasks, performed in Richard's family home—in other words, she bore the responsibility of cooking, cleaning, and housekeeping, therefore allowing Richard's wife Elizabeth and daughters to engage in the more pleasant aspects of domestic life. Expectations for Annick were high. As described on an American advertisement dated to 1734,

...[An enslaved woman] does all sorts of House Work; she can brew, boyle [sic], roast, soap, wash, iron & starch; and she is a good darey [sic] woman. She can card and spin at the wheel, cotton, linnen [sic] and wollen [sic], she has another good property she neither drinks rum nor smoaks [sic] tobacco, and she is [a] strong and hale healthy Wench.⁶



The Van Ripper kitchen would have been vastly noisier and more chaotic during Annick's lifetime. Annick (and later, her children) likely spent most of her life in this space. From the Wayne Museum.

Running a house was a hot, filthy, and endless endeavor. Annick would've had to keep the fire constantly ablaze in order to prepare and cook meals for the Van Rippers, in addition to warming the irons needed to iron their clothing. Water for cleaning pots and pans, never mind for laundry, had to be pumped up from an outside well and brought in. On top of these, Annick was also subject to the demands and stipulations of her enslavers. Given she lived under the same roof as the Van Rippers, we can be swayed into thinking that the personal relationships between Annick, Richard, and Elizabeth (and later, Uriah and Maria) were amiable, almost familial. That may be true—but these relationships must also be viewed with the

⁶ Matthews, Christopher N. "The Black Freedom Struggle in Northern New Jersey, 1613-1860: A Review of the Literature." Montclair State University. Prepared for the Passaic County Department of Cultural & Historic Affairs. July 2019. <https://www.montclair.edu/anthropology/research/slavery-in-nj/.10>

understanding that Annick, in the end, was viewed as a *possession* of the Van Rippers, rather than as a *family member*. Richard and Elizabeth determined Annick's workload; the manner in which she was to execute her tasks; whether any of her actions warranted a disciplinary response; and the severity of said discipline. In other words, Annick was not granted the same kind of agency and authority her enslavers wielded⁷.

Visitors to the Wayne Museum sometimes ask about where Annick slept, upon hearing her story. Unfortunately, we cannot say for sure where that was. From our own research, enslaved men and women in northern New Jersey may have slept in the same household as their enslavers. Especially in Dutch-American farmhouses, where the upstairs garret space was strictly used for storage, the case could be made that enslaved men and women owned by Dutch families slept in these small, uninsulated and unventilated spaces⁸. Some personal anecdotes from the descendants of prominent Preakness families (such as the Schuyler-Colfaxes) also suggest the presence of "huts" on the outskirts of a farm, specifically for housing enslaved men and women⁹. Short of having Annick tell us herself, we can only speculate how and where she would've slept on Richard's property.

At this point, you may be inclined to say that the enslavement Annick experienced would end in 1804, the year New Jersey "abolished" slavery. True, New Jersey did pass a law that year with slavery in mind—but the 1804 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery was far from the romanticized mass emancipation of enslaved men and women we think it to be. In fact, the Act freed no one. The Act set parameters for the gradual manumission of enslaved people, to be enforced "in good faith" by the enslavers. In particular, children born after 1804 to enslaved women were considered "free" by the law; however, they would remain as "apprentices" to their mother's enslaver until they legally "came of age" (twenty-five for enslaved men, twenty-one for enslaved women). Called "slaves for a term"¹⁰, the law provided a loophole for enslavers to still own and coerce people en masse into unpaid labor, affording New Jersey's agricultural communities plenty of time to adjust to life without the convenience of state-supported enslavement. Between 1804 and 1824 alone, the sale of enslaved children born post-1804 made up 17% of all enslaved African Americans advertised in New Jersey newspapers¹¹.

For Annick--a woman in her early twenties in the opening decade of the nineteenth-century—the law provided no guarantee of her freedom, so long as it was up to the "goodwill" of the Van Riper family (who themselves were unhappy with the state enacting the law in the first place)¹². It also deprived her any control over the fate of her daughter, Dine (born October 12th, 1811) and her son, Cuff (born April 8th, 1818)¹³.

⁷ The existence of peg-holes in the floorboards of Uriah's house, where Annick later lived, suggest that a partition may have separated the kitchen from the rest of the house—suggesting that Annick's labor, at best, was separated and kept hidden from the social and other activities carried on by her enslavers.

⁸ The upper garret was often used as a storage area by Dutch families—the family themselves exclusively lived on the first floor. For more on Dutch architecture, read Rosalie Fellows-Bailey's *Pre-Revolutionary Dutch Houses and Families in Northern New Jersey and Southern New York*. Dover: 1968.

⁹ Rauchfuss, William H. "A Visit To The Dawes House." Paterson Evening News, February 2nd, 1935.

¹⁰ A phrase coined by historian James Gigantino, in describing the legal restrictions placed on free Black children born to enslaved parents due to the 1804 Act. For more, read Gigantino's *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775-1865*.

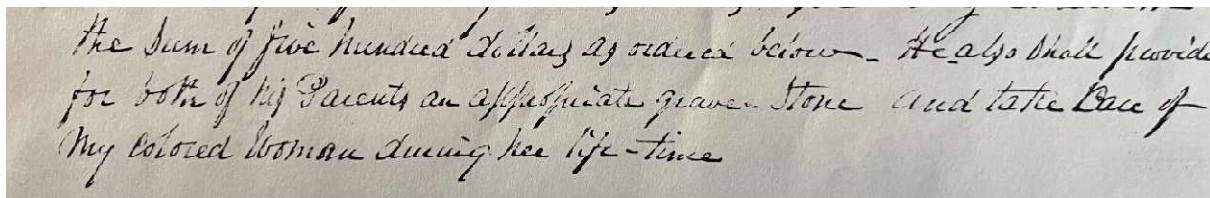
¹¹ Gigantino, James J. *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775-1865*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014): 103.

¹² In January 1806, Uriah Van Riper and his brother, Richard Van Riper Jr., signed a petition calling for the 1804 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery to be repealed. Their reasoning? "Dreading the intolerable burden of accumulating taxes".

¹³ Among other things, the 1804 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery required enslavers to keep a register of children born to enslaved mothers on their property after 1804. Uriah himself noted in 1824 that both of Annick's children were born in his house. To get the birth records cited here, we accessed a scanned microfilm of the original records, which are stored in the Bergen County Administration Building in Hackensack, NJ; Black Births, 1804-1846. New Jersey County Court (Bergen County). FamilySearch.org. Page 134.

After 1824 there is no mention of Dine or Cuff in any of our extant family and government records. It is possible that Annick's children were sold by the Van Ripers; that both passed away before legally coming of age; or, perhaps, that they remained with their mother on the property, albeit under different names (or no recorded names at all). According to the U.S. 1830 census, there was a "free man of color between the ages of 10 and 23"¹⁴ listed in Uriah Van Riper's household. Could this young man have been Cuff, who would've been twelve years old at the time? Perhaps. As of now, however, the record is silent on his and Dine's stories. Regardless, Dine and Cuff would not have seen their freedom granted until 1832 and 1843, respectively—a time many of us consider to be "long past" slavery's tenure in Northern New Jersey.

Allow us to go back to Richard Van Riper's vendue book for a moment. The book was compiled in 1817, over a decade after the ratification of the 1804 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery—and yet Annick is still listed alongside livestock, farming tools, textiles, and butter casks. Valued at \$125, she is still viewed in the eyes of her enslaver as a piece of his property: his to buy, his to sell, his to make a profit from. Nowhere is the fallacy of total emancipation in New Jersey more evident than in the faded dollar sums written next to Annick's name—a fallacy that existed right up until the end of the Civil War.

A photograph of a handwritten document, likely a will or testament, showing the closing sentences. The text is written in cursive and reads: "The sum of five hundred Dollars as ordered below. He also shall provide for both of his Parents an appropriate grave Stone and take Care of My colored Woman during her life-time".

The closing sentences of Item 4 in Jacob B. Van Riper's last will and testament, signed 14 November 1856. Note the language Jacob used in describing Annick, in the very last sentence. From the Wayne Museum.

RICHARD Van Riper's death in 1807 proved to be a turning point in the lives of Annick and the other five enslaved men and women mentioned by name in his estate inventory. Little is known about the fates of Harry, Prince, Mary, Hannah, and Dini—we can only speculate at the harrowing prospect of their being sold to other families in the area upon Richard's death. What we do know is that Annick was designated as "movable property" upon Richard's death, or property that was meant to stand in for any outstanding debts still owed by the deceased¹⁵. On September 29th, 1817, Uriah formally purchased Annick—she pregnant with Cuff---from his father's estate. She would spend the rest of her life in Uriah's household.

It was not uncommon for freed Black Americans to remain in the homes of their former enslavers upon manumission. Those who could emigrated to urban areas (such as Newark, Princeton, or New Brunswick) to start over—however, many freed Black Americans were set at a pronounced disadvantage when it came to obtaining the privileges enjoyed by their white counterparts. Setting up one's own household and becoming financially independent was particularly challenging. Especially in the case of freed Black women—against whom the laws of New Jersey were prohibitive--many white families "routinely hired... former slave women as live-in domestics or manumitted their slaves before hiring them to work in their households"¹⁶. Annick, it seems, followed a similar path. She was most likely legally "freed" between her sixtieth and seventieth years of life, as evidenced by her absence from the 1850 New Jersey Slave Schedule. However, U.S. Census of 1850 lists her as a "servant" living in the Van Riper household. The

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. Federal Census of 1830. Provided by Heritagequest.com

¹⁵ Our family records indicate that Annick split time between Richard's farm and the smaller farm owned by Uriah, before being formally purchased by Uriah in 1817.

¹⁶ Gigantino, 198.

Van Riper family's attitudes towards her may have a large part in this arrangement. Jacob B. Van Riper, Uriah's son, would even note in his November 1856 will,

He [referring to Jacob's son, Uriah J.] shall also provide for both of his parents an appropriate grave stone, and take care of my colored woman during her life time.¹⁷

It may read as a considerate command to ensure Annick's wellbeing in her old age. Perhaps it was—but Jacob's own words are forged from the same sense of ownership demonstrated by his grandfather nearly a century earlier. As "his" possession, Annick's fate was Jacob's to determine.

In all, Annick witnessed five generations of Van Ripers pass through the house she was enslaved in. Her presence was constant, if not always acknowledged—from her childhood on Richard Van Riper's farm to her twilight years in the company of young Mary Anna and Sarah Van Riper, Richard's great-great granddaughters. As far as we know, she spent the rest of her life within and around the property of the Van Ripers, observing the ways in which her enslavers were free to participate in American society—ways that she was not permitted to.

Perhaps the most compelling glimpse we have of Annick, however, is the last one recorded in government records—that of the 1860 U.S. census, which lists a 78-year-old African American servant by the name of Adriana Van Riper as one of the members of Uriah J. Van Riper's¹⁸ household. It's likely that Adriana is Annick, based on age and the demographic information provided—perhaps the census taker recorded her name incorrectly. However, it's also equally plausible that Annick deliberately chose a new name for herself—a small yet powerful act of agency in emerging from the shadows of her previous life as an enslaved woman. Even in her twilight years, Annick actively wrote a new chapter in the story of her life apart from the one assigned to her since birth—one on her own terms.

In February 2021, "Slavery at Dey Mansion Washington's Headquarters and Its Passaic County Environs: A Research Report on Archival Sources, Material Culture and Interpretive Themes" was released by Hunter Research, Inc. It was prepared for the Passaic County Department of Cultural & Historic Affairs and the Friends of Passaic County Parks, with support from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. This report traces the history of enslavement during various family residences at the Dey Mansion, as well as Passaic County and Northern New Jersey more broadly. It is a fantastic source on the experience of enslaved people in the region and can be accessed online- link forthcoming.

The Wayne Museum operates under a shared services agreement between the Township of Wayne and the County of Passaic. The County manages and operates the Wayne Museum on the Township's behalf through the County's Department of Cultural & Historic Affairs.

¹⁷ Last will and testament of Jacob B. Van Riper, signed 14 November 1856. Accessible on Ancestry- Passaic County, Wills, Vol A-B, 1835-1865, image #317.

¹⁸ Richard Van Riper's great-grandson. U.S. Census Bureau. Federal Census of 1860. Provided by Heritagequest.com