

John Jay College of Criminal Justice Records of the Enslaved and Slave Holders in New York

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a senior college of the City University of New York in New York, NY via a searchable online database project supported by its Master of Public Administration Programs house the New York Slavery Records Index with consists of records of enslaved persons and slave holders in New York from 1525 though the Civil War which come from census records, slave trade transactions, cemetery records, birth certifications, manumissions, ship inventories, newspaper accounts, private narratives, legal documents and many other sources. The index contains 30,000 records naming slave owners across New York state, 1,400 birth certificates of enslaved persons, New York State Senators who owned slaves in 1790 and 1800, 550 advertisements seeking the capture and return of enslaved New Yorkers, 1,681 records of enslaved persons delivered by slave ships to the Port of New York from 1715-1765, including the names of the owners and investors, Almost 200 “Underground Railroad” fugitives who came to New York after escaping slavery from the South, and it will continue to grow as John Jay College professors and students locates and assembles data from additional sources. Hence, the goal is to deepen the understanding of enslavement/slavery in New York by bringing together information that until now has been largely disconnected and difficult to access. This allows for searches that combine records from all indexed sources based on parameters such as the name of an owner, a place name, and date ranges.

Interestingly, John Jay (a New York governor and the first Supreme Court justice in the U.S.), the person in which the college is named came from a family that owned and invested in human enslavement as records from the Slavery Index detail, perhaps for the first time, the extent of the family’s involvement in slavery and the particulars of the individuals enslaved. His grandfather and father were investors. Augustus Jay, his grandfather, invested in 11 slave ships delivering a total of 108 enslaved people to the Port of New York between 1717 and 1732. Peter Jay, John Jay’s father, invested in 7 slave ships delivering a total of 46 enslaved people to the Port of New York between 1730 and 1733. In 1779, John Jay purchased an enslaved person named Benoit in Martinique, but there are no records of his ownership in any slave ships, yet he owned at least 17 enslaved people, used their services, rented them out or sold them to others (see ‘Slavery and the Extended Family of John Jay’ by Ned Benton and Judy Lynne Peters at <https://nyslavery.commonsgc.cuny.edu> for more details).

Slavery was introduced in New York City in 1626, less than two years after Dutch settlers first arrived on Manhattan. Between 1711 and 1762, thousands of enslaved people were brought to the city and sold at a slave market on the corner of Wall and Pearl Streets, and as late as 1800, several New York state senators still participated in human enslavement as owners.

The database can be searched at <https://nyslavery.commonsgc.cuny.edu/>