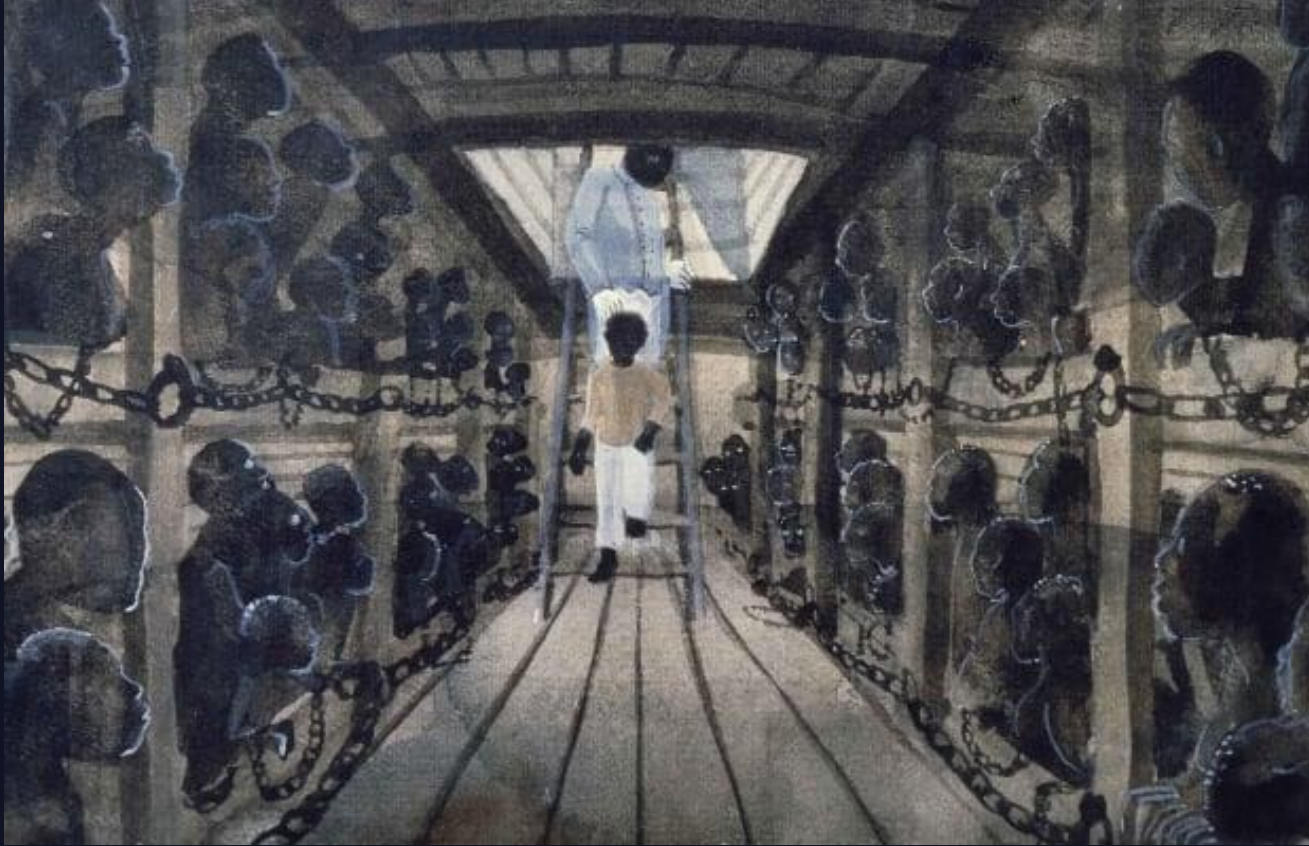


Slavery and Abolition



The first enslaved Africans arrived in New York in 1626. Slavery continued to be legal in New York until 1827. At the turn of the 18th century, New York City had the second highest concentration of enslaved people after Charleston, South Carolina. Many prominent New York families were enslavers, including the Jay family.

The Jays have a long, complicated history with slavery. Earlier generations were lifelong enslavers, never questioning the institution.

John Jay is recorded as having conflicting views on slavery his entire life. He would publicly denounce slavery and make attempts to end the practice, all while owning slaves himself. Later generations of the Jay family were abolitionists. They used their education and positions of prominence to help both enslaved and free black individuals have access to justice.



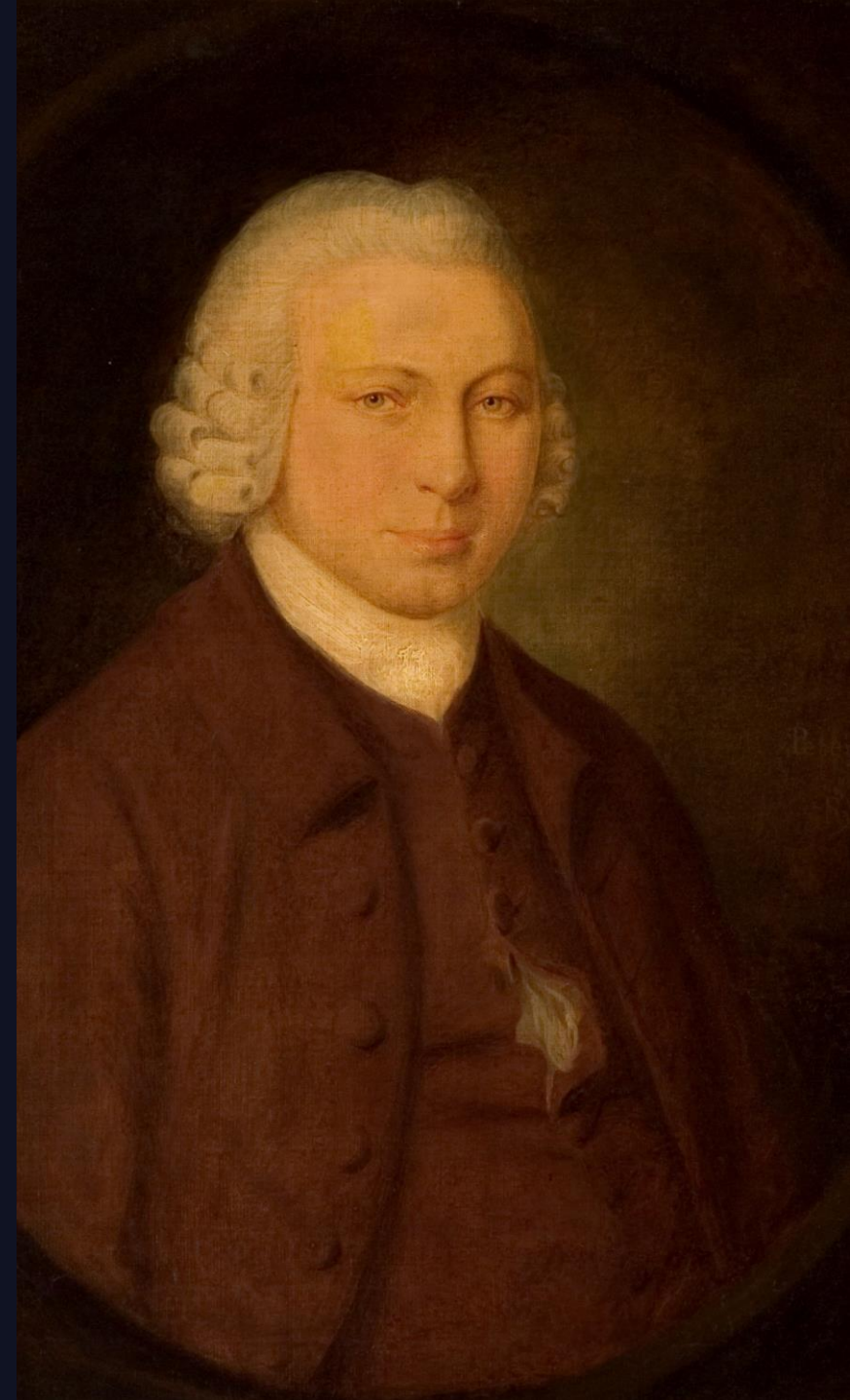
The first Jay to set foot in New York was Augustus Jay, John Jay's paternal grandfather. Augustus was a French Huguenot who fled France because of religious persecution. Augustus arrived in New York in 1686 and was soon employed by Frederick Philipse. Philipse, was a major trader and landowner and he hired Augustus to serve as supercargo on one of his vessels. Philipse was known to be heavily involved in the slave trade, and records indicate the while working for Philipse Augustus made several trips to Africa and oversaw the trading of furniture, spices and slaves.

Later in life Augustus became a prominent merchant and invested his own capital in the slave trade. He was an investor in eleven different slave ships that carried a total of 108 slaves to the Port of New York between 1717 and 1732.

No records exist about Augustus's own slave ownership.

Peter Jay was born in 1704 and following in his father's footsteps becoming a successful merchant. Peter traded in clothing, timber, grains and furs in Europe and throughout the colonies. Like his father, Peter also invested in slave ships.

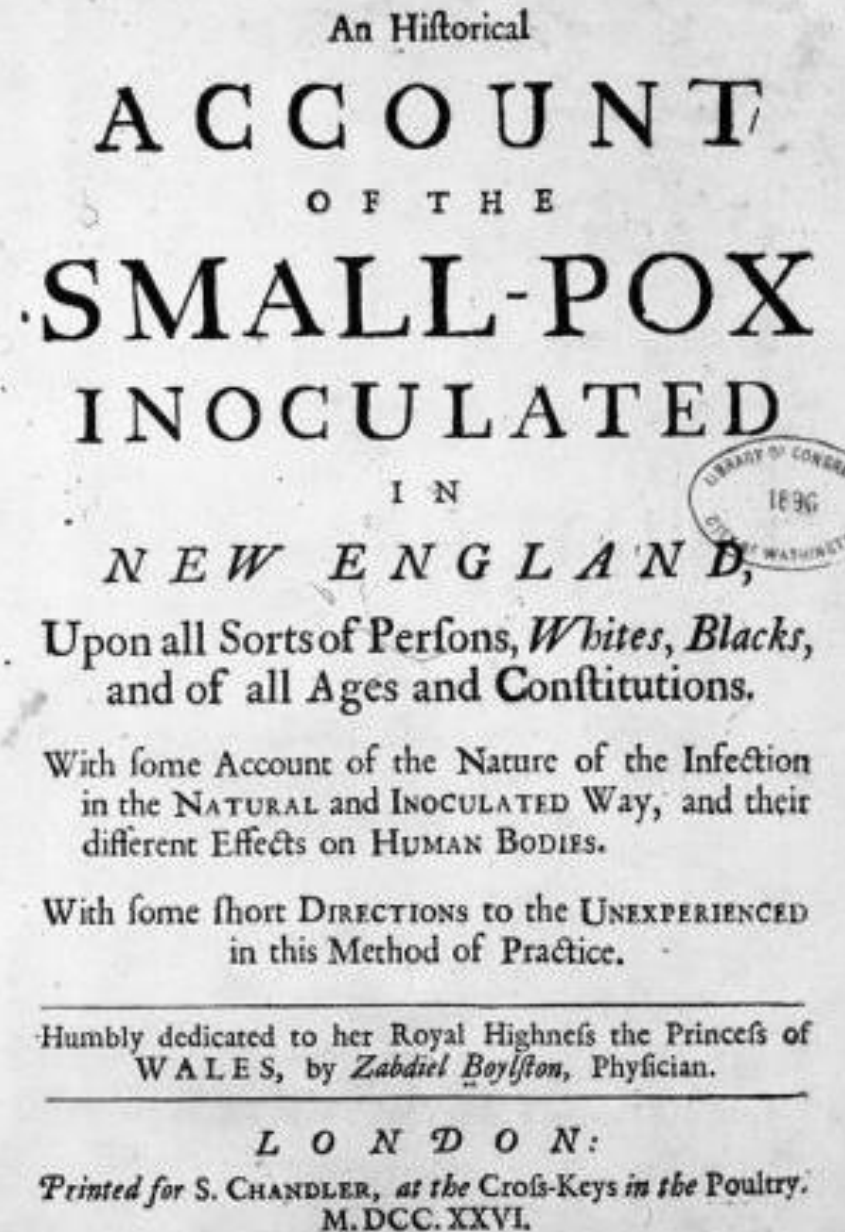
He invested in seven ships that delivered a total of 46 slaves to the Port of New York between 1730 and 1733. Peter continued in the merchantable business until 1745, when he moved his family to a 400-acre farm in Rye.



There are numerous records that pertain to Peter Jay's slave ownership. He owned up to twelve slaves at a time that often served as field hands or household servants.

Not much is known about Peter's treatment of the enslaved. In 1764 he had a young enslaved girl named Mercy inoculated against smallpox. Two of Peter's children had been blinded in a previous smallpox outbreaks. While the act of inoculating Mercy may seem benevolent, the motivation was most likely for Peter to protect his investment.

There were laws on the books that prevented owners from "dumping" sick or disabled slaves. The effects of smallpox could lead to lifelong disabilities, and Peter would be responsible to care for Mercy if this happened.



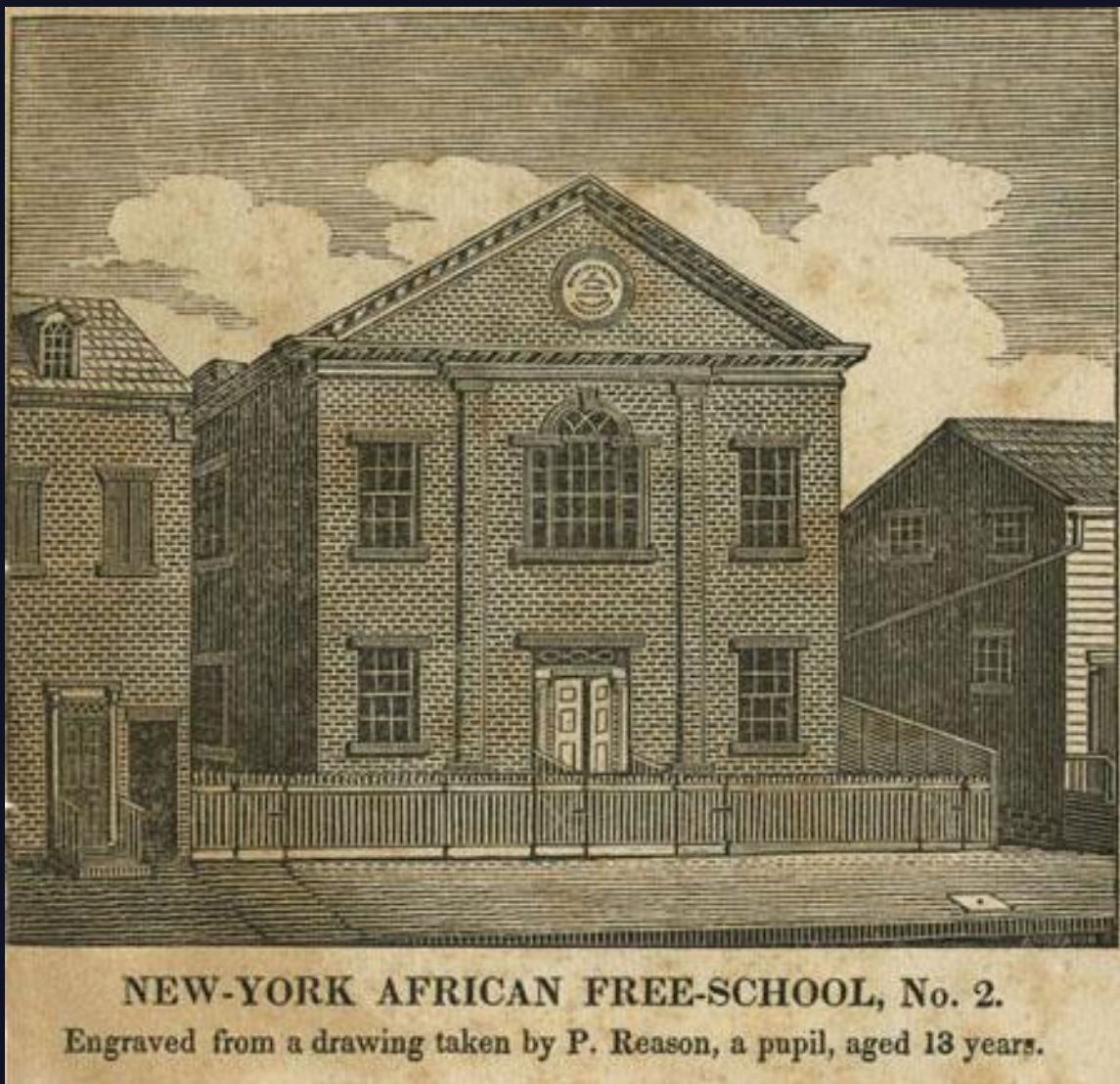
Peter enslaved individuals for the entirety of his life. Upon his death in 1782 he willed most of his slaves to his sons, but did include a specific clause pertaining to two women. He wrote:

“..and my two negro women, Zilpha and Mary, in consideration of long service, are to have their choice of masters among my sons.”



John Jay grew up in a slave holding household. His slave ownership began in early adulthood. He would enslave approximately 12 people during his life time.

Jay has a long, conflicting relationship with slavery. He began to publicly advocate for manumission in 1777 when he was writing the New York State Constitution. In an early draft he included a "*Clause against the Constitution of Domestic Slavery.*" The motion to include the clause was defeated and Jay was disappointed.



In 1785 he founded and was first president of the *Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves*. The society advocated for the manumission of slaves and putting laws on the books to protect the enslaved and free blacks from unjust persecution.

The society had many prominent members including Alexander Hamilton and George Clinton. Many members of the society were slaveholders when they joined the society, and some continued to be slaveholders throughout their time as members, including John Jay.

The Society rejected Alexander Hamilton's suggested resolution that anyone who wanted to be a member had to manumit their slaves. The society established the African Free School in 1787.

While governor, Jay signed into law an act for the gradual abolition of slavery in New York. The terms were that all children born to slave parents from July 4, 1799 onward, would be freed after serving their mother's owner for 28 years (for men) or 25 year (for women). The law was later turned into a complete abolition law and slavery became illegal in New York in 1827.

It is important to note that while Jay worked to end slavery, he continued to be a slave owner. He manumitted his last slave in 1817.

In A Letter to an Abolition Society in England in 1788, Jay wrote:

“The great majority, or rather the great body, of our people had been so long accustomed to the practice and convenience of having slaves.”

Jay enslaved several individuals throughout his life. Jay both inherited and bought slaves, some of whom are written about in family correspondence.

One of those enslaved was a boy named Benoit. Benoit was 15 when he was purchased by Jay in Martinique in 1779.

The Jays stopped there on the way to Spain where John was to serve as a diplomat. Benoit stayed with the Jays throughout their time in Europe. John drafted a manumission agreement in which he planned to free Benoit after eight years.

Jay wrote:

"...And wehereas it is therefore right, that after the said Benoit shall have served me until the Value of his Services amount to a moderate Compensation for the money expended for him, he should be manumitted. And whereas his services for three years more would in my opinion be sufficient for that purpose."

Benoit is never mentioned again in family letter and it is presumed that he did not return to the United States with the Jays.



When John and Sarah Jay departed for Europe, they were accompanied by an enslaved woman named Abbe. Abbe had been with Sarah for several years and came to Europe as her personal servant.

Once the Jays were in Paris in 1782, they hired a staff to run their home. Abbe disliked the way that she was being treated by one of the new staff members, and decided to leave when she was offered paid work by from a washerwoman.

John was in England at the time and looked to his friend and colleague Benjamin Franklin who was also in France to handle the situation. At Franklin's suggestion, Jay had Abbe arrested and incarcerated. Despite frequent requests for her to agree to return home, Abbe refused. Jay was perplexed as to why Abbe would run away in the first place.



“It was a measure of which I cannot conceive of a motive. I had promised to manumit her upon our return to America, provided she behave properly in the meantime.”

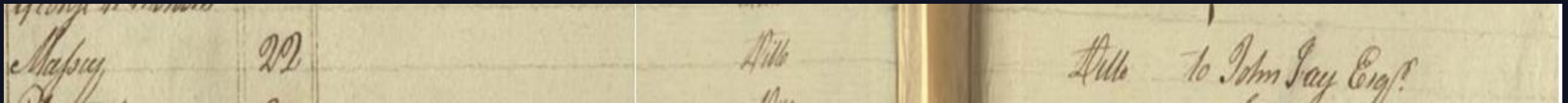
-John Jay to William Temple Franklin, November 11, 1783

Abbe became ill while she was in jail and agreed to return to the Jay home at that time. She died from her illness in December 1783.



Abbe was not the first slave to run away from John Jay. A slave named Massey is recorded as having run away and joined the British forces in 1778. Slaves were promised their freedom by the British if they left their American masters and served in the British Army during the Revolutionary War. Massey served in the Wagon Master General's department.

Massey survived the war and is recorded in the Book of Negroes as heading to Port Mouton, Nova Scotia in November 1783. He was 22 years old.



Massey's entry in the Book of Negroes

Two other Jay slaves that we know a great deal about are Clarinda and Zilpha. Clarinda had been a slave that belonged to John's father Peter. After Peter's death, Clarinda was sold by John's brother in 1783, but she was then rented back to John Jay. The practice of renting a slave was common.

Zilpha, Clarinda's daughter, grew up in the Jay house. However, in 1809 after being labeled as "difficult" she was sold to John's sister-in-law. John rented her back in 1811, and then purchased her again in 1813.



Upon his death in 1829, John Jay included a provision that Clarinda was to be cared for by William for the remainder of her life.

Clarinda remained with Jays until her death in 1837. She had spent her entire life with the Jay family.

Zilpha was manumitted in 1817, but stayed in the Jay household as a paid employee. She died in 1872 and was buried with William Jay's family at St. Matthew's Church in Bedford.



Tombstone of Zilpha Montgomery



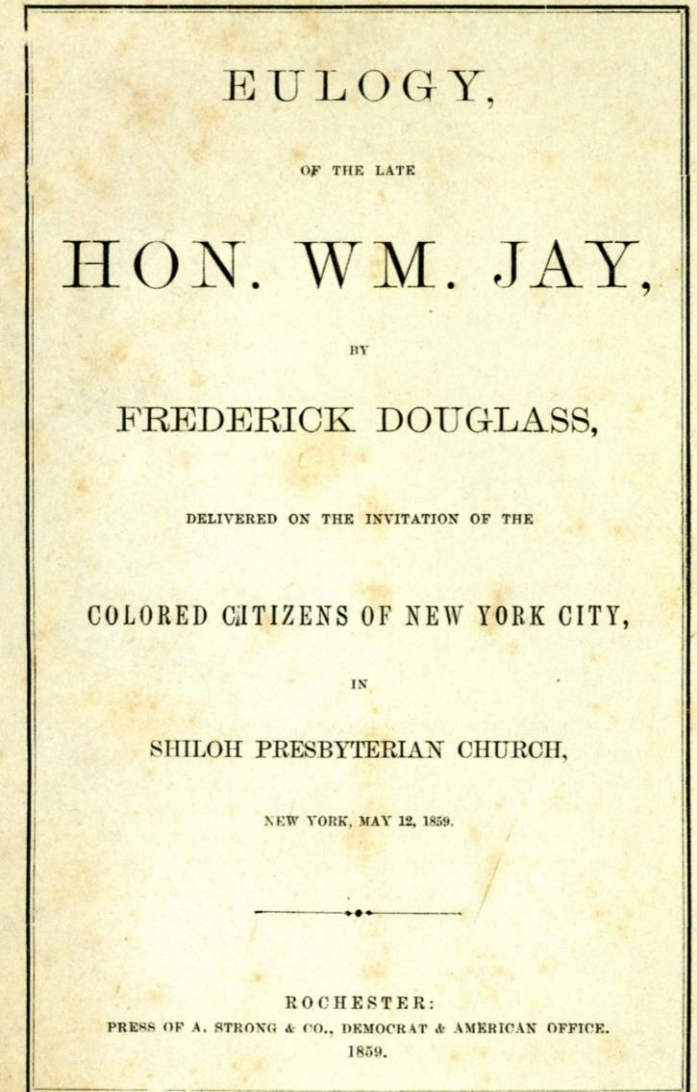
John's younger son William became the owner of Bedford House after his father's death in 1829. William was a lawyer by trade, but he is known for his dedication to the abolitionist cause.

William was a moral abolitionist. Moral abolitionism was rooted in the belief that the ending of slavery would come through the voluntary manumission of slaves by slave owners who had been convinced that slavery was a sin.

Other abolitionists felt that slavery could be ended through legislation; the moral abolitionists believed that the Constitution forbid this method.

By the early 1850s, William was no longer in the forefront of the antislavery movement. Most abolitionists had decided that political action was the fastest way to end slavery. Some even advocated violent acts and others the dissolution of the Union. William opposed these methods, although he did advocate peacefully resisting what he considered to be the unconstitutional Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

After his death in 1858, William was eulogized by Fredrick Douglass.





John Jay's other children also supported anti-slavery causes. Peter Augustus, John's eldest son, served as both President of the *New York Manumission Society* and President of the *New York Public School Society*, which was anti-slavery and concerned with greater humanitarianism towards the poor.

In 1821 he gave a speech at the New York State Constitutional Convention as a delegate, arguing that the right to vote should be extended to free African Americans. The motion was overruled.



Maria Jay Banyard



Nancy Jay

John's two daughters Maria and Nancy were founders of *The Society for the Support of the Colored Home* in 1839. The first meeting was held at Maria's home and Nancy was the first contributor, giving \$1000.

They both continued to support organizations that supported free blacks for the duration of their lives.

Upon her death, Nancy left the majority of her estate to charity.

Future generations of Jays continued to be dedicated to ending slavery and to social justice. John Jay's grandson, John Jay II became a prominent lawyer who dedicated much of his career to the anti-slavery cause. While attending Columbia in 1834 at the age of 17, he became the manager of the *New York Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society*.

As a lawyer during the 1840s and 1850s, he became one of the most active, and influential attorneys working in support of anti-slavery efforts. He won many important court cases on behalf of fugitive slaves who had made their way to New York. In the late 1850s-1860s he continued to be an advocate for anti-slavery, and other progressive causes.



L. Angerer.

His son William Jay II, served as a colonel in the American Civil War, joining the fight to end slavery on a national scale.

