

# The Carter Family and the *Deed of Gift*

An Account for Fifth Graders Based on the Book:

*The First Emancipator:*

*The Forgotten Story of Robert Carter*

*The Founding Father Who Freed His Slaves*

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**Figure 1 *Sailing Ship***

In 1635, twenty-two year old John Carter sailed from London to the new English Colony of Virginia. As the youngest son in his family, he had little opportunity to inherit much from his father's estate so he chose to take his chances in the New World. He was the first from the Carter family to live in the colonies in North America.



**Figure 2 *Jamestown, Virginia***



Figure 3 Corotoman

John Carter settled in Jamestown and was soon elected to the newly-formed House of Burgesses. He purchased 1,300 acres of land in Northern Neck on the Rappahannock River, which he named Corotoman. Here he grew tobacco. Carter had white indentured servants and African-born servants who did not have contracts that would guarantee freedom. John Carter's arrival in the colonies was the start of the family's involvement in land-ownership, politics and slavery.



Figure 4 Map of Corotoman Plantation in Virginia

When John Carter died in 1669, most of his estate passed to his eldest son, also John. But, when John the son, died in 1690, the youngest son, Robert Carter I inherited the property. Before long, Robert was heavily involved in politics. He served in the Virginia House of Burgesses like his father and held other political offices, including Governor of Virginia. Robert Carter I acquired so much land and wealth that he was nicknamed *King Carter*.



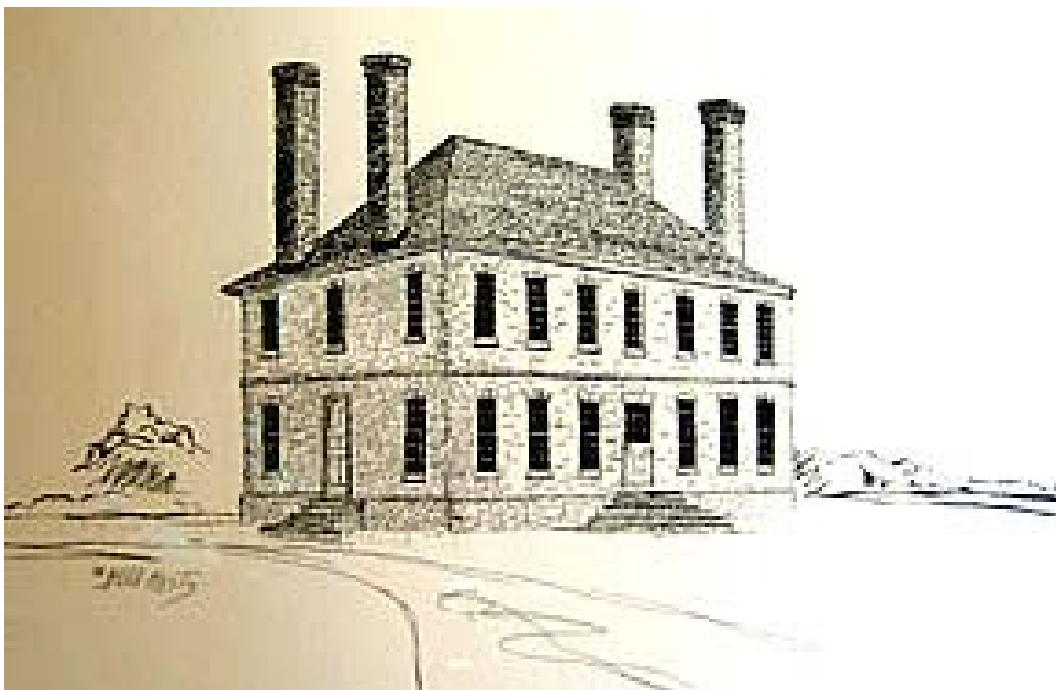
**Figure 5** *Robert “King” Carter*

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Virginia began importing slaves at a higher rate. Robert Carter I became both a slave trader and a slave holder. He was known for treating slaves with cruelty. However, Carter did offer his own slaves some conveniences that other slave owners did not. In the slave cabins, Carter gave his slaves beds and places to store their personal belongings. He also listed the slaves by family in his ledgers increasing the chances that they would not be separated.

Robert Carter I was married twice and he had fifteen children. One of these children was Robert Carter II. When Robert II married Priscilla Churchill, Robert I gave the couple a plantation along the Potomac River called Nomoni named after the local Nomony Indians. Robert and Priscilla had two children, Elizabeth and Robert III. At the age of three months, Robert I gave his grandson his first slave.

Robert II did not have the same political aspirations as his father and grandfather and did little to enhance his estate. He died at the age of twenty-nine. Robert Carter the grandfather made sure that his daughter-in-law and grandchildren were protected. Within a year of his son's death, however, Robert I also died. His four-year-old grandson Robert inherited one of the largest fortunes in the colonies. With it, he was also heir to the Carter family name, which in itself was wealth.

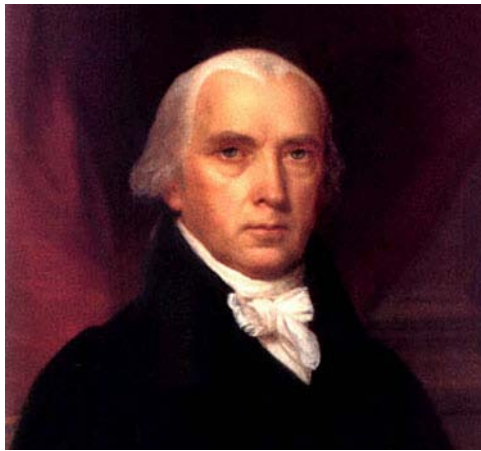
**Figure 6 *Nomoni Hall (Also spelled Nomony and Nominy)***



In February of 1749, Robert Carter III turned twenty-one years of age. He inherited one hundred slaves and sixty-five thousand acres of land in the Northern Neck area of Virginia. Without a father or grandfather to guide him, Carter was a young man without direction. He spent time in London where he studied law and then returned to Virginia where he ran for a seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Although he was unsuccessful in this election, he acquired a seat on the Governor's council. He became known

as *Councillor Carter*.

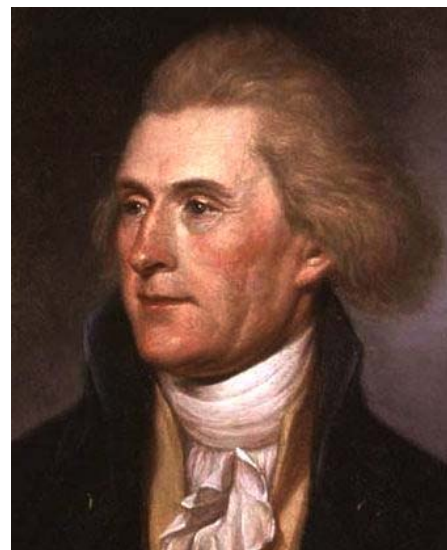
Fellow Virginians, who were Carter's peers, were successful in being elected to the House of Burgesses. They included James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington.



**Figure 7** *James Madison*



**Figure 8** *George Washington*



**Figure 9** *Thomas Jefferson*



**Figure 10** *Robert Carter III*

Together, they had seventeen children. Only twelve would live to adulthood, but this was not unusual in the eighteenth century.

For fourteen years, while Carter served on the Governor's Council, his family lived in Williamsburg, Virginia. During this time, the colonists were having trouble with their mother country of England. Carter's service ended in July of 1776 when America declared its independence from England and the family moved back to Nomoni Hall.

On April 2, 1754, Robert Carter III married Frances Tasker. They moved into Nomoni Hall for the first few years of their marriage.

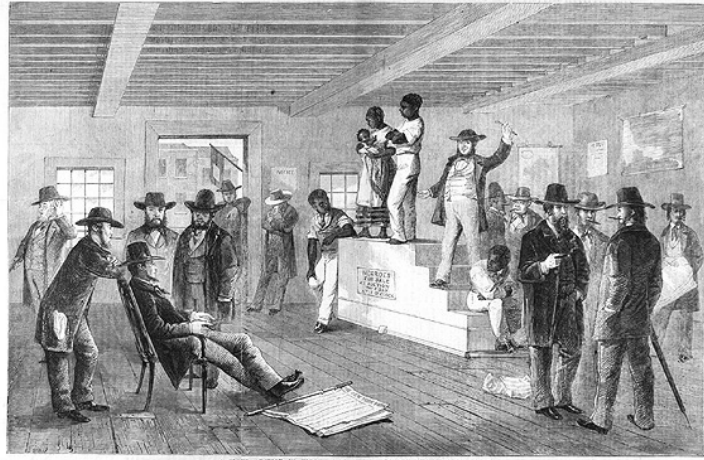


**Figure 11** *Frances Tasker Carter*



**Figure 12** *The Governor's Palace, Williamsburg, Virginia, Built 1722*

When Carters' father-in-law, Benjamin Tasker died, he left slaves as part of his inheritance. Both Robert and Frances Carter requested that the slave families be kept together when they were sold and that the slaves have the option of staying in Maryland instead of being forced to move to Virginia. This was the first outward sign that Robert Carter's view of slavery was changing.



**Figure 13** *Slave Auction*

*Councillor* Carter worked his slaves hard. During the tough economic times throughout the American Revolution, Carter added different crops to his plantations. This made life more difficult for his slaves who were always tending to one crop or another. Tobacco was a challenging crop to grow and Carter's slaves spent about fifteen hours a day in the fields.



**Fig.14** *Tobacco*

Hemp and wheat were also grown on Carter's plantations.



**Figure 16** *Wheat*



**Fig. 15 *Hemp***

Robert Carter III had much faith in the ability of his slaves. Slaves were trained to be house servants, blacksmiths, coach men, seamstresses, brick-makers, and sailors. Others knew how to take care of livestock, run a bakery, operate the Iron Works and cut hair. Carter's personal valet, Samuel Harrison, acted as a doctor for his fellow slaves. When there was trouble in the slave quarters, the residents went to Carter and knew they would be dealt with fairly. He allowed the slaves to design and build their own homes. Carter did not oversee his slaves directly but he insisted that his overseers follow his orders when punishing the slaves. He was not an advocate of whipping and he often took the side of the slave over that of the white employee.



**Figure 17 *Slave Quarters in Virginia***

Carter's view toward slavery began to be tied to his religious pursuits. He was born into the Church of England but he pursued an interest in other forms of Christianity. He became a Baptist with many of his less wealthy neighbors and his slaves. Although religion influenced Carter's treatment of his slaves, it is also possible that he was affected as well by the message of freedom that had launched the American Revolution.



**Figure 18**  
*Southern Baptist Church*

Carter continued to pursue other religious denominations. He discovered that being a slaveholder was very much a part of every aspect of his life and he began to view slavery as just another sin or an opportunity to do wrong. This realization was very difficult for Carter because this meant he had to change his whole life if he wanted to remove slavery from it.



**Figure 19** *Female Slave*



**Figure 20** *Male Slave*

## The Deed of Gift

On August 1, 1788, Robert Carter III wrote his *Deed of Gift*. In the first paragraph, Carter wrote:

*"I have for some time past been Convinced that to retain them in Slavery is contrary to the true Principles of Religion and Justice, and that therefor it was my Duty to manumit (release) them."*

Carter's *Deed of Gift* provided for a gradual emancipation of his slaves. He listed the names of 452 slaves with their ages and the plantations, which had named after the signs of the Zodiac, on which they lived.

Figure 21 Partial List of Carter's Slaves

Page 4				Page 5			
	BORN	RESIDED	FREED		BORN	RESIDED	FREED
Lucy	1789	Scorpio	1807	Samson	1791	Cancer	1812
Lucy	1792	Scorpio	1810	Samuel	1791	Aries	1808
Lydia	1789	Libra	1807	Sarah	1725	Nomony Hall	???
Margery	1788	Sagittarius	1808	Sarah	1755	Libra	???
Martha	1790	Billinggate	1808	Sarah	1758	Old Ordinary	1793
*3 Mary	1703	Leo	???	Sarah	1766	Coles Point	1793
Mary	1725	Old Ordinary	???	Sarah	1776	Forest Ctr	1794
Mary	1730	Nomony Hall	???	Sarah	1788	Aries	1806
Mary	1730	Sagittarius	???	Sarah	1800	Scorpio	1809
Mary	1769	Billinggate	1798	Sawney	1755	Nomony Hall	1793
Milly	1767	Sagittarius	1798	Sily	1790	Aries	1808
Moby	1745	Virgo	???	Solomon	1787	Nomony Hall	1793
Moby	1754	Scorpio	1793	Solomon	1786	Nomony Hall	1807
Moby	1788	Cancer	1806	Solomon	1787	Coles Point	1807
Moby	1789	Cancer	1809	Sophia	1781	Leo	1808
Moby	1793	Old Ordinary	1811	Stephen	1775	Nomony Hall	1796
Moses	1789	Scorpio	1810	Suzanna	1766	Cancer	1793
Nacey	1792	Nomony Hall	1813	Tasco	1781	Leo	1812
Nancy	1780	Leo	1798	Teanor	1789	Aries	1807
Nancy	1789	Old Ordinary	1808	Virgo	1758	Virgo	???
Nancy	1790	Aries	1809	Tom	1758	Coles Point	1794
Nancy	1790	Sagittarius	1809	Tom	1788	Leo	1810
Nanny	1758	Coles Point	1794	Tom	1790	Scorpio	1812
Nat	1776	Cancer	1798	Tom	1794	Scorpio	1815
Nat	1766	Nomony Hall	1798	Virgent	1766	Nomony Hall	1812
Nat	1785	Old Ordinary	1806	Will	1738	Cancer	1777
Nelson	1759	Nomony Hall	1804	Willoby	1793	Libra	1814
Nelson	1767	Libra	1798	Willoby	1790	Cancer	1808
Nelson	1767	Old Ordinary	1808	Winn	1794	Aquarius	1812
Nelson	1791	Libra	1812	Winn	1778	Cancer	1799
Nelson	1793	Coles Point	1814	Winn	1781	Cancer	1804
Nelson	1789	Nitchell's	1812	Winn	1783	Cancer	1804
Oliver	1757	Leo	1794	Winn	1774	Aquarius	1795
Oliver	1786	Virgo	1807	Winn	1790	Virgo	1800
Oliver	1776	Nomony Hall	1811	Winn	1784	Virgo	1797
Oliver	1793	Cancer	1814	Winn	1788	Nomony Hall	1800
Patt	1791	Libra	1808	Winn	1784	Aquarius	1800
Patt	1756	Old Ordinary	1794	Winn	1789	Scorpio	1807
Patt	1758	Libra	1794	Winn	1789	Coles Point	1797
Patt	1750	Capricorn	1809	Winn	1738	Coles Point	1793
Patt	1750	Old Ordinary	1810	Winn	1774	Scorpio	1792
Paul	1787	Coles Point	1809	Winn	1744	Scorpio	1777
Payne	1716	Gemini	???	Winn	1748	Scorpio	1792
Peggy	1790	Scorpio	1808	Winn	1783	Scorpio	1801
Penelope	1785	Leo	1804	Winn	1777	Nomony Hall	1793
Phoebe	1744	Scorpio	???	Winn	1778	Leo	1800
Phoebe	1789	Leo	1807	Winn	1790	Leo	1812
Phyllis	1786	Forest Ctr	1804	Winn	1787	Leo	1805
Polly	1784	Leo	1803	Winn	1791	Leo	1800
Polly	1788	Gemini	1806	Winn	1760	Leo	1796
Polly	1790	Nomony Hall	1809	Winn	1795	Taurus	1816
Polly	1812	Scorpio	1812	Winn	1786	Capricorn	1804
Polly	1794	Cancer	1812	Winn	1787	Old Ordinary	1805
Pompey	1721	Libra	???	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1792
Pressley	1766	Forest Ctr	1798	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Pressley	1770	Leo	1800	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Prince	1791	Old Ordinary	1809	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Prince	1792	Nomony Hall	1813	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Priscilla	1795	Leo	1813	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Rachel	1791	Leo	1813	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Rachel	1742	Capricorn	???	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Rachel	1786	Libra	1798	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Ralph	1787	Coles Point	1808	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Robin	1781	Cancer	1809	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Rose	1780	Aquarius	1815	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Rose	1780	Gemini	1814	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Rose	1788	Sagittarius	1806	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1763	Cancer	1800	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1775	Coles Point	1793	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1786	Leo	1805	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1786	Scorpio	1806	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1789	Nomony Hall	1807	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1790	Virgo	1809	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1791	Scorpio	1809	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1792	Cancer	1810	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1788	Nomony Hall	1811	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sally	1790	Gemini	1811	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sam	1792	Sagittarius	1813	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sam	1793	Cancer	1814	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sam	1793	Cancer	1815	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sam	1794	Aries	1815	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804
Sampson	1767	Nomony Hall	1798	Winn	1782	Old Ordinary	1804

\*3 Mary (mother of Baptist Billy Burke relatives)

\*4 Winnie Burke (daughter of Baptist Billy Burke and Hannah Burke)  
 \*5 Enoch Burke (son of \*4 Winnie Burke)  
 \*6 Harry Burke (son of \*4 Winnie Burke)  
 \*7 James Burke (son of \*4 Winnie Burke)  
 \*8 Nanny Burke (dau of \*4 Winnie Burke)  
 \*9 Nelly Burke (dau of \*4 Winnie Burke)

Joseph Burke 1808-1858 was a son of \*Winnie Burke who was born after Winnie had been freed in 1792 by Robert Carter III. Joseph came with his family to Washington County, Ohio in 1854.



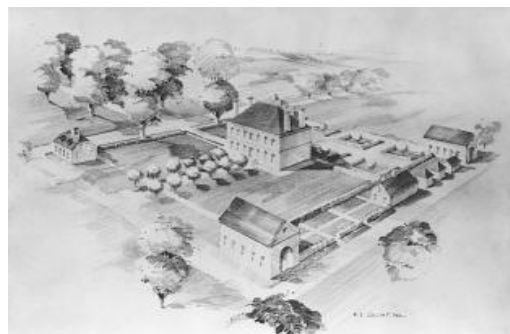
**Figure 22** *Westmoreland Courthouse*

On February 28, 1792, Carter began the largest emancipation of slaves in the new United States. He went to the Westmoreland County Court in Montross with some of his slaves to give them their freedom.

Many of Carter's neighbors and family members were unhappy with his freeing of the slaves. The manumission of Carter's slaves would take years, but other slaveholders were worried about how his actions would impact their slaves and their plantations. Carter was not discouraged and he worked to make sure that his *Deed of Gift* was protected by law. He also offered his freed slaves land of their own so they could take care of themselves.

Robert Carter III died on March 11, 1804. His descendants continued to free his slaves as was directed by the *Deed of Gift*. In fifty years, Carter emancipated over five hundred slaves. Carter was a revolutionary. He freed his slaves when it was not popular to do so and he did this long before the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation would liberate the remaining slaves in the United States. Carter should be remembered for his courage and his willingness to do what was right.

**Figure 23**  
*Nomini Hall  
Plantation*



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