



Overview

In this case study, students learn about the recent initiative to re-name Jacob Street because Stephen Jacob was a slaveholder, reconstruct Dinah Mason's life through primary sources, and at the end write a persuasive essay arguing one way or the other. [Here's what they decided](#)

Students first examine the 1777 Vermont constitution to understand the legal status of slavery in Vermont. They then jigsaw the documents presented here—bill of sale, Windsor census record, Windsor town meeting warrant, Windsor Poor Records, and Death Notice. Students recreate Dinah Mason's story and decide whether Stephen Jacob or the Town of Windsor should win the case. Finally, they write a persuasive essay arguing whether or not Jacob Street should be renamed.

Grade Level

Middle-High School

Enduring Understanding

Slavery existed in the North including in Vermont after the 1777 Constitution.

Topic(s)

Slavery; African American life in 18th- and 19th-century Vermont; Historical memory and monuments

Compelling Question(s)

Who decides which stories are told?

Supporting Question(s)

Was Vermont the first state to abolish slavery? What is the meaning of freedom?

Historical Background

A case study of Dinah Mason adds real historical figures and complexity to the story of slavery in early Vermont. Dinah Mason was an enslaved African American woman owned by Jotham White in Charlestown, NH. In 1783 Stephen Jacob of Windsor, a lawyer who became a judge and served on the Vermont Supreme Court, purchased Dinah and brought her to his home where she served him and his family. As Dinah's eyesight began to fail and she became ill, Jacob turned her out of his home. In 1801 the town of Windsor sued Jacob to force him to cover the town's expenses in caring for Dinah. The Supreme Court decided in Jacob's favor, arguing that Dinah could not have been a slave because slavery had been illegal in Vermont since 1777. This article provides more background: *DeFacto Slavery: The Case of Dinah Mason White* as does this lecture: [Dinah, A Vermont Slave](#)



Historical Thinking Skills

Primary Source Analysis; Synthesizing Sources; Historical Interpretation

Summative Task

Write a persuasive argument for why or why not Jacob Street should be renamed.

Outline

Hook/Introducing the Case Study	
The Jacob Street Controversy : Listen to the story. As a class, identify the two sides of the controversy. Explain to the class that they will be examining historical documents to uncover more about the story.	List of reasons to keep or change the name of Jacob Street
Activating Prior Knowledge/Building Historical Context:	
Vermont is widely advertised as being the first state to abolish slavery. Was it? Often the historical documents are more complicated. Use the linked worksheet to close-read and summarize the slavery clause of the 1777 Vermont Constitution . As a class discuss whether or not Vermont abolished slavery in 1777.	Formative Assessment Close-read worksheet; class discussion
Investigation of Primary Sources	
<p>Jigsaw Activity. Assign one document to small groups or pairs. Students source, close-read, and summarize their group document. Gather the group together and have them report out by date. Create a timeline on the board and include the 1777 Vermont Constitution as the first entry.</p> <p>Note. Dinah would have been born about 1753 (students could get that from the Bill of Sale) and was enslaved in Charlestown, NH.</p> <p>Document 1: 1783 Bill of Sale—Worksheet asks them to connect this to the VT Constitution</p> <p>Document 2: 1790 census—There are 2 “all other free” people in the household, one probably Dinah. Document 1 says she’s enslaved; Document 2 says she isn’t.</p> <p>Document 3: 1800 Town Meeting Notice—Worksheet asks them what this document proves.</p> <p>Document 4: 1809 Windsor Poor Records—This document shows Dinah’s decline from Leonard Freeman “keeping” Dinah, to the doctor “attending” her, to her eventual burial.</p> <p>Document 5: 1809 Death Notice: Dinah has no last name in this notice.</p>	<p>Primary source worksheets</p> <p>Class-developed timeline</p>
Discussion . Vermont law stated that towns were responsible for caring for the sick and poor who did not have family support. As Dinah became ill, she was forced from Stephen Jacob’s household. The town went to court to try to have Jacob pay to support Dinah, arguing that she was enslaved to Jacob and thus his responsibility. Was she enslaved or not? How do you think the Court decided the case?	Class Discussion/Debate using primary source evidence

Flow of History Case Study: Dinah Mason



Have one group of students summarize the town's arguments. What document might they have used to argue their case? (the bill of sale)

Have a second group of students summarize Jacob's arguments. What document might they have used to argue their case? (the VT Constitution; Census)

The court decided in favor of Jacob, arguing that the bill of sale could not be used as evidence because slavery was illegal in Vermont. [Here's a good summary of the case.](#)

Do students notice that Dinah did not have an opportunity to speak on her own behalf? Why might that have been? What might she have said if she had been able to speak?

Summative Assessment

Write a persuasive argument for why or why not Jacob Street should be renamed.

Summative Assessment

Persuasive Essay

Extended Discussion Points to Consider:

- Note that the court case wasn't about whether slavery was wrong.
- The case reveals that this slaveowner did not feel as if he owed his former slave, Dinah, anything even though she had worked for him so long.
- The case reveals how tenuous freedom was and asks us to think about what happened to enslaved people after they became free.

Materials & Resources

Background Essay: [The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont](#)

[The Jacob Street Controversy](#)

[1777 Vermont Constitution](#)

[1783 Bill of Sale](#)

[1790 census](#)

[1800 Town Meeting Notice](#)

[1809 Windsor Poor Records](#)

[1809 Death Notice](#)

[Case Summary](#)

DOCUMENT 1: Bill of Sale

From the collections of
The Vermont Historical Society
Barre, VT

XMS
326
W582

Know all men by these presents that I Jotham White of Charlestown in the County of Cheshire and State of New Hampshire Gent.- For and in consideration of the sum of Forty Pounds lawful money to me in hand before the Delivery hereof paid by Stephen Jacob Esq. of Windsor in the County of Windsor and State of Vermont, do hereby sell and deliver to the said Stephen Jacob, my Negro Woman Slave, named Dinah, about thirty years of age.

To have and to hold the said Negro Woman Slave to the said Stephen Jacob his heirs and assigns forever, and I the said Jotham White for myself my heirs Executors and administrators do by these presents covenant and engage with the said Stephen Jacob, that I am the sole and lawful owner of the said Negro Woman and that I will Warrant and Defend the said Negro Woman Slave to him the said Stephen Jacob his heirs and assigns against the lawful Claims and Demands of all persons whatsoever. In Witness whereof I hereunto set my hand and seal this 26th Day of July anne Domini 1783

Signed Sealed and Delivered

In Presence of
Zedekiah Stone
Isaiah Eaton

Jotham White (L.S.)

20th July 1801 I certify
that the foregoing is a true
copy of a bill of sale executed
to me by Jotham White Esq.
and consent that the same use
of this copy should be made
in Court as might be of the
Original Instrument.

Stephen Jacob.

How much money is Stephen Jacob paying to Jotham White?

Who is Jotham White selling?
What is her status?
How old is she?

How long is Stephen Jacob to have Dinah?

What is the date of the sale?

DOCUMENT 1 WORKSHEET: Bill of Sale

Summarize the Document—what is happening? Use specific evidence from the text.

Place the Document in Context:

According to the Vermont Constitution, was this sale legal? Why or why not? Include language from the Vermont Constitution in your answer.

DOCUMENT 2 WORKSHEET: 1790 Windsor, VT, Census Record

FIRST SOURCE YOUR DOCUMENT	What type of source is this? (letter, photo, etc.)	Who wrote or created the source?	When was it published?	Where was it published? Where does it take place?	Who is the audience?
READ IT CLOSELY Read the column headings and focus on columns 5 & 6. What do you think “All other free persons” means? Find the name Stephen Jacob—how is Dinah presented as a member of his household? Do other households in Windsor have “other free persons”?					
PUT IT IN CONTEXT Why do you think the census says there are no slaves in Stephen Jacob’s household? What do you think about the other “free persons” in column 5 of these Windsor census pages?					

1790 Windsor, VT, Census Record

Columns from left to right:

Column 1: Last name,
First name

Column 2: White males
16 years and upward
including heads of
household

Column 3: Free white
males under 16

Column 4: Free white
females including heads
of households

Column 5: All other free
persons

Column 6: Slaves

Column 7: Total

A continuation of Windsor Families in WINDSOR							A continuation of Windsor Families in WINDSOR						
Hopkins John	1	2	7			4	Marcy John	1	2	5			8
Keoghian Elias	1	5	1			7	Martindale Elias	1	3	1			5
Kubrick Eliza	1	1	2			1	Mason Isaac	1	1	7			9
Kubrick Matt	2		2			1	Meachum Elisabeth	2	4				6
Kunze David	2	1	1			10	Meers Solomon	1	2	3	2		11
Kunze Thomas	1	2	3			6	Minor Aaron	1	3	3			7
Kunze William	1	1	3			5	Molter Benjamin	1	2	3			6
Kurd Elijah	1	1	6			8	Moor John	2	2	7			11
Lacey Stephen	5	1	1	2		12	Orris David	1	1	3			8
Jenny Peak	1	1	1			3	Paines Amasa	3	2	5			10
Jenett William	3		1			7	Parker Joseph	1	3	3			7
Kendall Amos	4		3			7	Parmerle Alexander	6	3	5			14
Kendall Sathaniel	1		2			3	Parsonsbre Joseph	3	3	6			12
Kendall Reuben	1		1			3	Patrick Benjamin	1		6			7
Langeen Ira	1		2			3	Patrick Matthew	2	1	2			5
Languerthy James	1	7	5			13	Patrick Samuel	2	2	5			9
Leavins Charles	1	6	1			11	Peak John	1	1	3			5
Liedgar Joseph	2	2	3			7	Pearson Samuel	2	1	3			6
Lorenson Sathaniel	1	2	3			9	Pearson William	2	2	1			5
Lorenson William	2	1	1			8	Pearson William	1	2	3			6
Lynch James	1		2			3	Pollard John	1	1	2			4
Lynch Sathaniel	2	2	1			8	Porter William	1	3	3			7
Lumbard David	1	3	1			5	Pratt Cloathes	1	1	5			7
Lumbard John	1	2	1			7	Proddy Jacob	1	2	5			8
Lumbard John	2		2			4	Root Abel	1		2			3
Lumbard Stephen	1	1	1			6	Root Rufus	1	1	2			4
McDaniel James	1	3	2			6	Root Samuel	1	1	1			3
Marcy John	1		3			4	Robinson Silas	1	3	3			7
							Ruggles Samuel	2	3	9			8

DOCUMENT 3: Town Meeting Notice
(this document is typed on the next page)

These are to Notify and Warn the Freeholders and Inhabitants of the Town of Windsor to meet at the meeting House in the west Parish of said Windsor, on the fourth Day of March next at 10 of the clock in the forenoon, to act on the following articles Viz—

- 1st To Choose a moderator to Govern said meeting
- 2^d To Choose a Town Clerk Selectmen and all other Town Officers made necessary by Law to be — Chosen for the ^{year} ~~year~~ ensuing —
- 3^d To see what measures the Town will take respecting a certain negro Woman by the name of Dinah who was Purchased and brought into this State about Seventeen years past by Stephen Jacob Esq:

(104) And has until about Ten months past, lived in his family — and lately applied to the Selectmen as overseers of the Poor of said Town for support and maintenance

4th To see if the Town will raise money for the Support of the Poor in said Town and other — Necessary Expenses —

5th To Vote a Tax for that Purpose

6th To transact any other Business necessary & lawful to be done at said meeting —

Windsor Feb. 4 19th 1800.

William Hunter	} Selectmen
Calvin Chapin	
Joel Ely Jr	
Isaac Green	
Isa Langoon	

Transcription:

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- 5th To Vote a tax for that Purpose
- 6th To transact any other Business necessary & lawful to be done at said meeting—

Windsor Feby 19th 1800

William Hunter

Calvin Chapin Selectmen

Joel Ely Junr

Isaac Green

Ira Langdon



DOCUMENT 3 WORKSHEET: Windsor Town Meeting Notice

Source the Document:

What is this document?

Where was it published?

When was it published?

Read the Document Closely:

Find the reference to Dinah.

Write in your own words what the voters are going to decide:

Analyze the Document:

How old was Dinah when she was brought to Windsor?

How do you think the town defines Dinah's status? Is she free or enslaved?
What makes you say that?

Does she still live with Stephen Jacob?

What has Dinah asked from the Overseers of the Poor? Why might that be?



DOCUMENT 4
WINDSOR, VT: Poor Records 1809

Towns were required to care for those who were too poor or sick to care for themselves or whose families could not care for them. Often they paid townspeople to “keep” an ill or poor person in their home, providing food, clothing, and shelter. They also paid doctors to “attend” or care for the ill. Towns only wanted to support people who had been born in town. They would “warn” other people out, sending them to their hometowns for care.

TASK: Find each of these dates and Dinah’s name. Write down who was helping her and what they were doing. Then, write a paragraph summary of what you have learned. If you need help reading the document, there is some typed help on the last page.

1809	for keeping Judge Jacobs Dinah	4
Jan	10 To Lideon Hinton for keeping his Mother 3/4 year	25
	20 To Leonard Freeman for keeping Judge Jacobs	
	Dinah eight weeks 2/12	16
Feb	3 ^d To John Hall for keeping Moses Goodwin 4 weeks 5 days 1/4	
	28 To Leonard Freeman for keeping Judge Jacobs	
	Dinah four weeks	20
March	2 To Benjamin Corniers for 2 town books	
	6 To Ezechiel Parson for helping the widow Blanchard	5
	to sundry articles of food &c	6
	9 To Ebenezer Housington for keeping Amos Currier	6
	five weeks at 2/4	
	18 To Jiny Hammond for getting wood for wid. Blanchard	22
April	1 To Joel Lull for reclaiming the Back farm	1
	8 To N. & H. Hale for sundry articles for Alm. Carlton and	
	the widow. Blanchard	7
	To B. B. Brown for warning people out of town	8
	20 To Joseph Winslow for attending Hannah Jewett	14
	To Nathan Mills for serving Hrishton & B. Petrich	
	To Nahum Trask for attending Judge Jacobs Dinah	14
	in her last sickness	
	To Peter Houghton for digging grave for Hannah	1
	Jewett	
	To Ira Landon for attending Back matters	4

January 20:

February 28:

April 20:

16	To Stephen Parker for work for wid. Blanchard	8	1	50
	To Silvanus Hubbard to husking Mrs. Lenthin	3	—	—
	in weeks at 3/-	—	—	—
17	To N. & H. Hall for Oye and corn for A. Carlton	—	—	—
22	To Rufus Walker for making powder chests	—	1	50
27	To Barnard & Norton for making Coffin and Tolling	—	2	25
	bill for Judge Jacobs Dinah	—	—	—
30	To John Simmons for painting & gutting powder chests	—	3	—
June 2	To Josiah Hawley for digging grave for Judge	—	1	—
	Jacobs Dinah	—	—	—
		—	1	50
6	To Jonas Blanchard for Oye & corn for Mrs. Blanchard	—	—	—
8	To Abner Forbes for articles for wid. M.	—	1	34

May 27:

June 2:

Write a paragraph summary of Dinah's Story in 1809

Transcription Help:

Jan. 20, 1809: To Leonard Freeman for helping Judge Jacob's Dinah ...eight weeks @12

Feb. 28, 1809: To Leonard Freeman for keeping Judge Jacob's Dinah ...four weeks

April 20, 1809: To Nahum Trask for attending Judge Jacobs Dinah in her bed sickness

May 27, 1809: To Barnard Norton for making coffin and tolling bell for Judge Jacobs Dinah

June 2, 1809: To Josiah Hawley for digging grave for Judge Jacobs Dinah

DOCUMENT 5:

Death Notice of Dinah Mason White

Note: Spooner's Vermont Journal was a newspaper published in Windsor, Vermont.

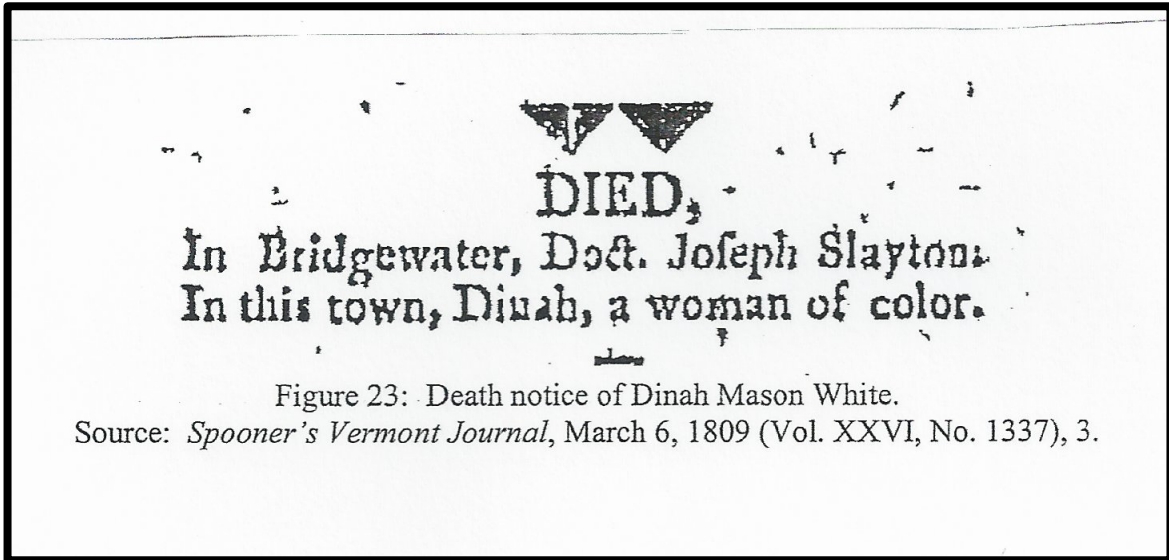


Figure 23: Death notice of Dinah Mason White.

Source: *Spooner's Vermont Journal*, March 6, 1809 (Vol. XXVI, No. 1337), 3.

Source the Document:

What is this document?

Where was it published?

When was it published?

Read the Document Closely:

Describe in your own words what this newspaper clipping is announcing about Dinah:

Analyze the Document:

Compare Dinah Mason White's death notice with Joseph Slayton's. What differences do you note and why might there be such differences?

Selectboard vote means Windsor street will keep slaveholder's name

By [ALEX HANSON](#)



WINDSOR — In a divided vote, the Selectboard has decided against holding a public hearing on whether to rename a street bearing the name of a prominent early resident of town who purchased a Black woman and kept her as a slave.

The vote last week appears to bring an [end to a debate begun in June](#), when Selectboard member Amanda Smith and other Windsor residents called for Jacob Street to be renamed.

In a speech at the start of the Nov. 24 Selectboard meeting, Chairwoman Heather Prebish said the board [has debated the issue](#) for five months without reaching consensus. A recent survey found that 58% of respondents wanted to keep the name as it is, she noted.

"What I have witnessed as a result of this divide is a conversation that has become more and more polarized, with very strong ideas about what should happen," Prebish said. "It is my opinion that we take this conversation in a new direction and focus on how we as the Windsor community can come together and align on how to best meet this goal of celebrating and honoring this remarkable woman" who was enslaved.

The board voted, 3-2, with Prebish, Paul Belaski and James Reed in the majority, against a motion to hold a public hearing on the proposal to rename Jacob Street.

Amanda Smith and Chris Goulet were in the minority and voted in favor of the hearing, which would be required before the name of the street, which is downtown off State Street, could be changed.

Stephen Jacob, for whom the street is named, studied at Dartmouth and Yale, fought in the Revolutionary War and served in local and state political office, including as a Windsor selectman and state representative. He was Vermont's first United States Attorney and sat on the Vermont Supreme Court.

He also owned an enslaved person. A bill of sale shows he purchased Dinah Mason from a man in Charlestown in 1783, and town records indicate she lived in the Jacob household until 1800, when she was either turned out as too old and infirm to work or was allowed to leave.

There is little historical record of Mason's life, and what records exist are

legal documents. The town sued Jacob in an effort to recoup some of the public money the town spent to care for Mason after she left Jacob's home. Jacob argued that she couldn't have been a slave, since the Vermont constitution made slavery illegal. The two other members of the Vermont Supreme Court ruled against the town's effort to admit the bill of sale as evidence — Jacob had recused himself — and the town withdrew its lawsuit. Mason died in 1809.

The effort to rename Jacob Street sought to remove the name of a slaveowner from a position of prominence in town and to make space for discussion of Dinah Mason. In her speech, Prebish ran through a list of other ways to honor Mason, including signage; restoration of Jacob's historic house, which belongs to Historic Windsor, a nonprofit; school curriculum that teaches about Mason's life and slavery in Vermont; a statue; and a scholarship in her name.

"I believe that by reflecting on these additional ideas, we can start to generate a more positive and collaborative discussion that is representative of our community as a whole and meets the original intent of the initial conversation," Prebish said. "In that spirit, I want to state that I do not support moving forward with the public hearing or continuing the debate to change the street name."

Without further discussion, Prebish moved to set a public hearing, and the motion was voted down.

Spoken and written comments sent to the Selectboard by residents expressed dismay at the foreclosure of further discussion about the proposed name change.

"Changing a street name can be hard, but being told you don't belong by the town government is always, and significantly, harder," said Colin Moon, a

Windsor resident. "You are choosing to be on the wrong side of history, but more importantly, you are saying to the people who do not look like you that they are not welcome here."

"The message is, Windsor accepts misguided traditionalism over progress and equality," Cody Sullivan wrote.

Mary McNaughton, a [member of a working group](#) established by the Selectboard to study the proposed name change, wrote that the discussion had gotten off track and argued that residents who wanted to change the street name had made up their minds before the committee got to work. She cited the online survey, which was filled out by an estimated 7.4% of Windsor residents as an example of how proponents of changing the street name were ignoring the will of the majority.

"The fact is 60% of residents who participated were against the name change, does that make the results illegitimate?" McNaughton wrote.

The [committee's report](#) also outlines some logistical challenges with changing the street name.

Also at the meeting last week, the board voted unanimously to create a committee on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion and to name several volunteers to the committee, including Smith, who will be the Selectboard's liaison.

"I think this is Windsor putting action and work behind our values," Smith said. "And I think, especially given how much pain has been revealed and now mostly dismissed, I think this allows people some sense of healing and comfort, knowing that these conversations will continue and that there will be people that they can also reach out (to) if they now no longer feel directly comfortable speaking with the Selectboard, which is a shame."

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