

1796. Emancipation of Preter Williams

Source: In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City by Craig Steven Wilder

p. 42-43 Peter Williams, probably a founder of the NYAS, was born enslaved. His birthplace was the Borite family's cow barn on Beekman Street, Manhattan. At the beginning of the Revolution, British captain Thomas Webb- a Wesley disciple who conducted classes in New York and Brooklyn during their occupation * converted Williams to Methodism. "In the revolutionary war, my father was a decided advocate of American Independence, and his life was repeatedly jeopardized in its cause," Peter Williams Jr. later wrote. Williams rescued Parson Capman of New Jersey from a British manhunt. He rode horseback alerting parishioners to move the preacher's property to safety while he personally escorted the minister out of danger. During the war, James Aymar purchased Williams and had him trained as a tobacconist. Williams convinced the trustees of the John Street Church, where he was employed as sexton and where many Africans were helping to establish evangelicalism, to buy him with the promise that he would repay them. He handed the trustees a pocket watch as an initial payment, and on June 10, 1783, they purchased him from Aymar for forty pounds. On November 3, 1785, Williams made his final payment to the trustees. On October 20, 1796, the trustees gave Williams his emancipation papers:

To all whom these presents shall come or may concern.

Whereas, by a bill of sale made by James Aymar, of the city of New-York, tobacconist, and duly executed by him on the tenth day of June, in the year of our lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-three, he, the said James Aymar, did, for and in consideration of the sum of forty pounds current money of the province of New-York, to him in hand paid at and before the ensealing delivery of the said bill of sale, by the trustees of the Methodist meeting in the city of New-York, fully, clearly, and absolutely grant, bargain, sell, and release unto the said trustees his Negro man, named Peter, to have and to hold the said Negro man unto the said trustees and their assigns forever. Now know ye that we, John Staples, Abraham Russel, Henry Newton, John Sproson, and William Cooper, trustees of the said Methodist meeting, amounting in value to forty pounds, have manumitted, liberated and set free, and by these presents do manumit, liberate, and set free the said Negro man, named Peter, now called Peter Williams, hereby giving and granting unto him, the said Peter Williams, all such sum or sums of money and property, of what nature or kind whatsoever, which he, the said Peter Williams, may, by his industry, have acquired, or which he may have purchased since the eighteenth day of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty five. And we do also give and grant unto him, the said Peter Williams, full power and lawful authority to sue for and recover, in his own name and to his own use, all such sum or sums of money and other property acquired as aforesaid, which is now due, or which will hereafter become due, or which of right belongs to him by such purchase since the said eighteenth day of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-five. In testimony whereof we have hereunto set our hands and affixed our seals this twentieth day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and ninety-six.

[signed] John Staples

Henry Newton

Abm. Russel

William Cooper

John Sproson

Sealed and delivered in the presence of

Nicholas Bayard

Jacob Tabule