

Jesse's Story

OVERVIEW

This lesson introduces students to Jesse, one of the two fugitive slaves sheltered at Rokeby who are featured in *Free & Safe: The Underground Railroad in Vermont*, and to the Elliott family of North Carolina, who claimed Jesse as a slave. Students will examine documents that tell us about Jesse's life in slavery and will learn how historians use such documents to understand the past. Your students will see these documents again when you tour *Free & Safe*.

DOCUMENTS

- Division of the Negroes of Joseph Elliott, January 10, 1828
- Work Record, 1831
- 1831 Taxable, Perquimans County, North Carolina
- 1836 Taxable, Perquimans County, North Carolina

The documents are high-resolution scans of public records from the North Carolina State Archives. You can share them with your students on the computer, which will allow you to zoom in and read them. Or you can project them, which may be easier for a class presentation.

BACKGROUND

Joseph Elliott and his family lived in Perquimans County, North Carolina, where he owned 267 acres of land and 13 slaves in the early 1820s. Joseph Elliott died unexpectedly in 1824, leaving a widow and 7 young children but no will. His estate was divided up among his heirs according to the law and practice of the time. The slaves were divided into lots, and the names of each were written on slips of paper and dropped into a receptacle. The Elliott children each drew out one of the slips, and the slaves whose names were on that paper were hired out to work for that child's support. Jesse was assigned to a lot with "Old Luke's wife Cherry," and their lot was drawn by young Ephraim Elliott.

The 1831 work record shows that Jesse was hired out to Stephen Elliott, a relative who lived nearby. You will note that the estate record refers to "boy Jesse" and the 1831 document says "man Jesse." Slaves were valued according to their ability to undertake hard labor, so age was an important distinction. Children younger than 12 and those too old to work were not taxed as property and cost less to buy than strong, capable adults.

The North Carolina list of "taxables" records property owned—land, slaves, and horses—for determining the tax owed. The taxables are similar to Vermont's grand lists. You may want to copy one from your town clerk's office for your students to compare. The list for 1831 shows that Ephraim Elliott had 75 acres of land valued at \$150 and one white and one black "poll." A poll was an able-bodied worker subject to tax; black polls were almost always slaves. Ephraim was the white poll and Jesse the black.

JESSE'S STORY

Jesse is one of two fugitive slaves your students will meet when they tour *Free & Safe: The Underground Railroad in Vermont*. Jesse escaped from North Carolina and lived and worked at Rokeby for at least a year. He saved his wages in order to buy his freedom legally.

Present the documents to your students in chronological order to follow Jesse through his life. You may want to create a timeline on the board as you examine the documents. Discuss what each document means and what it tells us about the Elliott family and Jesse. Try to estimate Jesse's age at each step.

Pay close attention to the 1831 and 1836 taxable lists. Ephraim Elliott ("of Jos") came of age in 1831 and is listed in the taxables that year for the first time. He inherited 75 acres of land and one slave, Jesse. Now, have your students find Ephraim Elliott on the 1836 taxable and look at it closely. What's different from the 1831 list? What does it mean?

Following are two passages from published fugitive slave narratives, by Moses Grandy and Moses Roper, both of whom escaped from North Carolina. Discuss with your students and ask them to note the similarities to Jesse's story.

Moses Grandy (*Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America*
[Boston: Oliver Johnson, 1844])

My young master and I used to play together; there was but two days difference in our ages. My old master always said he would give me to him. When he died, all the colored people were divided amongst his children, and I fell to young master; his name was James Grandy. I was then about eight years old. When I became old enough to be taken away from my mother and put to field-work, I was hired out for the year, by auction, at the Court House, every January; this is the common practice with respect to slaves belonging to persons who are under age. This continued till my master and myself were twenty-one years old.

Moses Roper (*A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery*
[Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838])

The way they divide their slaves is this: they write the names of different slaves on a small piece of paper, and put it into a box, and let them all draw. I think that Mr. Durham drew my mother, and Mr. Fowler drew me, so we were separated a considerable distance. I cannot say how far.

We have also proceeded to divide the negroes below

Lot No 1	Girl Rhody & boy Joseph	valued at	\$ 250 00
Lot No 2	Boy Moses	do do	250 00
do do 3	do Luke	do do	250 00
do 4	boy Ipe Old Aunt Cherry	is	250 00
do 5	Old Rose & child	do	225 00
do 6	Pleasant & child	do	325 00
do 7	Old Moses	do	200 00
do 8	Girl Sarah	do	175 00

whole amt valuation is \$ 1925 00
 which being divided in eight parts is 240 62 1/2

Francis Elliott	to receive of valuation on his lot	65 62 1/2
David White	do do do	40 62 1/2
Maque Elliott	do do do	15 62 1/2
		\$ 121 87 1/2

Division of the Negroes of Joseph Elliott, January 10, 1828 (1 of 2)

John, Smith

ing to said estate amongst the heirs as per statement

Lot No 1 drawn by	Semuel Elliott	\$ 250 00
" " 2 do do	Semimah Elliott	250 00
" " 3 do do	Lydia Elliott	250 00
" " 4 do do	Ephraim Elliott	250 00
" " 5 do do	Isaac Elliott	225 00
" " 6 do do	Hezekiah Elliott	325 00
" " 7 do do	David White	200 00
" " 8 do do	Francis Elliott	175 00
		<hr/> \$ 1925 00

Each share	Semuel Elliott pays	9 37/2
	Semimah Elliott do	9 37/2
	Lydia Elliott do	9 37/2
	Ephraim Elliott do	9 37/2
	Hezekiah Elliott do	84 37/2
		<hr/> \$ 121 87 1/2

which we also respectfully submit

January 10th. 1828

J. Dickson
 D. Allen Saunders
John, Smith.

Division of the Negroes of Joseph Elliott, January 10, 1828
(2 of 2)

Negros Belonging to the Estate of Joseph Elliott are
 hired out for the year 1831

man Jess	- - -	to	George Elliott	not	00
Boy mose	- - -	to	Nathaniel Elliott	Note	48
Boy Luke	- - -	to	Stephen Elliott	Note	46 75
Pleasant & bits poplar neck pit	- - -	to	Rayne Elliott	Note	7 75
Girl Sally	- - -	to	Samuel White	Note	12 50
Rodney & Joseph & Luke field	- - -	to	Samuel White	Note to be kept	9 75

Negros Belonging to the heirs of Loranca Perry hired of for 1831

Frank and	- - -	to	not Thomas Godwin	Note	50 00
Cortney	- - -	to	George Godwin	Note	10 00
Peter	- - -	to	Samuel Keeley		51
Sillar and	- - -	to	George Godwin	Note to be taken	7 75
Bray	- - -	to	Samuel Keeley	Note	10 00
Jerry and	- - -	to	Samuel Keeley	Note	14 00
Michel	- - -	to	John White	Note to be kept	10 00
Daniel and	- - -	to	Samuel Keeley	Note	3 75
Garret field	- - -	to	Samuel Keeley	Note	4 00

56
46-50
47 00

Work Record, 1831

Persons Names	aces of land	Value of land Dollars	H. Lotts	No. of H. Lotts	M. polls	B. polls	H. Horses	Price horse	Total taxes
William Copeland					1				
William Carey					1				
Isabel Copeland					1				
Barnabas Caruthers	12 ³ / ₄	50			1				
Amariah Cole	on the yopem district								
Joshua Elliott	189	950				3			
Isaac Elliott	494	2616							
gabriel Elliott	117	500							
Leah Elliott Junr	100	250			1				
Humphry Elliott	167	700			1	1			
D. for 7 or 8 children	14 ¹ / ₄	28 ¹ / ₂							
D. for Isab Elliott's heirs	38	90							
Miles Elliott Sr.	250	750	9	62.63.49 93.94.113 22.80.93	1	6			
Nachel Elliott			1	64	1				
Jonathan Elliott	241 ³ / ₄	680			1	4			
Francis Elliott					1				
Joseph Elliott (of Sepul)					1				
Willis Elliott Sr.						1			
Leah Elliott									
Hague Elliott					1	2			
Alexander Elliott	138	327			1				
Solomon Elliott					1				
Joseph Elliott (for Winslow)	50	167							
Nathan Elliott	moved away								
Ephraim Elliott of Soc.	75	150			1	1			
Michael Elliott					1				
Willis Elliott Jr.	130	100			1	1			
Walter Elliott					1	1			
Quinton B Elliott					1	1			
Elias Elliott					1				

1831 Taxable, Perquimans County, North Carolina

Persons names D. C.	area of Land	Value of Land Dollars	Val. of S. Pollo	Val. of Town lots Dollars	W. Pollo	O. Pollo	Head Horses	Swine for Season	Wool hales
Joseph Dail ^{son of J. A.}	60 ³ / ₄	240							
Joshua Elliott	189	950				2			
Lease Elliott	49 ¹ / ₄	2619				1			
Gabriel Elliott	157 ¹ / ₄	530							
Caleb Elliott ^{Senr.}						1			
Dumphry Elliott	248	910			1	1			
Do for Foster Elliott's Heirs	14	28							
Nyles Elliott ^{Senr.}	1440	6300	8	62.65.79.80 26.27.113.114		15			
Jonathan Elliott	240	685			1	4			
Francis Elliott	40	20			1				
Paque Elliott					1				
Alexander Elliott	moved over of the River								
Elias Elliott	48	48			1				
Merajah Elliott					1				
Lucas Elliott	440	935	4	52.67.73 77.118.3	1	2			1
Stephen Elliott	5	20	4	30.31.32.33	1	2			
Ephraim Elliott	80	100			1				
Solomon Elliott	70	187			1				
Henderson W. Elliott					1				
Joseph G. Elliott					1				
Stanton Elliott					1				
Mills Elliott ^{Senr.}	94	282				2			
August Elliott ^{imprisoned}	35	115							
Daeton Elliott	108	327							
Richard Dempsey (of Gold)	15	50							
Lordan Evans					1				
Asphut Elliott					1				
James Duncan	74	300							
Nancy Douglas				1 no 74					
Willis Cotton for Guorden	84	700							
do do for the Harrel heirs	15	45							
J. G. H.									
Leader Feltan	279	1500				9			
Many ^{Millers} Floyd	137	243							
Richard Feltan	1327	4583			1	13			
Job Goodwin	1550	1173				1			
Sanford C. Goodwin						1			
Do for Jacob Goodwin's Heirs	290	1300							
Do 6th of the mill	do.	412							

1836 Taxable, Perquimans County, North Carolina