

INVISIBLE HANDS:

SLAVES AND SERVANTS OF THE CHEW FAMILY

FUNDED IN PART THROUGH

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

**THE INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION FUND,
NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

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SUMMER 2003**

Acknowledgments

Cliveden would like to thank the following organizations and people for their generous contributions to this project: The National Endowment for the Humanities, the Interpretation and Education Fund of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the American Antiquarian Society, The Delaware State Archives, The Historical Society of Delaware, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, The Library of Congress, The Moorland-Spingard Research Center at Howard University, The Pennsylvania State Archives, Kate Navarra of The University of Massachusetts, Dr. Randall Miller of St. Joseph's University, Max van Balgooy, Elva Bell, Michelle Craig, Philip Seitz and Gregory Swank.

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I. Slaves and Servants of the Chew Family

Slaves and servants are integral to the story of Cliveden and the Chews. With a slaveholding history in Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania beginning in the seventeenth-century, the Chews built Cliveden in the eighteenth-century as a summer home. Just as any other Chew home, slaves and servants were needed at Cliveden while the family stayed there. Eventually the house became a more permanent nineteenth-century residence employing a predominantly immigrant domestic staff.

This essay will focus on the Chew family's workers from the construction of Cliveden to the end of the nineteenth-century. These workers are vital to the historical narrative, but are rarely discussed as part of the story of Cliveden. Perhaps because they were often unobserved as they worked behind the scenes, there isn't a lot of available information about their lives. Usually it is the documents of their owners and masters that give us a glimpse into slaves' and servants' lives. There are also some primary sources from the Chew workers themselves that have survived and provide insight into their personal lives. Slaves and servants are essential to understanding the entire landscape of Cliveden because the functioning of the property depended on them. The site was part of their life just as it was part of the Chews.

The use of slavery labor in colonial Philadelphia reached its height during the same decade as Cliveden's construction. In 1767, there were 1400 slaves in the city (roughly 8.8% of the total population) living in the homes of more than one of every five families in Philadelphia, including that of Benjamin Chew, one of the city's largest slaveholders. This was not the case, though, throughout the larger region. Philadelphia had an urban slave population four times larger than in number than the surrounding countryside.¹ As a part of the urban landscape, slaves

¹ Nash, Gary "Slaves and Slave Owners in Colonial Philadelphia" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 30, No. 2, 1973. p. 236-240

are critically important to understanding the city's past. They lived dual lives serving as property to their masters while desiring to create personal relationships of their own.

Slaves were not the first or only type of servant in colonial Philadelphia. Colonial America had three distinct types of unfree labor: indentured servants, slaves and apprentices.² Indentured servitude during the early eighteenth-century was common, though one of the reasons for the spike in practicing slavery during the 1756-1766 decade was the Seven Year's or French and Indian War (1756-1763). "It curtailed the migration of European indentured servants and enticed many of those already in the colony to join the military."³ In turn the wealthy preferred enslaved blacks to fill their labor needs. Apprentices were often hired by professionals and were given training in a particular field such as book binding or printing. The Chews used all three forms of service during the eighteenth-century and as a result represent many similar families of the region during the same time period.

In early Pennsylvania, indentured servants and slaves were members of an interchangeable labor force. As a result, the terms "servant" and "slave" do not have strict definitions that easily separate them, making it task more difficult to determine the status of workers during the eighteenth-century.⁴ Though the words may have been used interchangeably, the contracts between the two types of workers were very different. There are key differences between indentured servants and slaves that can distinguish the two types of unfree labor. Indentured servants, typically from England, were responsible for giving their employers a certain number of service years with the understanding that after their term they would be free to leave. They chose to enter into the binding agreement often in exchange for passage from England and their basic needs met during their indenture (such as clothing, housing, and food).

² Salinger, Sharon *To Serve Well and Faithfully: Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania 1682-1800* Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987. p. 6

³ Salinger p. 78

⁴ Salinger p. 15

Slaves, on the other hand, had no choices. Many were brought to the English colonies from Africa and others were born to enslaved mothers.

Slavery slowly ended in Philadelphia, over the course of more than 60 years following the American Revolution. At the same time, the city began to see the growth of an immigrant community during the mid-1800s. Irish, Germans, and other groups already part of the workforce continued to grow in population within the city. This is reflected at Cliveden during the tenure of Anne Sophia Penn Chew (1805-1892). While Cliveden was her main residence throughout the mid to late 1800s, she had only a small permanent staff and hired locals for necessary temporary jobs on the property. This small staff included Irish women who worked for long hours at low pay.

General trends represented in the Chew family history reflect the broader changes in America. They include the shift from unfree labor to paid workers, the modification of a large and permanent staff to a much smaller one supplemented by temporary hires, and the changes over time in the attitudes of both the workers and the employers toward one other. The Chew house can be representative in certain ways of a larger and broader history.

Though the stories of Cliveden's slaves and servants reflect changes over time, they also demonstrate some constants during those same 150 years. Slaves and servants controlled their own lives throughout the Chew family history in various ways. Chew's slaves maintained their families even at a distance, challenged their masters when they felt they were being treated unfairly, and ran away from the family's plantations. Though the different situation was somewhat different during the mid to late nineteenth-century with an entirely paid staff, servants continued to work against a system that classified them as lower than their employers. Using the threat of quitting as their weapon, Anne's staff demanded better positions within the household and better pay for their work.

II. Slavery within the Chew Family

Slavery had been a part of the Chew family before the building of Cliveden and continued after its construction. The slaves of Benjamin Chew (1722-1810) were found both here and at his other home in the city. Benjamin Chew's father, Dr. Samuel Chew (1693-1744) was a plantation owner in Delaware and Maryland. Of his three plantations in Kent County, Delaware, the largest was Whitehall. Purchased in 1742, only two years before Dr. Chew's death, Whitehall focused on wheat production with between forty and sixty slaves.⁵ Samuel Chew died in 1744 without a will, resulting in the division of his property.⁶ After his father's death, Benjamin Chew attempted to reconstruct the Whitehall plantation and by 1798 he had restored 984 of its original 1000 acres. A 1745 map of the property shows the slave quarters and tobacco barn historically used during Chew's tenure on the land.⁷ From his mother, Mary Chew, Benjamin inherited 54 slaves in 1747 at the time of her death. Fifty years later, records from 1799 show Benjamin had 42 slaves on the property, all listed by name with year of birth, children, and other comments. In 1803, Chew sold Whitehall but was continued to own other slaves in Delaware and Pennsylvania.⁸

The implications of slave labor always affected the lives of the Chew family not only on their Delaware plantation, but wherever they were located. Chew not only owned slaves both in Pennsylvania and Delaware and used them on his own property; he also leased slaves to other

⁵ The three counties of Delaware (Kent, Sussex, and New Castle) were the "lower counties" of Pennsylvania from 1682-1704 and were often highly influenced by Pennsylvania throughout the 18th century after their legal separation. (Further information about Delaware's practice of slavery can be found in *Slavery and Freedom in Delaware 1639-1865* by William H. Williams, Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1996)

⁶ Without a will, Samuel Chew's property fell into the hands of the Orphan's Court. The result was the division of property among all his children.

⁷ See attached map – Figure 1. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 265

⁸ William H. Williams in *Slavery and Freedom in Delaware 1639-1865* discusses the change over time in the positions of blacks in the state of Delaware. In Kent County, DE, where Whitehall was located, in the 1790 census there were reportedly 2,300 slaves and 2,570 freed blacks. That same year in the entire state of Delaware there were approximately 9,000 slaves and 4,000 free blacks. By 1810 the number of slaves had dropped in the state, but was still relatively high. Most freed slaves remained in the state and continued to work as free blacks: there were approximately 4,500 slaves that year and 13,000 free blacks. Chew's slave property decreased at the same time as state decreased its slave population overall.

people for profit. This was not at all uncommon: large slave-owners often would hire out their slaves to be used by other people for yearly or monthly terms. As a result, Chew received part or all of the payment for the slaves' work. Both this income and that gained by the plantations running on slave labor no doubt helped sustain the family's fortune, resulting in their ownership of several properties including Cliveden. In this way, though many Chew slaves did not travel to Cliveden, their stories at any location affected the house and the Chew family.

Chew did not abolish slavery within his household with the passing of the Pennsylvania Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in 1780. The law was passed in hopes of slowly choking the use of slave labor in Pennsylvania; however, Benjamin Chew was able to circumvent it by sending all women of childbearing age and most young men out of the state to Delaware, where slavery remained legal.⁹ In this way, Chew was able to salvage part of his "investment." In 1780, with the act's passage, slave-owners were required to report the number of slaves in their possession; any slaves not reported that year were considered immediately free. In Chew's Philadelphia home, he listed 14 slaves. Ten years later he reported only three. By 1800 Chew reported he had only one slave and three freed blacks employed in Philadelphia. Most slaves were probably sent to Delaware as a result of the law because Chew's slave listings in Delaware do not decrease at the same rate during the same time period.

It is difficult to know which slaves and servants stayed at Cliveden based on the scattered information that has survived. Benjamin Chew and his son Benjamin Chew Jr., both owned slaves and employed free blacks in Philadelphia and any number of them *might* have been to Cliveden at one time or another. Servants would typically accompany the family to Cliveden for the summer months. Some would be sent ahead of the family to open the house and remain after their departure to close it for the winter. Because we know about few of the actual individuals on

⁹ The Pennsylvania Law for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery stipulated that slave children born after 1780 were to be freed at the age of 28. Slaves born before 1780 could remain enslaved in the state their entire lifetime. If Chew were to send those women who were of childbearing age to Delaware, where no such law existed, their children could be permanently enslaved.

the property, particularly during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, this essay looks more generally at people owned and employed by the Chews, both in Philadelphia and Delaware.

There is evidence of a negotiated relationship between master and slave that gives insight into slave life within the Chew family. For example, Benjamin Chew sent a letter to an unidentified gentlemen (probably a relative or neighbor) discussing a slave named Mark in 1803. Mark had come to Chew after failing to feed the cattle, one of his prescribed duties. Though Chew was suspicious of this excuse, feeling that it would have taken less effort to feed the cattle than to travel to him, Chew wrote to Mark's owner asking him to be forgiving upon Mark's return. Chew is at times condescending in reference to slaves in the letter, but he also seems conscious of the dilemmas inherent in human slavery. "It is needless for me to repeat, how unhappy I am made by the conduct of their poor, wretched beings," but "nothing short of self preservation would prevail me to lift my hand, against any human creature." Asking Mark's owner not to beat him, he wrote, "I cannot help pleading for every possible Indulgence, especially towards those, who seem as it were, to be just stepping into the silent grave, there to rest from their Labors."¹⁰ Perhaps this was an attitude adopted in his later years, as he was 82 years old at this point, but it is revealing nonetheless. Though Benjamin Chew continued to own slaves until his death, his attitude toward them appears to be one of sympathy and paternalism. Though they were "wretched beings," he did not want to see slaves abused. This characteristic appears in other documents and together confirms Chew's rather protective nature towards his slaves.

Another equally noteworthy example is that of slave Joseph, who wrote a letter to Chew in 1804. This, too, offers insight into Chew's opinions about slaves. Joseph's ability to write and the survival of the letter is worthy of note but the content is also significant. Joseph's letter was sent to Chew in Philadelphia "From your plantation in Kent County" and asked Chew for

¹⁰ Letter draft of Benjamin Chew, 1803. Cliveden Archives – NTARC.CL1.23, Box 1

permission to move closer to his wife, who, not in the Chew's ownership, was sold by her mistress to a household in Baltimore. Though her new master "has been so kind as to grant me the liberty to go and see her," Joseph maintained that the travel from Kent County, Delaware to Baltimore was much too far for two who were "man and wife this Eleven years." He wished to be "more Convenient to her" and found himself a Baltimore gentleman interested in using his labor. He wrote Chew "if it was your pleasure to let me go over there for the ensuing year, they would allow you very generous wages."¹¹ This example provides important information regarding Chew's treatment of his slaves. The fact that Joseph already had permission to leave the Kent County plantation to visit his wife is evidence of some flexibility given to Chew's slaves in order to maintain their family relationships, an aspect of slave life often under much stress because of family members' movement from owner to owner. Typically, slaveholders did not allow "legal" marriage.¹² The act of writing a letter to his master is also telling because he was educated and believed a letter to his master *could* prove fruitful.

Slave owners were not always in direct contact with their slaves, as Chew had been with Joseph or Mark. Though the family owned property in Delaware, they were rarely present on the plantations to oversee their production and daily functioning. As a result, the Chews hired overseers to see to the land and its slaves. Joseph Porter was hired by Benjamin Chew in 1797 and remained the overseer at Whitehall until the land was sold in 1803. Porter signed a contract stating that he would "treat the black people both young and old committed to his care with tenderness attention and Humanity that he will cautiously guard against striking any of them with an improper instrument or weapon." He was also expected to "send for a Physician in due Season to such of the Black people as may be ill and require assistance."¹³ Porter ran the farm and regularly wrote Chew in Philadelphia to inform him of its current conditions.

¹¹ Letter from slave Joseph (Whitehall, DE) to Benjamin Chew (Philadelphia), 1804. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers Collection 2050, Box 96

¹² Melson, Claudia *Ross Mansion Quarter* Seaford Historical Society, 1994. p. 6

¹³ Contract between Joseph Porter (Whitehall, DE) and Benjamin Chew (Philadelphia), November 29, 1797. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers Collection 2050, Box 267

In 1800, a slave named Meritt Allee wrote a letter to Chew in complaint about Porter's treatment. He told Chew that Porter had threatened to kill him if he returned to Whitehall. He assured Chew he "had never misbehaved to any person nor any person can say that I have used any person ill." Often what happened at Whitehall was only known to Chew via correspondence. Though Porter's contract never gave him permission to treat slaves as Meritt attested he had, Chew would have had little way of knowing what he did there.

Though these preceding examples provide evidence that Benjamin Chew could be sympathetic toward their slaves, there are also documents that confirm that slaves feared him. George Ford, the Whitehall overseer prior to Porter, wrote Benjamin Chew in 1797 that he wanted Chew to come down to the plantation "for our boys are running about knights [nights] and has unmanner wore out ther [their] shoes and are very subbern [stubborn] and apt to give Lacy languig [language]."¹⁴ Apparently Ford felt that Chew's presence could end the unrest and bring things back to order.

In 1772 Benjamin Chew noted the "Rules for Cloathing and Feeding Negroes." Jotted by Chew's hand, the list was taken from E. Tilghman's 1772 directions for slaves' clothing and feeding allowances. The clothing allotment for Chew's slaves was small, as was the case in most colonial and early Federal slave holding houses. Slaves only received one set of clothes each year, usually during the fall before the winter arrived: two shirts or shifts, one pair of shoes, one pair of socks, a jacket or waistcoat, and a petticoat or pair of trousers. Some of the documents from Delaware show that Chew's overseers would measure the feet of the slaves and send the measurements to Chew in Philadelphia to have their yearly shoes made. The measurements consisted of only the length of their feet, no mention of anything else in particular. Though the Chews were rarely on their plantations and some Chew slaves were hired out temporarily to other houses or plantations, the family was always responsible for all the slaves' clothing.

¹⁴ Letter from George Ford (Whitehall, DE) to Benjamin Chew (Philadelphia), December 23, 1797. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers Collection 2050, Box 265

Extremely impersonal lists such as the shoe measurements demonstrate the view that slaves were labor and little else. They are often identified like livestock with little additional information other than their names and in some cases their ages. Lemon, for example, appeared on several lists as a Whitehall slave. The only note next to his name time after time was the word “old.” Such is the little information we have to document his life until a letter from Whitehall plantation’s overseer Porter in 1800 informing Chew of his death. In this, too, he is only mentioned as “old Lemon” who had died of nothing more than old age. The lists also demonstrate that there were very few names used by slaves, making it hard to know if a person from one list is the same person from another list. Some of the most common names on the Chew family’s slave lists are Dinah, Harry, Rachel, and Sal.

The Chews appeared to understand the problematic situation in which they placed themselves when they used unfree labor, but they did not abolish the practice for many years. Records from the 1820s, more than 40 years after the passing of the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, document Benjamin Chew Jr. with two slaves in Pennsylvania. However, there seems to be a protective and paternal relationship between the slaves and the Chews that is in direct contrast to the later nineteenth-century when there was far less give-and-take between Anne Sophia Penn Chew and her paid servants. While the family depended on slave labor, they created relationships with their slaves in which the slaves trusted their masters to a certain degree and the masters, understanding their position of superiority, treated the slaves as lower but with a paternalistic concern that the slaves came to expect and used to their advantage.

III. Servants and Slaves of Benjamin Chew and Benjamin Chew, Jr.

Only bits and pieces compiled together create the beginnings of a slave narrative within the Chew family. Little is known about which slaves may have come to Germantown. More information is available concerning slaves and servants of the Chews in the more general Philadelphia area and Delaware. Of the information about Chew slaves in the broader region there is little documentation of any one individual more than once or twice and as a result almost no complete life stories can be compiled. As more of the Chew documents are scoured for these particular people, there may be more information on workers within the household that will add to a better understanding of the Chews and their entire household. As a result, most of the following information gives but glimpses into slave life by way of short stories about different people, both paid and unpaid during Benjamin Chew and his son's tenures in Philadelphia and Cliveden.

By 1768, Benjamin Chew's family numbered ten. Caring for a family of this number required a sizeable staff of both domestic and outdoor workers. Chew realized that at least five domestic servants were necessary to have the house function: a cook, at least one maid, a manservant and waiter, a laundress, and a nurse for the children. Regular outdoor staff always included a gardener and a coachman. Chew's records for these early years make clear that these positions were filled by a mix of slaves, indentured servants, and paid employees. Though seven workers were necessary at any given time, Chew usually had about 12 on hand to meet the family's needs.

The records of 1776 list at least eight people as servants and slaves of the Chew family though there were probably more at any given time. Of these only one family is specifically listed as slaves: Will, his wife Dinah, and their children. The other workers included Hannah, the cook; Robert Burnett, the gardener; Betty, the washwoman; William Stewart, the coachman; and

John Badger, an indentured servant. In 1776 these would have been the permanent staff on hand during the summer months at Cliveden. The staff size remained fairly constant and many of the same names appear year after year in the family records.

Some indentured servants and slaves ran away from their positions because of harsh conditions, a desire to find their families, or a host of other reasons. John Badger, a 19 year old white indentured servant, was reported in 1776 as having run away from the Chew family with a collection of costly clothes, probably taken from the family. Chew believed he planned on either enlisting into the army or joining a merchant ship. Offered in the newspaper was three pounds for information of his whereabouts. This case provides an example of the reasons many wealthy Philadelphians preferred slavery over indentured servitude.

In 1807, a slave named Tom Miller ran away from Chew's property in Delaware because he had an argument with a white man and feared the possible consequences. Chew offered a \$40 reward for his whereabouts. Miller appears in later Chew records, however, and it is unclear whether he returned to the Chew plantation on his own free will or was found and returned. Running away was a concern for slave-owners. In attempting to retrieve escaped "property," Chew used three methods: advertisements in the local newspapers, informally asking acquaintances to watch out for the slaves, and sending out people to search for them. A surviving letter from 1776 was used as the pass for Michael, a Chew slave, to travel and procure runaways of the Chew family. A slave traveling alone needed a letter for his safety and proof of his ownership. Chew told Michael that he was to tell all runaways that if they returned "without subjecting me to further trouble and expense, all that is past should be overlooked, and they will be treated from the time to come with the kindness and humanity due to them."¹⁵

Robert Burnett, the gardener, had an important job on the Cliveden property. The gardener's responsibilities were to tend the grounds while also functioning as a small farmer.

¹⁵ Permission to Travel Draft by Benjamin Chew, 1796. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 96

Historically, a “garden” was not a flower garden as we see today but rather a working and functioning section of ground producing crops for the family. On a hierarchical scale of workers, the gardener was highly ranked because the garden was such a visible part of the landscape. Burnett had the power to purchase necessary equipment and keep track of temporary hires and their hours worked. A general rule in looking at servants and slaves is that the more visible the worker was, the better their appearance because they were a reflection of their master’s or employer’s prosperity. A visitor would see the gardener on the grounds before he or she saw the cook, for example. As a result, the gardener would be better dressed than the cook who would rarely be seen by guests.¹⁶

The coachman at the time, William Stewart, would have been second to the gardener on the hierarchy of family workers. Stewart worked for Chew from 1771 to 1779 and was one of the longest serving coachmen on his staff. Also highly visible, Stewart would have been well dressed because he reflected his master’s or employer’s lifestyle. He, like any coachmen during the eighteenth-century, was responsible for the grooming of the horses, the cleaning of the stables, and the care and management of the carriages.

Salaried staff in 1778 included Mrs. Furman, the children’s nurse. She was the highest paid female employee in the household. Though Mrs. Furman was paid, her pay was significantly less than Chew’s male paid employees. This inequality continued to be the case long after the abolition of slavery. Mrs. Furman’s responsibilities revolved around caring for the family’s children. Typically, the parents and older siblings had little interaction with the children; most of the children’s daily routine revolved around their nurse.

The only slave family that we know spent time at Cliveden was that of Will and his wife Dinah. Will served as a manservant and records show that he was part of the family staff from his 1772 purchase until his death. Though it is unknown how many children the couple had, they too are listed as slaves. One of the “advantages” of having an enslaved couple, in the mind of

¹⁶ Richards, Nancy *Cliveden: The Chew Mansion in Germantown*, 1993. p. 33-34

slave-owners, was that the children of an enslaved woman were also considered slaves and an addition to the owner's property. Both Dinah and Will remained with the family for the remainder of their lives. It is unknown if their children remained with them or were sold off at some point. Dinah died in 1779 and Chew paid for her burial fees.¹⁷ Will remained a member of Chew's staff until he died in 1810, 31 years after his wife's passing.

Many of the Chew's slaves did not remain in one place throughout their lives. Harry, owned by Chew, was born in 1774 to Dinah (though it is unknown if she was the same Dinah married to Will). There is documentation of Harry traveling on two ships, working at two plantations, and running away. He traveled to Santo Domingo from the ports of Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1805 and 1809. Because he was a slave traveling without his master, Harry needed written permission for his movements. Benjamin Chew wrote a note for Harry's second trip in 1809 and he was expected to carry it with him at all times as notification of his slave status. "My Negro Man, aged about 30 years short in his stature but of strong limbs and square built Person. I certify that the said Negro Man Harry was born and bred up in my family and is now my Property and placed on board the *Indostam* for the advantages of Sea Voyage instead of remaining in my family."¹⁸ Harry was to show the note to anyone questioning his permission to travel or his status as an enslaved person. On his trip aboard the *Neptune* in 1805, Harry made 12 dollars each month. It is unknown if he was permitted to keep a portion of his salary or if it was all given to Chew as payment for Harry's work. In 1807, two years after this journey, he was back in Kent County, DE working as a field hand on the Chew plantation. In 1815 he ran away from another plantation in Maryland at the age of 39 and no further documentation mentions him. It is unknown if he was returned or escaped to freedom.

In 1796, Sydney, a 13 year old African American girl, placed her mark on an indenture form and in effect signed a contract wherein she would serve Katherine Chew, Benjamin Chew

¹⁷ List of Chew slaves, 1800. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 96

¹⁸ Permission to Travel Draft by Benjamin Chew Jr., 1809. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 87

Jr.'s wife, until her 28th birthday. As Katherine's maid, she agreed not to marry and was expected to "faithfully serve and every where gladly obey." Most importantly she was not to "absent herself neither night nor day from her said mistress's service." The only obligations specifically required of Katherine within the agreement were that she provide Sydney "with sufficient apparel and lodging" during the term. Sydney was expected to live and breathe depending on Katherine's desires and needs. Sydney could not sign her name but marked an "X" in the necessary spot. A similar contract was signed by Cynthia Ross for a five month agreement with Chew Jr.'s family as the cook in 1810. She would perform her duties "without making any other demand or claim than the usual cloathes [clothes] furnished to persons in that station."¹⁹ Cynthia's term is much shorter in length than Sydney's though within her contract, too, the only obligation the Chews have on her behalf is to provide clothing, food, and shelter.

Chew slaves attempted to create personal relationships, test the boundaries of enslavement, and find balance in a world that treated them as less than human. The evidence suggests that the Chews recognized the dilemma unpaid servitude created though they did little to stop the practice within their own homes. It is also apparent that those under Chew control knew of the family's moderate opinions and tried to take advantage of them when necessary. They wrote the Chews regarding their overseer's treatment, asked for permission to relocate for loved ones, and came to the Chews requesting safety from their own masters. Slaves also attempted to escape from family control and seek freedom. The evidence shows that Chew slaves did not accept their position as lower than their masters. Rather, they took control of their lives in various ways while enslaved. Slavery within the family was a peculiar institution only successful with a balance between master and slave.

¹⁹ Indenture form between Cynthia Ross and Benjamin Chew, Jr., May 19, 1810. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 87

IV. A Family Dependent on Paid Employees

With the abolition of slavery in Pennsylvania, the Chews had to look elsewhere for Cliveden workers. A full-time staff was still needed at the house when the family resided on the grounds, especially during the permanent tenure of Anne Sophia Penn Chew (1805-1892) after 1857. During her residency at Cliveden she hired staff to handle the chores of the household as well as temporary employees for improvements on the house and additional chores the permanent staff could not complete on their own. The new permanent and temporary staff during the mid to late 1800s was hired from a growing European immigrant and local free black community.

Philadelphia saw the rise of immigrant groups seeking paid employment beginning in the middle of the nineteenth-century. At Cliveden during the second half of the nineteenth-century, most of the permanent staff consisted of white, Roman Catholic, Irish women. Domestic workers were strangers to their mistresses, though they lived under the same roof, because of their different cultural backgrounds. Immigrants often entered domestic service because it was almost the only paid work they could find in a society that did not accept them as workers in many other fields.

When employers were unhappy with the conditions of the household or the grounds, they often blamed the Irish in general. They used racist preconceptions for their explanations, and in this way acted similarly to the earlier slaveholding generations. During the nineteenth-century the dislike of the Irish was used as the explanation behind many of the problems occurring in the cities of the east coast, including Philadelphia.²⁰ Though there was a distrust of the Irish, they continued to be hired because they were often willing to accept low wages for long hours. Anne Sophia Penn Chew was frequently unsatisfied with her permanent staff, writing about them as

²⁰ Dudden, Faye Evelyn *From Help to Domestic: American Servants 1800-1880* Univ. of Rochester, 1981 iv

lazy and disrespectful in her personal notes, but she rarely employed anyone other than Irish women.

Philadelphia was also a city brimming with blacks during the nineteenth-century. Throughout the century their population grew and many searched for jobs. Philadelphia was typically a city of refuge; most of the blacks who lived here weren't born here. Many came to Philadelphia from other parts of Pennsylvania and the surrounding states. "By 1800, black Pennsylvanians were four times as likely to reside in the capital city as were white residents of the state." Manumitted slaves heading north often found themselves within the city limits as well.²¹ Free blacks found it harder and harder to find employment because of competition within the workforce with other ethnic groups. They were forced to find niches in the economy and were often found at the bottom of the hierarchical system working as chimney sweeps and washerwomen, both regularly hired at Cliveden.

Nineteenth-century etiquette insisted on an elaborate observance of rational work with a disciplined staff looked after by the house's mistress. This was true in Anne Sophia's household as well as throughout the country. Using advice from literature often written by women of American and European society's echelon, employers attempted to create models within their household for how servants *should* behave and act.²² Workers had lists of chores to be finished by the end of each day. Under the supervision of the house's mistress, domestics were to follow these models. This is a change in the perception of service from the years of Benjamin Chew and Benjamin Chew Jr.'s tenure during which the role of slave or servant seemed much more fluid depending on their needs and the needs of the family at a given time.

Anne had chore lists for all her domestic staff to complete. The lists were organized by day of the week and began with their rising before the rest of the household and preparing for the

²¹ Nash, Gary *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community 1720-1840* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988. p. 142-143 Philadelphia was the capital of the United States from 1790 to 1800.

²² A good example of such a publication is Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* first published in 1861.

day. In 1868, she listed the duties to be completed by the maids on Tuesdays. “Rise early, fix the dining room for breakfast – commence ironing – Get your own breakfast ready – attend to the family breakfast when they are ready for it – make the beds and attend to the chambers as before – clear the breakfast table – attend to the dining room – see that the parlor is ready for company – return to ironing – prepare the lamps and candles for evening – prepare the dinner table.”²³ In addition to taking care of all the duties for the family, the servants were also responsible for their own rooms. “Take care to keep your own room well aired and dusted. Keep the window sill clean.”²⁴

The chores Anne expected to be completed by each servant typically placed them in a different location of the house than the family. Ideally chores were to be completed by unseen hands that moved through the house at different times from the family so as to avoid encountering them. Food was to be laid out before the family came down for breakfast, for example, and while they were in the dining room, the bedrooms were to be fixed and cleaned for the day. After breakfast, when the family went back upstairs, the maids were to be out of the bedrooms, having left them in perfect order.

Anne’s servants went to town to run her errands and were given funds to buy merchandise and produce regularly. Anne kept impeccable notes on the money given to her servants, the cost of all items, and any change after their return from town. James Smith, a long time employee of the family, often went to town for Anne’s daily needs. Anne’s servants were also permitted to travel into town during their free time on Sundays though she expected that the girls never leave at the same time in the event that she needed something. By enforcing this rule, Sundays were not entirely theirs; they needed to work shifts for Anne and were not able to leave for the entire day.

²³ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, 1868. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 249

²⁴ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, 1868. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 249

Though the domestic servants of Anne's household were paid, the pay was irregular and sporadic. There were no weekly payments given to the staff. As in most households of the time, the staff was paid on a need basis. Though her staff earned weekly wages, they received them far less often. When they needed pay they went to Anne and requested their earnings both for past and future weeks. For example, Hannah Welsh, a maid to Anne, requested a forward of two months pay for necessary personal items. Anne gave her this money but took note that she had forwarded Hannah pay for work not yet rendered and that Hannah owed her work as a result.

The house depended on the staff and Anne's accounts document her reliance on them. Though her personal documents attest to the fact that the staff ran Cliveden, she never seemed to let on to this in her correspondence to family and friends. The impression was that she handled everything at Cliveden and though people were assisting her, they were certainly not to be credited with the functioning of the house. What little was mentioned about her staff in letters and memoranda criticized them and how the house was falling apart because of their lackadaisical attitudes. "The food brought is not properly taken care of but wastefully misapplied. Yet I pay the butcher out of my own funds. The meals are messy, inelegantly served and generally ungenteeled in all the appointments, not satisfactory to those who have been more genteely [genteelly] brought up... My servants are thought hateful and I have been advised to manage them better."²⁵

Anne needed a lot of work completed that her small staff could not accomplish. For these annual and semiannual duties she hired local residents. In her notes she refers to them as "dayjobbers," paid based on the days and hours they worked at Cliveden. Some of the duties needing assistance included cleaning rugs, tending to the gardens, washing laundry, and serving as maids when visitors were at the house.

²⁵ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, October 27, 1878 Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 205

More documentation exists about Cliveden's workers during Anne Sophia Penn Chew's tenure on the property than her predecessors. These documents reveal the strained relationships between worker and employer during the nineteenth-century. Anne did not trust her workers and often wrote of them suspiciously. She thought they tried to take advantage of her and always wanted more than they deserved. Perhaps it was the difference in culture or the fact that her staff changed much more frequently than it had during Benjamin Chew and Benjamin Chew Jr.'s tenure that affected her negative outlook. There was no guarantee that a servant in Anne's house would stay if he or she did not want to. Because of this, a tension existed in Anne's house that did not seem present in the preceding generations.

V. Anne Sophia Penn Chew's Staff

Anne's notes and letters not only document the workers' responsibilities and pay, they also begin to reveal the lives of her workers beyond their positions within the household. Personal stories emerge from her papers regarding her servants. Though the documents were written by Anne and as a result were shaded by her opinions, they nonetheless begin to illuminate the lives of those taking the servant's stairs rather than the main staircase and demonstrate that her staff, like Benjamin Chew and Benjamin Chew Jr.'s staffs, held agency in their lives and tested the boundaries of their positions.

Anne's servants stayed on the third floor of the main house. With such close quarters came the typical arguments and squabbles inherent in any household. In 1857, when Anne moved into the property permanently, she brought with her three servants: Hannah Welsh, Maria Claffy, and James Smith. Both women were Irish Catholic and James Smith an African American. Soon after, she hired Nora Monahan, also an Irish Catholic. By 1868, Maria had left the household but Hannah and James remained. Hannah had been serving as the house cook, hating the job because of its long, hard hours, and James Smith was a manservant, taking care of any chores the women were not expected to complete, such as cutting wood and tending fires.

In 1868 Hannah demanded that she be reassigned as a housemaid and receive a raise. Anne agreed and hired a new cook: Maria Carnivan. Maria and Hannah did not get along and apparently had a loud and heated argument. Anne wrote that "The cook overheard the other two after she left their chamber this morning laughing at her – as she says slandering her – but I don't believe she used that word understandably – and of course she gave them a piece of her mind and the three were very mad at each other."²⁶ She quit within a week from the position and was given \$2.50 for her work. Hannah went back to serving as the cook until Anne could find another

²⁶ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, 1868. Cliveden Archives, Mss., Box 1

replacement. Anne kept Hannah as part of her staff until the 1880s though she often referred to her as “overbearing to other servants, disinclined to obey directions.”²⁷

Though Anne attempted to create a strict set of rules for her servants to follow, there appears to be a struggle over who really ran the house. Mary Johnson Brown Chew, wife of Anne’s nephew Sam, spent a good deal of time at Cliveden. When Mary stayed on the property with her children a nurse was always on hand because she was ill following their deliveries and needed the extra assistance. The nurse hired at Cliveden for these duties was Catherine. Anne noted that “Mary cannot be bothered with the care of the children and has a nurse who is able to relieve her entirely of the charge of them.”²⁸ Though this may appear neglectful on Mary’s part, having a nurse was very common. Catherine had a high position in the family and was responsible for establishing the children’s routines and overseeing the other servants. As a result of being closely linked to both the family and the servants, Catherine was often the go-between for the two parties.

It is clear that Catherine understood her position of power and used it to her advantage. The household, including Anne, realized how integral to the proper function of Cliveden Catherine was, especially when Mary was ill and needed her assistance more than ever. Anne told her sister Eliza Mason Chew in a letter that Catherine was “a valuable creature in regard to her care of the children.” Though Anne noted Catherine’s good work as nurse, she also realized that Catherine tested her limits. In the same letter, Anne wrote that Catherine had “to be humored to the fullest extent of her humors – for every little worriment in the nursery or dread of losing the services of the head nurse throws poor Mary back and makes her nervous and sick.”²⁹

Another member of Anne’s staff was James Smith. He had been added to the staff in 1819 and remained there until his death in 1871. He was first hired as a coachman and later had

²⁷ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, June 20, 1868. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 197

²⁸ Richards, Nancy. 62

²⁹ Letter from Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to her sister Eliza Chew Mason (Canada), September 4, 1867. Historical Society of Pennsylvania – Chew Family Papers, Collection 2050, Box 249

his duties changed to that of a general servant. As a servant in Anne's household, James was responsible for keeping the kitchen fires running, cleaning the pots, fetching coal, and collecting wood. Previous to his Chew employment, James was a slave in Maryland and had bought his freedom. He died carrying fire wood to the house at the age of 80.³⁰ James was also the only Chew servant that we know of who was professionally photographed, reflecting the family's high esteem toward him. He is pictured, formally dressed with a hat and cane, sitting on the steps at the front of Cliveden in 1867. Photography during the time period could be symbolic, similar to painted portraits of the decades before. Though James was dressed well, perhaps a reflection of his position as servant within the family, he is also seated on the step. His seated position could reflect his inferiority within the household as servant.³¹ It is interesting to see both the dress and the pose in one photograph. Though they seem to work against each other, the two together can reflect the difficult position servants found themselves during the nineteenth-century: they could be respected if they worked hard for their employers, however they would never be able to reach the level of authority found among family members.

³⁰ See Figure 2, James Smith obituary. Cliveden Archive

³¹ See Figure 3, James Smith photograph. Cliveden Archive

VI. Conclusion

The lives of Cliveden slaves and servants represent broad changes that took place in the country during the 1700s and 1800s. Many of the themes inherent in studying the lives of workers throughout the United States appear within the Chew history. During the Chew tenure at Cliveden, the family saw the gradual end of an enslaved and unpaid labor force, the dependence on a growing immigrant and free black population, the change in attitude during the Victorian era toward workers, and the tendency for workers to challenge the restrictions of their positions in a variety of ways.

There was a negotiated relationship between the Chew family and their staff. As far back as the early accounts of Benjamin Chew, there was an understanding that the family relied on slaves to complete the necessary jobs for the house's proper functioning and slaves relied on their masters to be understanding, kind, and generous. Without this balance, the consequences could be detrimental. This equilibrium between servant and employer seemed to be less sturdy during the late nineteenth-century in the Chew house when immigrants began to take over the jobs that before had been filled by unfree labor. These immigrants often worked for little money with the belief that they could climb to a brighter future. Hannah Welsh is an example of such a worker. She did not like being the cook, and demanded a raise after being employed by Anne for several years. She insisted from Anne that she be moved to another position of the household and succeeded because Anne did not want to see her quit.

Life was not easy for any worker regardless of the time period. However, a paid worker *could* leave if they so chose. The power of choice is one of the big differences between paid servants and unpaid slaves. No slave had the right to leave his or her master or insist a better position within the household at any time. However, Chew slaves attempted other avenues to get what they desired, such as running away and writing letters.

These issues are important in gaining a better understanding of the family and their workers. How the family treated those they depended on and how the staff felt about the family gives insight into a more personal side of life within the Chew household. The staff was expected to go about the house unseen, and though they often did, they certainly knew more about their owners and employers than did many of those outside Cliveden's gates. They prepared the family's food, made their beds, cared for their children, and saw to all the daily chores. Because of this, each room within the house also tells the slaves' and servants' stories.

One of the biggest themes that weaves through the Chew family history is the power inherent within the workers. Servants and slaves attempted to control their lives in a social system that placed them lower than their masters and employers. Work was hard, pay was little or nothing, and life was always under stress, but in some areas the Chew workers created their own rules. They maintained families and a personal life, demanded better pay for work rendered, and hoped for the promise of freedom and security that so many took for granted.

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