

100 Dollars Reward.

RUN away from the

subscriber, in Kingston, Ulster County, about the 29th of May last, a Negro man slave, named TOM, aged about forty years, of about middle stature, of rather a light complexion, speaks broken English, and has been brought up in a Dutch family, well built, and is esteemed a good fidler, he has a scar in his face not unlike a large pock mark, has a good set of teeth, and his front teeth project, and the thumb of his right hand by occasion of a wound, is somewhat stiff, and bent inwards.-----Whoever will apprehend and deliver him to the subscriber within four months from the date hereof, in Kingston, shall receive the above reward from

TJERCK DE WITT.

S. S. FREER'S PRINT—KINGSTON.

(African Americans) De Witt, Tjerck, 100 Dollars Reward. RUN away from the subscriber, in Kingston, Ulster County, about the 29th of May last, a Negro slave, named TOM, aged about forty years, of about middle stature, of rather a light complexion, speaks broken English, and has been brought up in a Dutch family, well built, and is esteemed a good fidler, he has a scar in his face not unlike a large pock mark, has a good set of teeth, and his front teeth project, and the thumb of his right hand by occasion of a wound, is somewhat stiff, and bent inwards. ---- Whoever will apprehend and deliver him to the subscriber within four months from the date hereof, in Kingston, shall receive the above reward from TJERCK DE WITT.

Kingston, [New York]: S. S. Freer's Print, [nd circa 1814] broadside, measuring 9 x 7 ½ inches, paper browned, edges folded, separations along fold lines reinforced on verso with archival tissue, formerly framed, a handwritten date to the left of "Tjerck" has faded and is illegible, otherwise in good condition. Not in OCLC, etc.

From an article in the Kingston *Argus*, of April 12, 1878¹, on the "Black Gentry" of Kingson, New York, composed mainly of the 33 slaves who were born in the family of Andries DeWitt, and his sons, Isaac and Tjerck, between 1718 and 1819, we learn that the runaway, Tom, in this broadside was likely "Tom Dian's son, born May, 1768." The broadside was printed by Samuel Freer, the proprietor of the *Ulster County Gazette*, printed in Kingston from 1799-1803². (See Brigham, C.S., *American Newspapers*, p. 595.) De Witt placed an advertisement with this same text in *The Ulster Gazette*, June 21, 1814. See: *In Defiance Runaways from Slavery in New York's Hudson River Valley 1735 -1831*, second edition, 788, p. 418. The *Ulster Gazette*, (1802-until 1820), was a weekly, a continuation without change of numbering of the *Ulster County Gazette*. It was also published by Samuel S. Freer; at some time between 1815 and 1817, Samuel S. Freer admitted Anthony Freer to partnership and the paper was published by S. S. & A. Freer until at least 1819. (See Brigham, C.S. *American Newspapers*, p. 596). This broadside is apparently unrecorded.

Tom, like his mother Dian, and his siblings were born into slavery in Kingston, New York. They were among the thousands of African Americans who lived and died as slaves in the North. He and his family were owned by the De Witt family and were passed down as that family's property with each successive generation. Tom ran away from his then current owner, Tjerck De Witt, who had inherited him from his father Andries De Witt.

The De Witt family descended from Tjerck Claessen De Witt (c. 1620-1700) the ancestor of the De Witt family in America. He arrived in America circa 1655, and of whom the first mention made is to be found in the "Trouw Boeck," or register of marriages of the Reformed or Collegiate Dutch church of New York City. There it is recorded that on April 24, 1656, "Tjerck Claessen De Witt van Grootholdt en Zunderlandt" (Westphalia) married "Barbara Andriessen van Amsterdam." He was the son of Nicholas De Witt, of Holland, one of the members of a most influential family. It is not known whether other of his relatives actually came over from Holland at the same time that he did; but it is thought probable, as he had a sister, Emmerentje, who married Martinus Hoffman in 1662, at New Amsterdam, and his brother, Jan Claessen De Witt, died, unmarried, at Kingston, New York, in 1699.

Tjerck C. De Witt resided in New York for a short time following his marriage in 1656, where his first child was born; but moved in the spring of the following year to Albany, where he purchased a house and lot. He exchanged this in September 1660, with Madame de Hutter, for land in Wiltwyck (Kingston), Ulster County, New York, with "possession to be given May 1, 1661." Here he lived until his death, and for two centuries and a half the place remained in the family. He was undoubtedly a man of means, as is shown by the fact that in 1661 he was taxed one hundred and twenty-five guilders (equal to about \$50) to help pay for a new church building in Esopus, and in 1662 he owned No. 28 of the "New Lots." His eldest daughter, Taatje, was carried away from him by the Indians, June 7, 1663, during the destruction of Kingston and Hurley, but was rescued. Governor Lovelace deeded to him "a parcel of bush-land, together with a house, lot, orchard, and calves' pasture, lying near Kingston, in Esopus," on June 25, 1672, and Governor Andros, October 8, 1677, deeded to him about fifty acres of woodland west of the town. He was, on February 11, 1679, one of the signers of a renewal of the Nichols treaty with the Esopus Indians. He joined with others, in 1684, petitioning Governor Thomas Dongan that there might be "liberty by charter to this county (Ulster) to choose our owne officers to every towne court by the major vote of the freeholders." The petition greatly offended the authorities, so that the signers were arrested and fined for this display of a desire for free or local self-government. The trustees of Kingston

conveyed to him one hundred and eighty-nine acres of land, February 13, 1685, and June 6, 1685, he claimed two hundred and ninety acres lying upon the north side of Rondout Kill, known as Momboccus, which was granted to him by patent May 14, 1694. He was elected a magistrate of Ulster County, March 4, 1689. He died at Kingston, New York, February 17, 1700. By his will, dated March 4, 1698, he left his property to his wife for life, and directed that after her death it be divided between his oldest and youngest sons, in trust, and by them divided into twelve equal shares, to be given to each of his children or their heirs; but to Lucas he devised the one-half of a sloop he had built the year before, and his widow was named executrix.³ There was at least one Tjerck De Witt in each succeeding generation of the family.

New York was the heaviest user of slave labor north of the Mason and Dixon Line, especially in York City, and the surrounding counties and in the Hudson River Valley. Slavery began in New Netherland in 1620, in 1750, New York had the fifth largest slave population in the 13 colonies, in 1770, there were more enslaved persons in New York than in the province of Georgia, and in 1790, New York City had more slaves than any other city in the nation other than Charleston, South Carolina. Slavery in New York lasted longer than any other Northern state with the exception of New Jersey. The Dutch and Dutch descent Americans played a substantial role in shaping the institution in New York. There were slaveowners spread all over the state, but the majority lived either in New York City and its environs or in ribbons on each bank of the Hudson River. One scholar has estimated that between 30-40 per cent of New York slaves spoke Dutch. Slave owning was not confined to the elites but even shopkeepers and artisans owned a slave or two. This pattern was repeated in New York City's immediate surroundings – Kings and Queens counties on the western end of Long Island and Richmond County on Staten Island. In these counties proximity to the city's markets provided a living for farmers in the surrounding countryside.

In the Hudson Valley farms were less concerned with feeding New York City than with supplying the grain importing areas in America and Europe. Slavery had long been an established part of everyday life in this region as well, Ulster County, in which the De Witt's resided had a particularly high concentration of slave owners, the De Witt family was likely among those who owned the highest number of slaves owning ten or more. Persons of Dutch heritage were the most committed to slave ownership, in the Hudson Valley the vast bulk of the population from New Paltz to Albany was of Dutch origin, the farmers of Ulster County were the most likely to use slaves, one in every two and four in every ten households possessed slaves. Sylvester's *History of Ulster* reports that "it was a colloquial saying abroad concerning Kingston that every other house was a barn, and every other white man a negro." Dutch farmers in the Hudson Valley found that slavery was profitable particularly in the cultivation of wheat. The prevalence of Dutch slave ownership did not go unnoticed in 18th century travel narratives, many of which contained cruel and cutting comments on the Dutch. In the 1790 Census 28 per cent of households classified as Dutch owned slaves.

Slavery in the northern states was different from slavery in the south, but it was not necessarily milder. The myth of a mild northern slavery pervaded contemporary white thinking and still survives today. Northern slavery was neither centered around the growing of staple crops such as tobacco, rice, or cotton nor based on a plantation model. The eclectic mix that developed on the patchwork of small farms and urban areas north of the Mason and Dixon Line would later be called by Ira Berlin the Northern nonplantation system of slavery. In this system slaveholdings were typically small, and slaves were often housed under the same roof as their owners and often worked in close proximity to their owners in the fields or workshops. This close proximity and the family nature of the institution in this region were generally believed at the time to prevent the cruel and violent excesses of slavery in the south – and was the origin of the myth of northern slavery's mildness. However, in New York history one does not have to search long to find examples and reports of whites behaving in a cruel fashion towards their

slaves. Slave whippings were the primary method of punishment and control and often included an element of public observation. Public whippings were given at a whipping post, typically located outside either the county courthouse or local tavern. Whippings were also done privately. A New York law of 1730 allowed the master or mistress to punish slaves at their discretion, provided the punishment did not destroy life or limb.

One of the most significant events in the lives of New York slaves was Pinkster. This festival – Pinkster was the Dutch version of Whitsuntide or Pentecost – came to America with the seventeenth-century Dutch settlers, like Tjerck De Witt. By the last decade of the eighteenth-century, however, Pinkster was primarily an Afro-American holiday. The flamboyant festivities in and around Albany are best known, but the holiday was observed wherever there was a strong Dutch presence – along the Hudson Valley, on the western end of Long Island. The version of Pinkster celebrated by black people evolved in the years after the Revolution, and represented a complex synthesis of African practices and Dutch traditions. The holiday was an important break from the rigors of agricultural labor of rural New York. Tom, “esteemed a good fidler” would have played an important part in the celebration of Pinkster in Kingston.

The circumstances which led to Tom’s decision to flee slavery are unknown and likely to remain that way. In the years before the passage of New York’s Manumission Act, the number of runaway slaves increased. The number of runaway slaves in the Hudson Valley also increased in the 1790’s and 1800s, based on the increased number of runaway slave notices in contemporary newspapers. Perhaps he and other slaves simply grew impatient with the slow pace of manumissions which Dutch slave owners in the Hudson Valley had fiercely opposed. Whatever his reasons he left behind his family in an attempt to gain his freedom, whether he was successful is also unknown.

Sold.

1. <https://uctruthandrec.ulstercountyny.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Enslaved-DeWitts-Genealogy-1.pdf>
2. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn83031193/1800-01-04/ed-1/>
3. <https://www.schenectadyhistory.org/families/hmgfm/dewitt.html>

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