



A Revolutionary Breakthrough: Discovering Our Van Salee Lineage

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*Please note that this article is based on preliminary findings only.
Additional research remains to be done.*

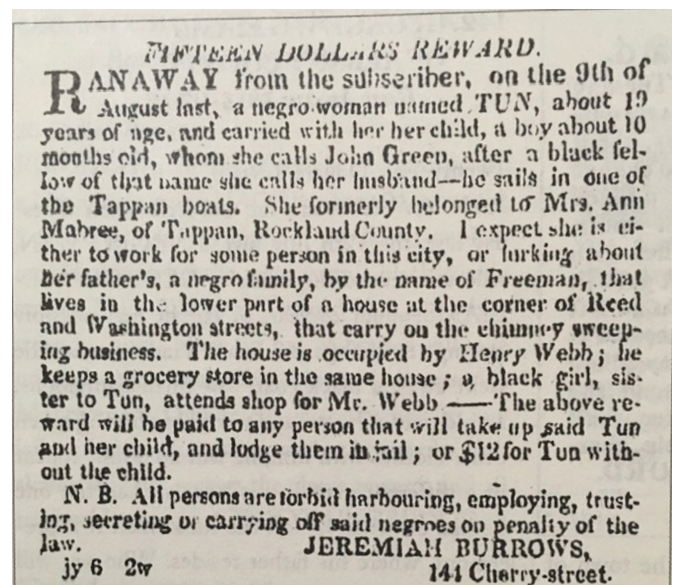
In April of 2022, my cousin Andrea Hughes and I focused on records from Bergen County, New Jersey, and Orange, Rockland, and New York Counties, New York. We did this for two reasons: first, we knew we descended from The Mann/Mannuel, DeVries, and Van Donck/Van Dunk families via our 4x great-grandfather Samuel Piggery, an Afro-Indigenous man of Lenape (Munsee) and Scots-Irish ancestry. Our Mann and DeVries ancestors were among the sixteen Tappan patent land grantees who left New Amsterdam in 1683 and relocated to Orange County, New York.¹ Our “Afro-Dutch” families were endogamous and tri-racial from the beginning.² Second, I also began gathering information on my 5x great-grandfather, Samuel Freeman, a Black Patriot who fought in Hardenburgh’s Regiment in Orangetown, New York, on and off for four years. While enslaved by Benjamin Moore, Freeman was also sent to New York City to build fortifications before the British occupied the city.

Finding Samuel Freeman, Finding Sarah Van Salee

We first discovered Samuel Freeman two years ago in an 1815 runaway enslaved ad for his daughter, my 4x great-grandmother Antonia (“Tun”) Snyder (ca. 1790–1881).³ Tun attempted to emancipate herself at the age of twenty in August 1814 in New York City. She fled with her newborn son

John Green named after a man she considered her husband. The ad stated that Tun was previously owned by Ann Mabie.⁴

While Samuel was free because of his service during the Revolutionary War, Tun was enslaved for life, as she was sold and taken to New Jersey in 1809.⁵ She was only freed after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862. By that time, she was seventy-two years old. In the 1860 census, she is listed as a “slave servant” in the household of Hannah Ackerson in New Barbados, New Jersey.⁶ Tun was one of New Jersey’s last enslaved people and she died on 2 Jan 1881 in Washington Township, New Jersey.

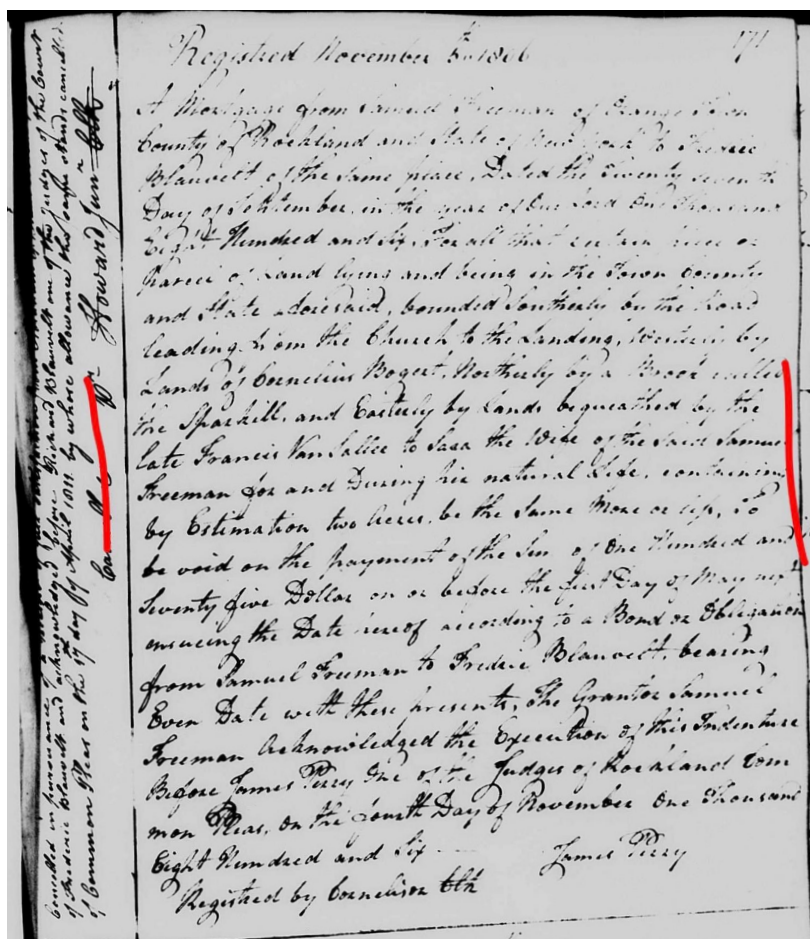


Tun’s runaway slave ad

From the ad and further research, we knew that Samuel Freeman became a master chimney sweep after the Revolutionary War and operated a business out of his home at 47 Reed Street in Lower Manhattan.⁷ His other daughter (name unknown) managed a grocery store owned by merchant Henry Webb at the same address. Samuel was one of several Black men from Orange County, New York, who started chimney sweep businesses in the Sixth Ward.⁸ Although becoming a master chimney sweep offered Samuel a leg up in the post-Revolutionary War era, chimney sweeping soon became a highly regulated occupation. By 1820, chimney sweeping began to decline due to the mechanization of the trade along with changes in labor laws that affected sweep apprentices. By 1821, Samuel was back living in Tappan, Rockland County, and listed as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church with his second wife, Betsy, and their two young daughters.⁹ His death date remains unknown.

While gathering additional documents for Samuel's DAR application right around Thanksgiving, Manhattan DAR Chapter Registrar Alyssa Ritch-Frels found an 1806 mortgage indenture mentioning Samuel.¹⁰ In 1806, Samuel's wife Sarah died. In the mortgage indenture, Fredericus Blauvelt wrote that Sarah used to be a well-known servant of Francis Van Salee and that she inherited half his property. Perhaps Samuel needed the money to support his business and residence in New York City. We do know that he paid the loan back because the indenture was cancelled in 1811 and was noted on the same 1806 indenture as a side note.¹¹

Finding Sarah was the brickwall breakthrough that led to more amazing genealogical finds. In Francis Van Salee Jr.'s (1702–1769) will, he wrote



1806 mortgage indenture

that "I give to my loving friend and servant Sarah her freedom and the other half of my estate real together with my dwelling house during her natural life and after her decease to her issue."¹² At this point, we didn't know whether Sarah was Francis Van Salee's common-law wife or daughter, as it was quite common for free Blacks to buy their enslaved relatives and emancipate them in their wills. Further digging revealed a 2 Oct 1759 christening record for Sarah that listed her parents, my 6X great grandparents, as being Fran Van Sylle and Rabecca.¹³ There is no other information regarding Rabecca. However, we do know that she is our earliest known maternal ancestor with Malagasy roots due to her descendant's mtDNA results.¹⁴

The christening record was proof that Sarah was Tun's mother, not Betsy. In the 1800 census, Samuel is shown living in a household with three

Name	Sara Van Sylle
Event Type	Christening
Event Date	2 Oct 1759
Event Place	New York City, New York County, New York, United States
Event Place (Original)	Lutheran Church, New York, New York, New York, United States
Sex	Female
Father's Name	Frans Van Sylle or Sylle
Mother's Name	Rabecca

Francis Van Salee's Will and Sarah's christening record

individuals.¹⁵ We believe his family unit included Sarah and another unknown child, possibly the sister mentioned in Tun's runaway enslaved ad. Her younger sister was no doubt born free due to Sarah's free status. Her parents also lived very close to the interrelated Blauvelt, Bogart, and Maybie families and Margaret Graham, who owned Tun's brother William.¹⁶ Tun would have grown up knowing her parents and other relatives. Although Sarah's father died in 1769, probating his will took twenty years. Sarah was likely enslaved when Tun was born, and may not have received her inheritance by then. If this was the case, then ten-year-old Sarah was probably raised by other Van Salee relatives until she came of age.

By the time Tun was a teen, she was already sold to William Sandford, her first New Jersey enslaver.¹⁷ Although Orangetown, New York, bordered Bergen County, New Jersey, slavery existed much longer in New Jersey; it was the last Northern state to emancipate enslaved people. The New Jersey Gradual Emancipation Law stated that enslaved children born after 4 July 1804 would be

freed when they reached the age of twenty-one for women and twenty-five for men. Children born before that date, however, were enslaved for life.¹⁸ Sarah and Tun's situation shows how enslavement was a harsh reality that led to very different outcomes within the same family.

It is significant that Fredericus Blauvelt was the person who backed the mortgage loan to Samuel. He was married to Anna Maria DeWint, whose father, Johannes DeWint, moved to Orange County, New York, from the island of St. Thomas. The DeWints were well-known sugar plantation owners there. During the Revolutionary War, both the DeWints and Blauvelts lived together at the DeWint House, which twice served as President George Washington's headquarters during the American Revolution.¹⁹

Connecting all the dots, Fredericus and Anna Maria (DeWint) Blauvelt had one child, a daughter named Elizabeth, who married Cornelius Mabie. Cornelius was the father of Ann Mabie to whom Fredericus bequeathed Tun in his 1809 will. Samuel intimately knew all the individuals involved as some of his relatives were probably owned by them. Moreover, there is the possibility that some of our ancestors on Samuel's side may have also come from St. Thomas. Clearly, there were ties that still connected formerly enslaved people to their former enslavers even after freedom came.

Going Back to New Amsterdam

After finding Sarah, I went directly to the two-article series by Henry B. Hoff published in the *New York Genealogical & Biographical Record* entitled "Frans Abramse Van Salee and his Descendants: A Colonial Black Family in New York and New Jersey."²⁰ Hoff's articles took Sarah's paternal line all the way back to New Amsterdam! As he wrote his articles in 1990, he may have been unaware of Sarah's 1759 christening record, which listed her parents' names, as he only mentions Sarah as a servant in the articles. Although I knew some of our Heady/Hedden ancestors from Westchester

County, New York, married into the Van Salee line in the early 1800s, I didn't know that I was actually a direct Van Salee descendant until we found Sarah's 1759 christening record.

The various spellings of Van Salee—including Van Salle, Van Salea, Van Sellea, Van Sile, Van Zylle, Van Sylle, Van Surlay, Van Sorlay, Sealy, and Selea, amongst others—have created problems for people researching their family lines. Furthermore, their “racial classification” has complicated matters. Though Abraham Jansen Van Salee was of Dutch and Moroccan descent, his descendants continued to intermarry with people of Native American, European, and African descent in both New Amsterdam/New York and New Jersey. Today many Van Salee descendants self-identify as either Black, mixed-race, white or Native American.

The following articles led me to find several other well-known great-grandparents:

Frans Abrams Jansen Van Salee (1654–1737) and Isabela Frans Salomons (1667–1738) are my 7x great-grandparents and the parents of Francis Van Salee Jr. Frans Abrams was married twice: first to Lucretia Hendricks and then to Isabela. Isabela was a widow who was previously married to Anthony Salomons, the grandson of Peter Santomee, one of the first eleven Angolans to arrive in New Amsterdam in 1626. Isabela had one daughter, Maria Salomons, by him. With Frans Abrams, she gave birth to Cuffeen Prime, Francis Jr., Caspar Francis, Isabella, and Berbetje. Abram and Isabela moved to Tappan, Orange County, in the early 1710s after purchasing land from the family of Jan DeVries. The Van Doncks/Van Dunks also moved to Orange County at this time. Frans Abramse was a yeoman.

Abram/Abraham Jansen Van Salee (1602–1659) and Fortuyn are my 8x great-grandparents and the parents of Frans Abramse Van Salee. Abram was the brother of Anthony Jansen Van Salee, who was banished from New Amsterdam along

with his wife Grietje. They then became the first residents of Brooklyn. Both Abram and Anthony were routinely referred to as being “Turks” and “Mulattos” in reference to their complexions. They were men of financial means so that may have influenced people's reactions to them. Abram's line is the progenitor of the Black and mixed-race Van Salee line.

Francisco Bastian (1636–1697) and Barbara Manuels de Reus (1642–?) are my 8x great-grandparents and the parents of Isabela Frans Salomons. Francisco was the last Black colonial landowner in New Amsterdam before the British banned people of African and Native American descent from owning land. In 1674, Judith Bayard Stuyvesant, widow of Peter, sold him four acres of land in the area that is now Gramercy Park. He also purchased fifteen acres of land in 1684 in the area around 34th Street and 6th Avenue.²¹

Sebastian De Brillo and Susanne Simons are my 9x great-grandparents. He is the father of Francisco Bastian and was born in Santo Domingo, Hispaniola. De Brillo was a free Black sailor on a Spanish or Portuguese ship who was brought to New Amsterdam and given as a prize to the director of the Dutch West India Company. He was given his freedom in 1645 and was referred to as “The Captain of the “Negars” (the Blacks). He oversaw the work of other Black people and was frequently called upon to act as a witness for them during Dutch Reformed Church baptisms and marriages. He was married twice; first to Isabel Kisana, and then to Susanne Simons, daughter of Simon Congo, one of the first eleven Africans to arrive in New Amsterdam in 1626. Sebastian owned property in the Bowery and lived among his peers.

Manuel de Gerrit de Reus and an unknown Angolan woman are my 9x great-grandparents, and the parents of Barbara Manuel de Reus. Manuel de Gerrit was among the first Angolans to

be brought to New Amsterdam by the Dutch West India Company in 1626. He was one of nine Black men accused of murdering Jan de Primero in 1641.²² All the men confessed to the crime knowing that if they stuck together, the authorities would hesitate to execute them all because they were highly valued laborers. They were instructed to draw lots, and Manuel de Gerrit was chosen to be executed. On the day of his execution, two ropes were wrapped around Manuel's head, and when he was pushed off the ladder, the ropes broke. This was seen as divine intervention, and his sentence was commuted, as were those of the other eight Africans. In 1644, he became one of the first Africans to be given conditional freedom ("half freedom") by the director of the Dutch West India Company, William Kieft. Manuel de Gerrit owned land near what is now Washington Square Park.

Jan Jansen Van Haarlem and Margarita Al-Shabi (1578–1631) are my 9x great-grandparents and the parents of Abram Jansen Van Salee and his brother Anthony Jansen Van Salee. Jan Jansen, a sea captain, was born in Haarlem, the Netherlands. He went to sea, left his Dutch family in the Netherlands and ended up converting to Islam in 1618. He was married a second time to Margarita Al-Shabi from Cartagena, Spain.²³ While Margarita's family was originally from Fez, Morocco, they were allowed to reside in Spain as "Mudejars" (also known as "Moriscos") for generations after the expulsion of Jews and Muslims in 1492.²⁴ Jan Jansen took the name Reis Murad and became a famous Barbary Corsair (pirate) operating under the Moroccan flag out of the city-state of Sale, where the Van Salee surname originates. Reis Murad raided ships and enslaved people throughout the Ottoman Empire. Although he is known for enslaving people around the Mediterranean, he also conducted raids and enslaved people from Ireland, England, the Netherlands, and Iceland.²⁵

My cousin Andrea and I have been lucky to find documents like Tun's runaway enslaved ad that led us to discover Samuel Freeman and, in turn, the 1806 mortgage indenture that led us to finding Sarah Van Salee. Both of these documents greatly expanded our family tree. Researching the lives of enslaved people isn't easy. There is a lot of grappling with historic trauma. The paucity of genealogical records related to our ancestors makes the research tedious, hard, and frustrating at times.

We keep researching because we are historical detectives who know that our ancestral stories are waiting to be found. To know that our ancestors built the fortifications for New Amsterdam in 1626, and then 150 years later, that our 5x great-grandfather Samuel Freeman helped build fortifications in New York City during the American Revolution makes us stand taller knowing that despite enslavement, dispossession, and genocide, our ancestors survived so we can tell the world about them today.

We are proud descendants of "The Freedmen of New Amsterdam."²⁶

Teresa Vega holds degrees in Anthropology and Asian studies from Bowdoin College. She is a proud member of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (NY/NJ Chapters) as well as a member of the Greenwich Preservation Trust. She serves as a core panelist on BlackProGen Live, a podcast of professional genealogists, and is also the co-administrator of FamilyTree DNA's Malagasy Roots Project along with CeCe Moore of PBS's *Finding Your Roots*. Her genealogy blog can be found at www.radiantrootsboricuabranches.com. Most recently, she is the founder/owner of the new online genealogy-focused store, www.rrbb-Shop.com.



ENDNOTES

- 1 The Tappan Patent (Orange County, New York) was founded in 1683. In 1798, the southern part of Orange County split off and became Rockland County. In 1840, Bergen County as it exists today was formed. The Tappan Patent land grantees were Cornelius Claesen Cooper, Peter Jansen Haring, Cozyn Haring, Garret Stenmetts, Johannes Gerritsen (Blauvelt), Huybert Gerittsen (Blauvelt), Ide Van Vorst, John Stratmaker, John DeVries, Sr. and Jr., Claes Manuel, Adriaen Lambertsen (Smidt), Cornelius Adriaeson (Smidt), Cornelius Adriaeson (Smidt), Stat DeGroat, and Daniel De Clark. See *The George H. Budke Collection, 1798–1948*, BC-67 (“Patent Granted for Lands in the Present County of Rockland New York with Biographical Notices of the Patentees”), p. 64.
- 2 I use the term “Afro-Dutch” to describe the early Africans who arrived in New Amsterdam in 1626 and were acculturated by the Dutch. These early Africans primarily married among themselves, but also married, or had children with, people of Native and European ancestry. Intermarriage between people of African and Native descent has been documented in my family. Claire Garland, a Revy-Van Salee cousin describes our Lenape ancestry in her 2023 article “Indian Summer at Sand Hill: The Revy and Richarson Families of the Jersey Shore” in *New Jersey Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9 (1): 168–224. (<https://njs.libraries.rutgers.edu/index.php/njs>). Other scholars have described intermarriage and adoption between Native and African people for centuries. See: Lipman, Andrew W. *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2015).; Newall, Margaret Ellen. *Brethren by Nature: New England Indians, Colonists, and the Origins of American Slavery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2016) and Forbes, Jack D. *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993). The issue of “paper genocide” is beyond the scope of this article. However, it must be noted that many Indigenous people were erased in historical documents because they were racially classified as “Colored,” “Mulatto,” “Free Blacks,” “Negro,” and/or “White” to dispossess them of their land. Likewise, the “one drop rule” that codified into law the assertion that one drop of “Black” blood made an individual solely African American has led to the denial of the existence of Afro-Indigenous people, as embedded in Cohen, David S. *The Ramapough Mountain People* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974).
- 3 Burroughs, Jeremiah. “Fifteen Dollars Reward.” *Mercantile Advertiser*, January 19, 1815. Tun’s runaway slave ad also appears in Stessin-Cohn, Susan, and Ashley Hurlburt-Biagini. *In Defiance: Runaways from Slavery in New York’s Hudson River Valley, 1735–1831*. (Delmar, NY: Black Dome Press, 2016): 270.
- 4 In Fredericus Blauvelt’s 1809 will, he bequeathed Tun to his granddaughter, Ann Mabie. Wills, Orders, 1798–1901; Author: New York. Surrogate’s Court (Rockland County); Probate Place: Rockland, New York.
- 5 Samuel Freeman served as a private in Hardenburgh’s militia off and on between the years 1776–1780. Hardenburgh’s militia primarily served the 2nd New York Regiment, but also served other regiments as well. See *Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775–1783*; Microfilm Publication M246, 138 rolls; War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Record Group 93; The National Archives in Washington, DC. Regarding Tun, the Gradual Emancipation Law in New York did not occur until 4 July 1799. That law stated that children born to enslaved people after that date would be freed after serving a term of twenty-five years for women, and twenty-eight years for men. In 1817, the law was updated to include all children born before 4 July 1799, and stated that they would become free on 4 July 1827. If Tun had stayed in New York, she would have been freed in 1827.
- 6 The National Archives in Washington, DC; Record Group: Records of the Bureau of the

- Census; Record Group Number: 29; Series Number: M653; Residence Date: 1860; Home in 1860: New Barbados, Bergen, New Jersey; Roll: M653_683; Page: 397; Family History Library Film: 803683.
- 7 Rare Book Division, The New York Public Library. *New York City Directory*. (1799). New York Public Library Digital Collections. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/4a453ec0-7fb9-0135-97f4-13bb75676eeb>.
 - 8 See Paul A. Gilje and Howard B. Rock. 1884. "Sweep O! Sweep O! African-American Chimney Sweeps in the New Nation." *The William & Mary Quarterly* 51 (5): 507–38. Jacob Kortwright, John Patterson, and John Freeman all have roots in Orange County, New York.
 - 9 Samuel and Betsey Freeman are listed as members of the Tappan Reformed Church in 1821. See Cole, David. *History of the Reformed Church of Tappan*. (New York: Press of Stettiner, Lambert & Co., 1894): 158. They also baptized their daughters Hannah (b. 3 Nov 1820) and Jane (b. 5 May 1821) in the Tappan Reformed Church. Tappan, New York is a hamlet in the town of Orangetown. *The George H. Budke Collection, 1798–1948*, BC-48 (Records of the Tappan Reformed Church Tappan, Rockland County, NY, Baptisms 1816–1817).
 - 10 United States, *New York Land Records, 1630–1975*, p. 171. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-99WZ-F9F6-2?i=180&wc=M7C3-ST5%3A358134401%2C359221901&cc=2078654>.
 - 11 Ibid.
 - 12 *Orange County Wills Transcribed*; Author: New York. Surrogate's Court (Orange County); Probate Place: Orange, New York, p. 34–35.
 - 13 Holland Society of New York; New York, New York; *New York City Lutheran*, Vol I, Book 85.
 - 14 Two matrilineal descendant cousins of Tun took a FTDNA.com mtDNA test and have a M23 haplogroup, which is found in Madagascar. For more information on Haplogroup M23, see Ricaut, FX., Razafindrazaka, H., Cox, M.P. et al. 2009. "A New Deep Branch of Eurasian mtDNA Macrohaplogroup M Reveals Additional Complexity Regarding the Settlement of Madagascar." *BMC Genomics* 10: 605.
 - 15 Year: 1800; Census Place: Orange, Rockland, New York; Series: M32; Roll: 25; Page: 1035; Image: 197; Family History Library Film: 193713.
 - 16 Samuel Freeman's son William was also a member of the Tappan Reformed Church and is listed as "a slave of Margaret Graham." See Cole, David. *History of the Reformed Church of Tappan*. (New York: Press of Stettiner, Lambert & Co., 1894): 154.
 - 17 Tun was born enslaved by Fredericus Blauvelt, who bequeathed her to his granddaughter, Ann Mabie, in Orangetown, New York, in 1809. She was sold that same year to William Sanford of Morris County, New Jersey. At the time, Tun was pregnant with my 3x great-grandmother, Susan Picket. Mother and daughter were separated after Susan was born and William Sanford sold Susan to James Canfield Caldwell of Pequannock, Morris County, New Jersey. Tun was also sold to Noah Johnson of Hanover, Morris County, New Jersey. In 1811, sometime after Tun gave birth to her son, Samuel Picket, Noah Johnson sold her to Jeremiah Burrows of New York City. Both Susan and Samuel's births are recorded in Mitros, David, ed. 1991. *Slave Records of Morris County, New Jersey: 1756–1841*. (New Jersey: The Morris County Heritage Commission): 52, 58. Tun's pregnancies no doubt precipitated her being sold multiple times. Tun returned to Bergen County, New Jersey, in the early 1820s and was a "slave servant" for various members of the Ackerman-Ackerson-Demarest family. In all, Tun served seven enslavers during her lifetime.
 - 18 See Gigantino II, James J. *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom, in New Jersey, 1775–1865*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) and Hodges, Graham Russell. *Root and Branch: Slavery in New York and East Jersey*,

- 1613–1863 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
- 19 See Hoff, Henry B. and Rev. F. Kenneth Barta. 1985. “De Windt Families of the West Indies.” *The Genealogist* (6) 1 for the genealogical history of two DeWindt descendants on the island of Saint Thomas; and Maurer, C. F. 2021. “The De Wint House: Washington’s Headquarters and a Masonic Historic Site at Tappan.” *Our Quarry* XII.
 - 20 Hoff, Henry B. 1990. “Frans Abramse Van Salee and His Descendants: A Colonial Black Family in New York and New Jersey.” *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 121 (2): 67–71 and 121 (3): 157–61. See also Hoff, Henry. 2005. “Researching African-American Families in New Netherland and Colonial New York and New Jersey.” *New York Genealogical and Biographical Society* 136 (2): 83–95.
 - 21 Alfred Pommer and Joyce Pommer. *Exploring Gramercy Park and Union Square*. (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2015): 1.
 - 22 Van Laer, Arnold J. F., trans. “Council Minutes, 1638–1649.” In *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch*. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, Inc., 1974). https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/files/9714/0152/0608/Volume_IV_-_Council_Minutes_1638-1649.pdf.
 - 23 Some members in the Facebook Jansen Van Salee Genealogy Group are currently conducting research in archives in France and Morocco, including the Village of Azarif where the Al-Shabi family originates, to confirm Al-Shabi family descent from the prophet Mohammed. Brian Smith, administrator of the Jansen-Van Sallee Genealogy Facebook Group, has a book in the prepublication phase titled *Footprints in the Sand: One Man’s Journey from Morocco in Search of Family* which will also shed light on the Al-Shabi family. I eagerly await more information on this line as it will be the oldest documented family line from Africa on my family tree.
 - 24 See Corrales, Eloy Martin, and Consuelo Lopez-Morillas. *Muslims in Spain, 1492–1812: Living and Negotiating in the Land of the Infidels* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).
 - 25 See Clark, G. N. 1994. “The Barbary Corsairs in the Seventeenth Century.” *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 8 (1): 2–35; and Connie, Kelleher. 2013. “The Insolency of the Turks Done at Baltimore.” *Archaeology Ireland* 27 (4): 26–29.
 - 26 Christophe, Peter R. 1991. “The Freeman of New Amsterdam.” In *A Beautiful and Fruitful Place*, ed. Nancy MuClure Zellar. (Albany, NY: New Netherland): 157–70. <https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/files/7313/5067/3659/6.2.pdf>.