

LUCY

BORN MARCH 16, 1806

March 2021

The year 1806 saw the most children born in a single year since the founding of Belle Grove Plantation in 1783: six babies—two boys and four girls. Young Lucy was born to Anna, a woman enslaved at Belle Grove since 1801. Lucy was her third child and first daughter. Searching through plantation records that survive today, no further information emerges about Lucy. She shares her birthday with Nelly Hite's brother, James Madison, later president of the United States. It is unlikely he ever knew Lucy, but may have known Anna and [her brother Shadrach](#), who had both come to Belle Grove from Montpelier.

WHAT IS ONOMASTICS?

Lacking the typical records used in family history research, historians look for other clues to understand the lives of enslaved people. Onomastics is defined as “the study of the history and origin of proper names, especially personal names.” It comes from the Greek verb “to name.” Previous studies done on name trends within enslaved populations show some names can be dated to specific generations when they were introduced or popular. Naming for ancestors was a common practice in the region of Africa from which the enslaved of the

Piedmont of Virginia were kidnapped. It honored the ancestor and transferred some of that person's worthiness to the baby. The practice also established that child within their family clan or lineage who might protect them.

Because the use of African names was soon forbidden and the captives were instead given English Christian names by their enslavers, naming for ancestors continued under the new, culturally imposed standards. More examples appear on the next page.

This issue produced by Robin Young and Kristen Laise



LUCY'S FAMILY

Lucy's mother was Anna and her grandmother was Daphne. Lucy's eldest brother, Abraham, was born at Montpelier and when he was one year old, he and his mother were given to the Hites at Belle Grove. Their brother, Ben, was Anna's first child born at Belle Grove, and younger sisters Milley and Daphne came after Lucy. Ben is the second and last child of that name born at Belle Grove in a decade—the other was a twin.



This opens up the possibility that the name hearkens back to Montpelier where an adult Benjamin who is listed in property tax records might have been their grandfather.

Isaac Hite Jr. noted sales, trades, and purchases of his enslaved workers in varying degrees of details, but 40% listed are like Lucy: name, mother's name, and birthday. For Anna's family, only Milley is noted as sold but it is not known when. An estimated 20% of all Hite slaves seem to have been sold. By 1830,

neither Lucy nor her siblings lived at Belle Grove. Only her mother was there.

It is frustrating to know only bare outlines of most lives—it cannot be known if Lucy was amazing with raising chickens, or made a wonderful apple pie, or had a splendid singing voice. And it is impossible to know her unique heart, thoughts, and feelings about being held in bondage her whole life.

The image of Lucy's name above is from Isaac Hite Jr.'s Commonplace Book, Virginia Museum of History and Culture (Mss5.5.H67375.1_21a).



WHAT ARE THE COMMUNITY’S ANCESTRAL NAMES AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

Near the end of 1718, two young Black women came off a Guineaman slave ship from Bristol, England in Port Royal, on the Rappahannock River in Virginia. Reaching a strange, new land after a long, terrifying voyage across the Atlantic, they alone remained unsold. John Baylor, an infamous Virginia slave trader

who sold the Piedmont land owners enslaved workers, kept them back, for reasons unknown.¹ It seems likely they clung to each for support as “ship sisters” in such an overwhelming situation.

In January 1719, both were sold to Ambrose Madison, founder of the Madison family wealth, in anticipation of his upcoming marriage to Frances

Taylor, granddaughter of James Taylor, another notorious, Virginia slave trader. Ambrose records their names as Nanney and Kate; a few more women followed, as did children from unions with the field hands who cut down forests to plant tobacco. Just 14 years later, in 1733, Ambrose Madison owned 29 enslaved people shown in the table below.

The 15 enslaved men and women and 14 enslaved children of 1733 Montpelier²

Men	Women	Boys	Girls
Tom	Nanney	Jack	Lucy
Turk	Kate	Sam	Betty
Bristoll	Daphne/Daffney	Billey [Gardner]	Catterenea
Joe	Claris/Clarissa	Anthony	Sarah
Harry	Dido		Cussina
George			Letts
Isaac			Judah
Peter			Violet
Spark			Nancy
Dick			Hannah

Among their descendants, this founding generation of survivors of the “Middle Passage” were revered. To survive capture in Africa, leave their homeland, stay alive on the death ships, adjust to a new land, new social customs, the loss of their freedom forever under the rule of the white enslavers, and yet

lovingly raise their children—what giants these ancestors were! One of the few ways to honor and remember them was to name children for them.

Three names stand out in above the list. Lucy is the precious eldest female child listed. Daphne is in the middle of the list of the women. Betty

is second in the group of girls, and [as discussed previously, one of the “Elizabeth name” variants](#), the most popular name source at Belle Grove, where Eliza had sixteen girls named for her.

1 Baylor Family Papers, Ledgers Vol 1. University of Virginia, Charlottesville

2 Spotsylvania County Will Book A, Will of Ambrose Madison

NEXT MONTH WE WILL HONOR

**Richmond born
April 25, 1821**

Research is underway about the 276 men, women, and children enslaved by the Hite family at Belle Grove Plantation in Middletown (Frederick County), Virginia. Enslaved individuals made the plantation a success. Since 1967, Belle Grove has been a 501c3, nonprofit historic site and museum. [Understanding and uplifting the contributions of the enslaved community is an ongoing effort and priority.](#) If you wish to help, consider volunteering or donating to Belle Grove, Inc. at the address below or online at www.bellegrove.org/support/donate.

Belle Grove Plantation

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