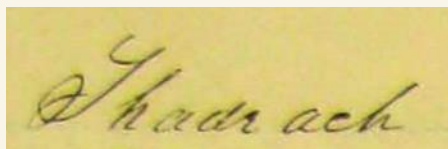


SHADRACH

BORN JANUARY 7, 1767

January 2021



Shadrach an enslaved man was born at Montpelier, the Madison family plantation in Orange County, VA. His mother, Daphne, is found in five years of tax lists, in the grouping of younger women. She was named for, and likely the daughter of, the Daphne owned by Ambrose Madison, the original patriarch of Montpelier. This baby's birth early in the new year, just after the end of the Twelve Days of Christmas, celebrated in the quarter and the big house alike, may have allowed mother and son to rest quietly in the warmth of their cabin for a while.

We do not know the name of the baby's father. Plantation records typically linked only mother and child, for by law, a child born of an enslaved woman was also enslaved. In 1801, Shadrach was in a group of enslaved whose ownership was transferred from James Madison's Sr.'s estate to his daughter Nelly Hite to complete her inheritance.

At thirty-four years old, Shadrach left the only home he had known to journey three days to the Shenandoah Valley and Belle Grove.

The image of Shadrach's name above is from an inventory in the documents settling the will of James Madison Sr.

THE MEANING BEHIND THE NAME SHADRACH

In the mid-century of the 1700s, choosing names from the Bible for enslaved babies was popular. From around 1750, attempts to convert second generation African enslaved to Christianity were at their peak. Just like today, names had trends. Eleanor Conway Madison, wife to James Madison Sr., was revered and renowned for her piety and religious learning. Whether it was she who gave the name, or the baby's mother, who had learned Biblical stories from working in the household, we cannot know.

In the Old Testament of the Bible, Shadrach is one of three Jewish men living in exile in Babylon, who after first earning the trust of King Nebuchadnezzar, lost it by insulting him while refusing to worship a giant gold idol, which he had built as a symbol of his wealth and power. The book of Daniel tells how an enraged King ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be thrown into a fiery furnace.

God protected them from any harm, and they emerged unsinged and well, to the astonishment of the King and his court. Of course, such a contest of Godly power resulted in the conversion of the King and his people to the God of the Jews.

SHADRACH'S FAMILY

We do not know if, or to whom, Shadrach was married at Belle Grove, or if a partner came with him from the Madisons. His name is not repeated in successive generations, probably because it was out of fashion by the 1800's. We cannot presently trace which, if any, of the children born at Belle Grove might be his. He did know the joy of young ones in his life. Anna, his younger sister, born in 1775, had five children. She and her first son were among those deeded along with Shadrach to the Hites in 1801.



HIS BACKSTORY

Isaac Hite Jr., owner of Belle Grove Plantation, purchased enslaved workers and was also given or inherited them from family. Of the 276 people whom Hite enslaved, a significant number were from Montpelier. The first individuals that Ambrose Madison enslaved were bought in 1718, all from coastal Guinea, and more followed. Montpelier became a closed universe for enslaved family relationships for 60 years. Everyone had kinship ties to each other. Ambrose's son, James Madison Sr., started gifting his adult children enslaved workers in 1782, thereby providing an inheritance to his offspring and reducing his taxes.

WHAT WORK DID HE DO?



There were never-ending tasks for the enslaved at all plantations and Belle Grove was no exception. However, it is less common for plantation records to note the assignments or skills of the enslaved, beyond the all-important blacksmith and cook. Still, there are clues about Shadrach's life.

In 1787, a record in James Madison Sr.'s handwriting survives that lists who among his enslaved received expensive shoes, as opposed to the cheaper shoes issued to the masses. The group receiving these better-made shoes were elite, but still their jobs were not detailed.

To whom among your workforce would you allocate these better-looking, better-wearing pairs of shoes? Yes, the blacksmith and trading agent received them; they often met with customers and may have walked distances on business. Perhaps they needed the protection, but certainly the goal was to present enslaved workers to visitors whose appearance enhanced the reputation and status of the master.

Another group of enslaved workers who needed to have a nice appearance were those in constant contact with the family and visitors. This included any household worker from coachman to those who waited on table, valet, lady's maid, steward, cook, or others.

Both Shadrach and his sister owned such shoes. He was listed as being aged 20 and wearing size 12. Anna was age 15 and wore size 8.

The enslaved persons the Madisons gave the Hites were valued, for taxation purposes. In 1801, of the seven men transferred in this group, only two were listed at the highest value of 120 English pounds. Shadrach was one.

This implies he had a skill set of great value. Knowing that he was likely working in the house, it is possible that he was trained to execute the duties of a steward. If so, this gave him great status in the enslaved community and value to the Hite family. In their new, elegant manor house, which had just been completed in 1797, the Hites' had the room to entertain and receive visitors from near and far—and they did.

WHAT WAS HIS FATE?



There are no further records at Belle Grove of Shadrach being traded, sold, or deeded to an adult Hite child. His death date is also not recorded. By 1837, he was 70. At that age, an enslaved person was no longer expected to work and was therefore off the tax rolls. Household records in 1835 reveal that in his "retirement," he kept chickens and sold six to the Hite family.

The 1837 inventory done after the death of Isaac Hite Jr. does not list Shadrach as one of the enslaved at Belle Grove. He appears to have died between May of 1835 and January 1837 and may be interred in the enslaved burial ground Belle Grove, where few graves are still marked and no carved headstones exist. A child or grandchild might well have lived to Emancipation and perhaps out there somewhere, a family has an ancestor or two by the name of Shadrach.

This issue produced by Robin Young and Kristen Laise

NEXT MONTH WE WILL HONOR

**Eliza born
February 17, 1750**

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 P.O. Box 537, Middletown, VA 22645 or online at www.bellegrove.org/support/donate.

Belle Grove Plantation

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