

ON THESE GROUNDS

Using Digital Humanities to Enhance Community Access to Records of Slavery

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THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

Background

Initiated in 2021 as a Mellon grant project, On These Grounds (OTG) is a multi-institutional initiative to surface and connect histories of enslaved people, including their labor and life events, on university campuses through archival material. Ultimately, the names, events, locations, and organizations associated with enslaved people found in records will appear in a centralized, publicly available OmekaS database.

Project Management

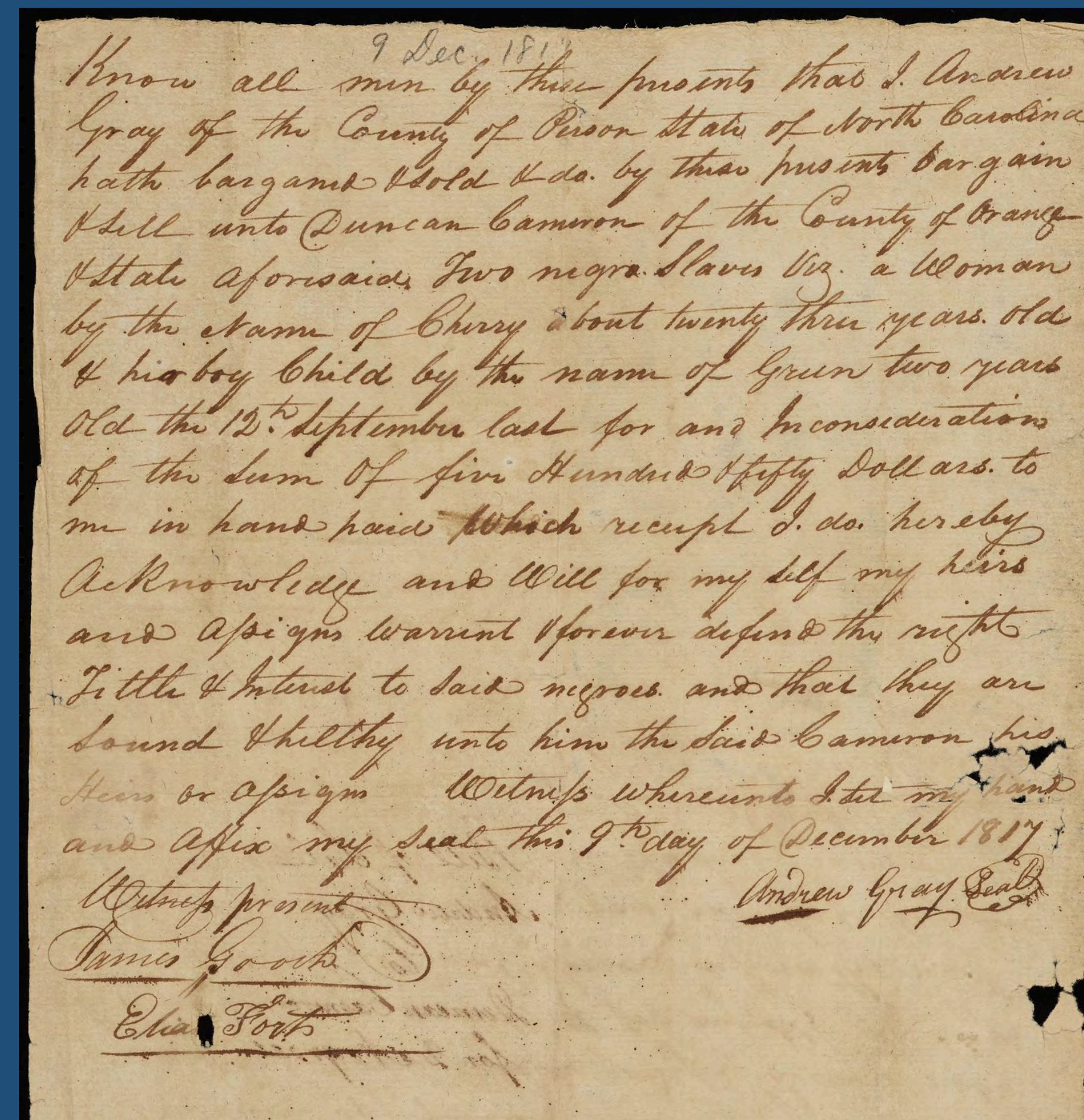
The grant phase of the project was heavily focused on productivity, namely creating a large number of records. However, after reflecting on our completed work and our desire to deepen our involvement with our community partners, we decided to focus our efforts on optimizing our project management workflow. We realized we needed to work systematically through record types within a collection, such as inventories, bills of sale, and letters.

Sustainability

Coming up with a more strategic workflow ensures that we have the ability to better manage and share our work. By having a more concrete process, we are better positioned to clearly communicate project updates with community partners and other stakeholders. In addition, should current team members transition to other roles, we now have the workflow and documentation to transfer the work to others and ensure the project lives beyond the current team.

Shift in Approach

After creating records internally for about two years, our team recognized the need to expand the project's reach. In 2023, we shifted focus away from university records and onto the Cameron family, one of the largest enslaving families in North Carolina, of whom UNC-Chapel Hill holds over 33,000 records. This shift helped us complete more thorough work on one set of records, rather than spreading too thin across our entire collection. As we prepared for the public launch, we strived for more meaningful community involvement from various groups such as Black genealogists, descendants, and local historic sites related to the Cameron family.



Collaborations

- On These Grounds Project Team
- UNC-CH Technical Services
- Independent genealogists
- Stagville Descendants Council

On These Grounds

1817, Cherry (born about 1794),
Freedom Status Transaction: Sale

Item

Title

1817, Cherry (born about 1794), Freedom Status Transaction: Sale

Description

Cherry (born about 1794) was an enslaved Black woman claimed in ownership by Duncan Cameron. Her name appears in an 1817 bill of sale where she and her enslaved Black child named Green were sold by Andrew Gray to Duncan Cameron for \$550.

Event Type

Freedom status transaction: Sale

Action Status

Completed

Date

9 December 1817

Location

Person County, N. C.

Source

Bill of sale for Cherry and her son Green, 9 December 1817 in the Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Folder Z203, Box no. 98, Collection no. 0193

Primary Participant

Cherry (born about 1794)

Freedom Status

Enslaved

Enslaver

Duncan Cameron (1777-1853)

Age

23

Additional Participant

Green (born about 1815)

Witness

James Gooch (active 1817)
Elias Fort (active 1817)

Buyer

Duncan Cameron (1777-1853)

Seller

Andrew Gray (1770-1857)

Parent

Cherry (born about 1794)

Child

Green (born about 1815)

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Learn more about the On These Grounds Project:
onthesegrounds.org