Teacher Packet

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# Background Information

This lesson uses primary source documents related to Sabe and Rose, two enslaved and later free people in Salem. The information here is meant to provide context to help students and teachers analyzing these sources.

**Elias Hasket Derby (enslaver)**

Elias Hasket Derby (1739-1799) was a wealthy Salem merchant and is sometimes remembered as America’s first millionaire. He owned several ships that conducted trade at ports around the world in Europe, Asia, and the West Indies. From 1762-1782 Elias lived with his wife and children in a three-story brick house (known today as [the Derby House](https://www.nps.gov/places/derby-house.htm) at Salem Maritime). Later the family moved to a larger house on Washington Street in Salem. A 1771 tax record indicates the Derby family enslaved at least two people while living in the Derby House. Later evidence exists of two more people enslaved by the Derbys, Sabe and Rose, but it is unclear if they ever lived in the family’s first home (the Derby House).

**Sabe and Rose**

Sabe and Rose were two people of African descent who were enslaved and later free in Salem. Learn more by watching this 5-minute video – [*A Woman Named Rose*](https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/rose.htm).

**Emancipation in Massachusetts**

Start by watching this 3-minute video – [*Gradual Emancipation*](https://www.nps.gov/sama/learn/historyculture/gradual-emancipation.htm).

In 1783, Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, William Cushing, presided over the case Commonwealth v. Jennison. In his instructions to the jury Cushing declared that slavery was incompatible with the state’s constitution and therefore “effectively abolished” in Massachusetts.

*“The 1783 decision Commonwealth v. Jennison did not abolish slavery. Rather, it stipulated that slavery was contrary to the Massachusetts constitution and had no standing in law. Worded in such a way, judicial emancipation placed the onus of ending enslavement on slaves themselves. If an enslaved person could not access the courts or run away, such as vulnerable children and the elderly, they remained effectively enslaved. Often owners would refer to the enslaved people living in their households as indentured servants, a category that was still legal. Although the 1790 U.S. Census did not enumerate any slaves for Massachusetts, evidence suggests that most enslavers just listed their slaves as servants or census takers did not bother to record them. This use of legal loopholes and subterfuge meant slavery lingered in Massachusetts until the mid-1790s if not later.”*

Hardesty, Jared Ross. *Black Lives, Native Lands, White Worlds: A History of Slavery in New England*, University of Massachusetts Press, 2019, pp 151.

# Primary Source Analysis

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| Primary Source Document | Background Information | How to Use in Lesson |
| #1 1771 Tax Inventory | A tax record for Elias Hasket Derby of Salem shows he enslaved at least two people in 1771. The original document includes tax records for other Salem residents, including Elias’ father (Richard Derby) and brother (Richard Derby Jr.), and is evidence of the family’s collective wealth. Richard Derby owns the only listed “still house” (distillery), 5.5 warehouses, and over 5000 ft of wharf. The column “Servants for Life” documents enslaved people between the ages of 14 - 45. The term “servant” is a euphonism for “slave.” The fact that enslaved people younger than 14 and older than 45 were not included as taxable property suggests their labor was seen as less financially valuable.  It’s possible the Derbys and other families enslaved additional people who fell outside the 14 - 45 age range and were not included on this tax inventory. | The two enslaved people recorded in this document are unnamed. Given the dates, we know neither of these individuals were Sabe or Rose. This document is evidence that Elias Hasket’s family enslaved people prior to Sabe and Rose while living in the Derby House from 1762-1782. |
| #2 1783 Receipt for schooling Sabe | This receipt records that Francis Cook was paid by Elias Hasket Derby for schooling his son (Master Richard) and Sabe. Document #7 lists Sabe’s birthdate as 1771, making him approximately 12 years-old at the time of his schooling. There is no indication of what curriculum was taught, but supporting evidence suggests many enslaved people received basic instruction in writing, arithmetic, reading, and training in skilled labor. An educated enslaved person was considered a more valuable asset or investment. | This document shows Sabe’s connection to and dependence on the Derby family at a young age. This document may demonstrate some sense of freedom or equality as Sabe and Elias’ son (Richard) received schooling from the same educator, perhaps even together.  |
| #31788 Receipts for schooling Rose | Receipts documenting that Hannah Masurey was paid by Mrs. Derby (Elias’ wife, Elizabeth) for schooling Rose for at least six months. (We believe Rose and “your black girl” are the same person.) Rose was likely around the age of 10.Mrs. Derby, as opposed to her husband, likely paid these receipts because she was responsible for household management, production, and finances. This suggests Rose may have received education related to household labor. Some enslaved women were trained in the care of clothing, hairdressing, makeup production, and other household labor skills. Literacy was desirable for many of these skills and increased the financial value of an enslaved woman. Rose received schooling in 1788, five years after slavery was deemed incompatible with the Massachusetts state constitution. Many slaveholders ignored the court’s decision and continued to hold Black Americans in bondage. Other slaveholders began to free the people they enslaved, and this created conflict over the financial support of ex-slaves. There was apprehension among whites that this new class of people – free Black Americans – would become a financial burden on society, subsisting off public welfare and residing in town funded poor houses. Across New England, former enslavers were socially (and sometimes legally) held financially responsible for the people they once enslaved. This practice created a system of dependency that blurred the lines between freedom and bondage.  A second girl, Betsy Browne, is included on the first receipt. We have not identified other documents related to Betsy, but it’s likely she was white and around the age of 10. | The language “your black girl” demonstrates ownership and possession by Mrs. Derby. It also suggests Rose’s identity as an individual was not seen as important enough to record her name in the first receipt. The second receipt (which records Rose’s name) may suggest Hannah recognized Rose more as an individual after three months of schooling. These documents may also show some sense of freedom or equality as Rose received education in 1788, five years after slavery was deemed incompatible with the Massachusetts state constitution.  |
| #41799 Will of Elias Hasket Derby | Two pages from the last will and testament of Elias Hasket Derby, who died in September 1799. As seen on page 1, Derby left Sabe and Rose $250 each. As seen on page 2, Derby stipulated that they should not be given their money directly. Instead, Derby gave instructions that the money should be paid to his daughter, Martha, and that Martha should choose when and how much money to give Sabe and Rose based on her best judgment. *“The families of former slaves quite commonly provided financial assistance for them even where, as in Massachusetts, there was no longer a legal obligation to do so… Although such assistance was humanitarian and at the very least a form of reparation to which all former slaves were surely entitled, nonetheless the continuing support and responsibility of former owners for free persons of color tended to blur the boundaries between slave and free.”* Melish, Joanne P. *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860*, Cornell University, 1998, pp. 99. The will also provided “legacies” or inheritances to Derby’s family members and at least two employees. In those cases, the employees were paid directly, and the inheritance was in addition to their wages. | At the time, Black Americans were excluded from banking institutions and employers sometimes acted as “banks” and held onto wages. Elias directed his daughter to pay Sabe and Rose the money with interest. Did he intend Martha to act as a “bank” to Sabe and Rose? This document can demonstrate a sense of freedom and independence for Sabe and Rose who each inherited $250 in 1799, 16 years after slavery was deemed incompatible with the Massachusetts state constitution.The document can also demonstrate a sense of bondage because neither Sabe nor Rose had free access to their money. It was instead controlled by Elias’ daughter, Martha. Elias also referred to Sabe and Rose with the possessive “my,” suggesting possession or ownership. |
| #51799 Marriage record of Sabe Derby and Rose Lane | A record of marriages in Salem from September 1798 – 1799, organized by the name of the reverend who administered the marriage and the date.Sabe and Rose are listed as married by Reverend Nathanial Fisher on December 9, 1799 (three months after Elias’ death). Sabe is documented as “Sabe Derby” and Rose as “Rose Lane.” The document also shows the marriages of four other Black couples administered by two reverends. | This document may demonstrate that Rose and Sabe experienced a sense of independence and equality as they were free to marry, and their marriage was recognized by the government. The ceremony was administered by a reverend who also married white couples.Sabe was identified by the “Derby” name, suggesting he remained at least socially tied to the family of his former enslaver.  |
| #61809 Death notice for Rose | Death notice for Rose Derby, as printed in the Salem newspaper, *The Essex Register*, June 3, 1809. The notice identifies Rose as the wife of Sabe, both free Black Americans, formerly belonging to Elias Hasket Derby.The term “friends of humanity” is sometimes used to describe abolitionists, specifically Quaker abolitionists, but that is not assumed to be the case here.  | This document could demonstrate a sense of freedom and equality. Rose and Sabe were both described as free individuals. Other Black Americans were free to gather and mourn her death in Salem. The document may also demonstrate a sense of subjugation. Rose is defined by her relationship to her husband and former enslaver. Rose and those who mourned her were patronizingly applauded for their “good behavior” and considered not as individuals but as representatives of their entire race.  |
| #7Undated Derby family genealogy | A page from the Derby family bible. It includes information on the births, deaths, and marriages of Elias Hasket Derby’s children. Sabe’s birthday is listed at the bottom of the page. Rose is listed as well, but no month, date, or year is recorded for her birth.This page was likely written many years after Sabe was born.  | This document may demonstrate the patriarchal relationship between the Derby family and Sabe and Rose. On the one hand, Sabe and Rose are included on the page with Derby’s children. On the other, less (if any) information is included for Sabe or Rose. The note could also be considered diminutive as it refers to them both as children and denotes their race. |

# Tips for Lesson Implementation

* Assign one source to each group. They will report their findings to the rest of the class. Rotate through the groups in chronological order of when the document was produced.
* Divide the class into 5 or 6 small groups and model one or two of the primary sources for them.
* Provide each group with paper and digital copies of each source. Encourage students to use digital copies to zoom into other parts of the document to see if there is other relevant information included.
* Remind all students to take notes that will help them complete the independent work at the conclusion of the lesson.