

THE GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

*Inside the Vault:
Highlights from the Gilder Lehrman Collection*

February 4, 2021

The session will start shortly. Please note:

- Your video and audio will automatically turn off.
- You can participate through the Q&A function.
- If you have technical difficulties, please email collectionprograms@gilderlehrman.org so we can assist you.

Our Team

Panelists

- Sandy Trenholm - Collection Director
- Jeanette Providence - High school English Language Arts educator from Sacramento, California
- Krystal Mackie - Ensemble in *Hamilton*
- Zoya Siddiqui - Curatorial Intern
- Allison Kraft - Assistant Curator

During the Session



- If you would like to ask a question, you can **use the Q&A feature**, which is at the bottom of your screen.
- **Viewing in full screen** is recommended to see the presenters and the presentation at the same time.

For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.

Today's Documents



Phillis Wheatley



Elizabeth Keckley

Phillis Wheatley (1754- 1784)

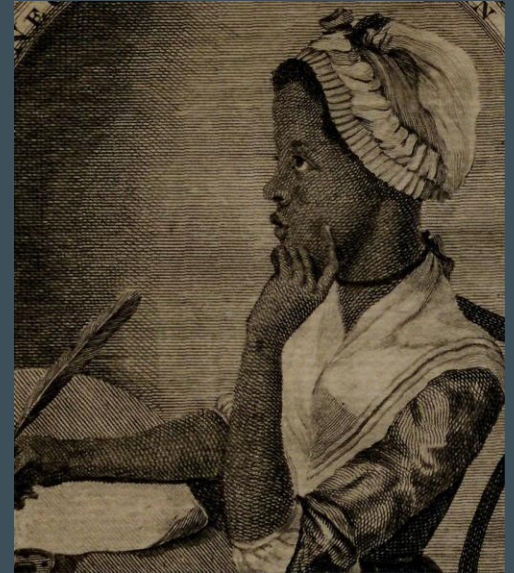


Gilder Lehrman Collection

- Phillis was born in Senegal/Gambia, West Africa.
- She was kidnapped as a child and sold into slavery.
- She was brought to Boston on a ship named the *Phillis*.
- August 1761, John Wheatley purchased Phillis as a domestic servant.
- The Wheatleys recognized her love of learning.

Phillis Wheatley, poet

- 1767 –published her first poem
- 1773 - published *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in London.
 - Wheatley is the first English-speaking person of African descent to publish a book.
- 1773 - manumitted
- She published approximately 145 poems, many of them were commissioned.
- Scholars have criticized her for not speaking against slavery.
 - More recent research has uncovered her connections to 18th-century abolitionists.
 - She often criticized slavery in letters to members of the church.



Gilder Lehrman Collection

Phillis Wheatley's poems

THE GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE of AMERICAN HISTORY



Published according to Act of Parliament, Sept. 1. 1773 by Arch.^d Bell,

Bookfeller N^o 8 near the Saracens Head Aldgate.

P O E M S

O N

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL,

B Y

PHILLIS WHEATLEY,

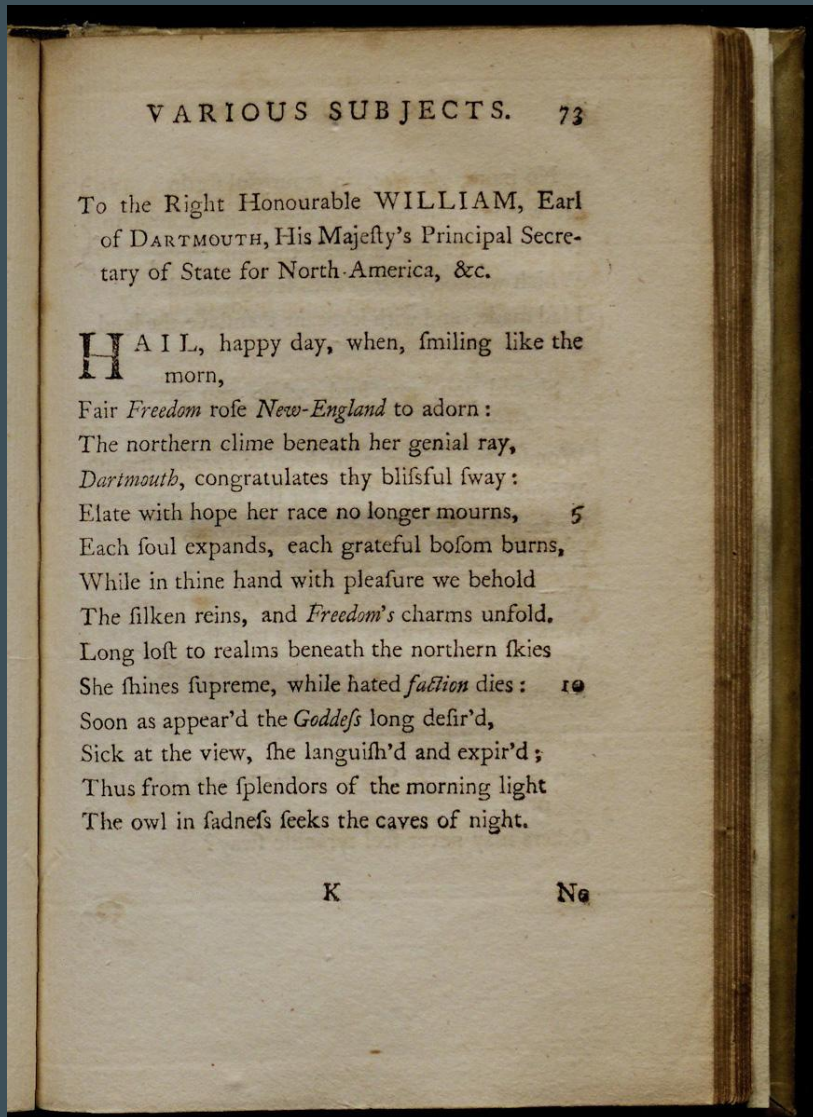
NEGRO SERVANT TO Mr. JOHN WHEATLEY,
of BOSTON, in NEW ENGLAND.

L O N D O N:

Printed for A. BELL, Bookfeller, Aldgate; and sold by
Messrs. COX and BERRY, King-Street, BOSTON.

MDCCLXXIII.

“To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth”



- August 1772 - William Legge, Earl of Dartmouth, is appointed Secretary of State for the Colonies.
- October 1772 - Thomas Woolridge commissioned Wheatley to write a poem for Legge.
- Her poem reflects the colonists' hopes that Dartmouth would be less tyrannical than his predecessor.
 - She used the poem to discuss her own enslavement.

“To the Right Honorable William,
Earl of Dartmouth”

No more, *America*, in mournful strain 15 }
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd complain, }
No longer shall thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton *Tyranny* with lawless hand
Had made, and with it meant t' enslave the land.

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my
song, 20
Wonder from whence my love of *Freedom* sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat: 25
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe below'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but
pray 30
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

For

For favours past, great Sir, our thanks are due,
And thee we ask thy favours to renew,
Since in thy pow'r, as in thy will before,
To sooth the griefs, which thou did'st once de-
plore. 35
May heav'nly grace the sacred sanction give
To all thy works, and thou for ever live
Not only on the wings of fleeting *Fame*,
Though praise immortal crowns the patriot's
name,
But to conduct to heav'n's refulgent fane, 40
May fiery couriers sweep th' ethereal plain,
And bear thee upwards to that blest abode,
Where, like the prophet, thou shalt find thy God.

K 2

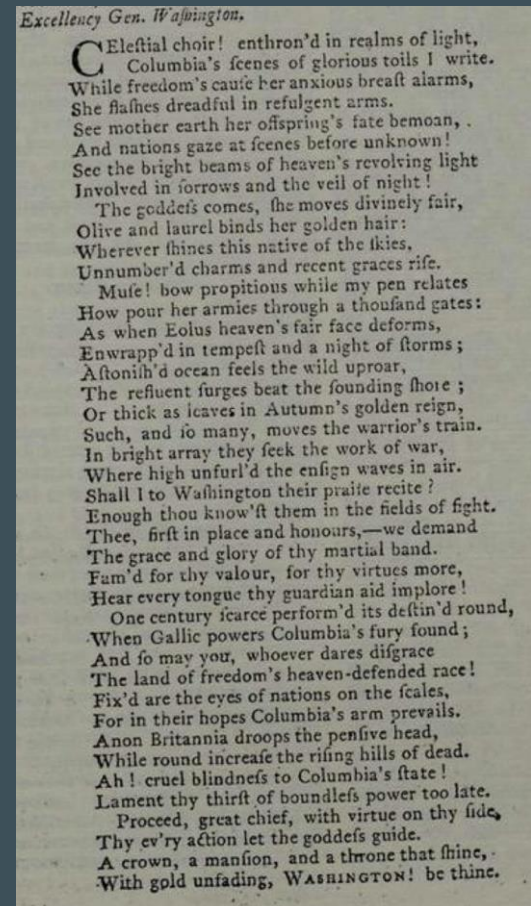
O D E

Wheatley's Experience

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my
song, 20
Wonder from whence my love of *Freedom* sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat: 25
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe lov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but
pray 30
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

Phillis Wheatley & George Washington

- Summer 1775 - The British occupy Boston and the Wheatleys, including Phillis, flee to the safety of Providence, RI.
- June - Washington is appointed Commander in Chief of the Continental Army.
- October - Phillis Wheatley writes and sends a poem to George Washington.
- December - Washington receives the poem
- February 10, 1776 - Washington sends the poem to Joseph Reed, who publishes it in *Virginia Gazette* March 30th. It is then more widely published in April.
- February 28, 1776 - Washington writes to Wheatley to thank her for the poem.



Wheatley's letter to Washington

“SIR,

I Have taken the freedom to address your Excellency in the enclosed poem, and entreat your acceptance, though I am not insensible of its inaccuracies. Your being appointed by the Grand Continental Congress to be Generalissimo of the armies of North America, together with the fame of your virtues, excite sensations not easy to suppress. Your generosity, therefore, I presume, will pardon the attempt. Wishing your Excellency all possible success in the great cause you are so generously engaged in, I am,

Your Excellency's Most obedient humble
servant,

PHILLIS WHEATLEY”

PROVIDENCE, Oct. 26, 1775.

His Excellency General WASHINGTON

Celestial choir! enthron'd in realms of light,
Columbia's scenes of glorious toils I write.
While freedom's cause her anxious breast alarms,
She flashes dreadful in refulgent arms.
See mother earth her offspring's fate bemoan,
And nations gaze at scenes before unknown!
See the bright beams of heaven's revolving light
Involved in sorrows and the veil of night!

The goddess comes, she moves divinely fair,
Olive and laurel bind Her golden hair:
Wherever shines this native of the skies
Unnumber'd charms and recent graces rise.

Muse! bow propitious while my pen relates
How pour her armies through a thousand gates:
As when Eolus heaven's fair face deforms,
Enwrapp'd in tempest and a night of storms;
Astonish'd ocean feels the wild uproar,
The refluent surges beat the sounding shore;
Or think as leaves in Autumn's golden reign,
Such, and so many, moves the warrior's train.
In bright array they seek the work of war,
Where high unfurl'd the ensign waves in air.
Shall I to Washington their praise recite?
Enough thou know'st them in the fields of fight.
Thee, first in place and honors,—we demand
The grace and glory of thy martial band.
Fam'd for thy valour, for thy virtues more,
Hear every tongue thy guardian aid implore!

“His Excellency General Washington”

One century scarce perform'd its destined round,
When Gallic powers Columbia's fury found;
And so may you, whoever dares disgrace
The land of freedom's heaven-defended race!
Fix'd are the eyes of nations on the scales,
For in their hopes Columbia's arm prevails.
Anon Britannia droops the pensive head,
While round increase the rising hills of dead.
Ah! cruel blindness to Columbia's state!
Lament thy thirst of boundless power too late.

Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,
Thy ev'ry action let the goddess guide.
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,
With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! be thine.

Excerpt from *Poem to Washington*



“Celestial choir! enthron’d in realms of light,
Columbia’s scenes of glorious toils I write.
While freedom’s cause her anxious breast
alarms,
She flashes dreadful in refulgent arms.
See mother earth her offspring’s fate bemoan,
And nations gaze at scenes before unknown!
See the bright beams of heaven’s revolving light
Involved in sorrows and veil of night!”

(lines 1–8)

“Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,
Thy ev’ry action let the goddess guide.
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,
With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! be thine.”

(lines 39–42)



Behind the Scenes, or
Thirty Years a Slave, and
Four Years in the White
House, 1868

BEHIND THE SCENES.

BY

ELIZABETH KECKLEY,

FORMERLY A SLAVE, BUT MORE RECENTLY MODISTE, AND FRIEND TO MRS.
ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

OR,

THIRTY YEARS A SLAVE, AND FOUR YEARS IN
THE WHITE HOUSE.



NEW YORK:

G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers.

M DCCCLXVIII

A memoir? Or an exposé?

The book contains biographical information about

- Keckley's enslavement and freedom
- Dressmaking business
- Private conversations with DC's elite women
- Keckley's relationship with the Lincolns, especially Mary

CONTENTS.	
	PAGE
Preface.....	11
CHAPTER I.	
Where I was born.....	17
CHAPTER II.	
Girlhood and its Sorrows.....	31
CHAPTER III.	
How I gained my Freedom.....	43
CHAPTER IV.	
In the Family of Senator Jefferson Davis.....	63
CHAPTER V.	
My Introduction to Mrs. Lincoln.....	76
CHAPTER VI.	
Willie Lincoln's Death-bed.....	91
CHAPTER VII.	
Washington in 1862-3.....	111

CHAPTER VIII.	
Candid Opinions.....	127
CHAPTER IX.	
Behind the Scenes.....	139
CHAPTER X.	
The Second Inauguration.....	156
CHAPTER XI.	
The Assassination of President Lincoln.....	178
CHAPTER XII.	
Mrs. Lincoln leaves the White House.....	201
CHAPTER XIII.	
The Origin of the Rivalry between Mr. Douglas and Mr. Lincoln.....	228
CHAPTER XIV.	
Old Friends.....	238
CHAPTER XV.	
The Secret History of Mrs. Lincoln's Wardrobe in New York.....	267
Appendix—Letters from Mrs. Lincoln to Mrs. Keckley..	332

Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907)

- 1818 - Born in Virginia
 - Enslaved by the Burwell family
- Circa 1843 - Was given to Anne Burwell Garland and moved to St. Louis
 - Worked as a seamstress and financially supported the Garlands
- 1855 - Bought her and her son George's freedom
- 1855 - Married James Keckley
- 1860 - Left her husband and moved to Washington, DC with her son, George



Gilder Lehrman Collection

Washington, D.C.

ply to for assistance, I was sorely troubled. I also had to have some one vouch to the authorities that I was a free woman. My means were too scanty, and my profession too precarious to warrant my purchasing license. In my perplexity I called on a lady for whom I was sewing, Miss Ringold, a member of Gen. Mason's family, from Virginia. I stated my case, and she kindly volunteered to render me all the assistance in her power. She

Fashion Designer

- Established herself as a modiste
- She was one of the most sought-after designers in DC.
- She had many influential clients.
 - Including Varina Davis, Mary Lee, and Mary Todd Lincoln.



A request to move to the South



Library of Congress

“But, Mrs. Davis, are you certain that there will be war?”

“Certain!—I know it. You had better go South with me; I will take good care of you. Besides, when the war breaks out, the colored people will suffer in the North. The Northern people will look upon them as the cause of the war, and I fear, in their exasperation, will be inclined to treat you harshly.”

“I thought over the question much, and the more I thought the less inclined I felt to accept the proposition so kindly made by Mrs. Davis...A show of war from the South, I felt, would lead to actual war in the North; and with the two sections bitterly arrayed against each other, I preferred to cast my lot among the people of the North.”



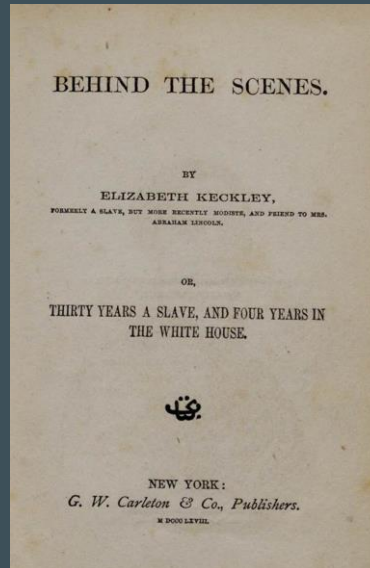
Gilder Lehrman Collection

Elizabeth Keckley and Mary Lincoln

- Keckley and Lincoln became good friends.
- Lincoln relied heavily on Keckley as her confidante.
- They bonded over the death of their sons.
- When Abraham Lincoln died, Mary sent for Keckley to be with her.
- Mary Lincoln suffered from financial problems, mental health issues, and verbal attacks.



White House Historical Association



Gilder Lehrman Collection



Gilder Lehrman Collection

Attempting to Vindicate Mary Lincoln

His wife was different. He was wholly unselfish in every respect, and I believe that he loved the mother of his children very tenderly. He asked nothing but affection from her, but did not always receive it. When in one of her wayward impulsive moods, she was apt to say and do things that wounded him deeply. If he had not

Gilder Lehrman Collection

loved her, she would have been powerless to cloud his thoughtful face, or gild it with a ray of sunshine as she pleased. We are indifferent to those we do not love, and certainly the President was not indifferent to his wife. She often wounded him in unguarded moments, but calm reflection never failed to bring regret.

Gilder Lehrman Collection

“He [Abraham Lincoln] was wholly unselfish in every respect, and I believe that he loved the mother of his children very tenderly. He asked nothing but affection from her, but did not always receive it. When in one of her wayward impulsive moods, she was apt to say and do things that wounded him deeply. If he had not loved her, she would have been powerless to cloud his thoughtful face, or gild it with a ray of sunshine as she pleased. We are indifferent to those we do not love, and certainly the President was not indifferent to his wife. She often wounded him in unguarded moments, but calm reflection never failed to bring regret.”

Mrs. Lincoln's Reactions

- Betrayal
- Anger
- Violation of privacy
- Dissolved the friendship

Public Reactions

- Not well received
- Scandalous
- Improper
- Violated social norms
- Directly affected Keckley's business

Life after the White House

- Keckley's business suffered after her book was published.
- She began training Black seamstresses.
- In 1892, she became the head of Wilberforce University's Department of Sewing and Domestic Arts.
- She suffered a possible stroke and moved back to DC.
- She died in 1907 at the age of 89.



Library of Congress



Gilder Lehrman Collection

Q&A

Upcoming Programs

- *Inside the Vault*, Thursday, February 18 at 7 pm ET (4 pm PT)
 - We will be discussing primary sources by Frederick Douglass.
- 22nd Annual Frederick Douglass Book Prize
 - Tuesday, February 23 at 7 pm ET (4 pm PT)
 - We invite teachers, students, and history lovers to join us for this event, which will feature remarks and a Q&A with prizewinner **Sophie White** as well as David Blight, Pulitzer Prize-winning author and director of the Gilder Lehrman Center at Yale University.

Upcoming Programs

- *Book Breaks*, February 7 at 2 pm ET (11 am PT)
 - Amanda Bellows discusses her book *American Slavery and Russian Serfdom in the Post-Emancipation Imagination*.
- Nominate a teacher for History Teacher of the Year!
 - K-12 teachers in each of the 50 states, District of Columbia, Department of Defense Schools, and US Territories are eligible. These winners are then entered into a pool for the National History Teacher of the Year award.
- Visit gilderlehrman.org for free resources for students, teachers, families, and history enthusiasts of all ages.