

## Buying Frederick Douglass's freedom, 1846

### Introduction

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After he had escaped from slavery in 1838, Frederick Douglass became a well-known orator and abolitionist. He wrote an autobiography in 1845, but because he was a runaway slave, its publication increased the chances that he would be captured and returned to slavery. Douglass went on a speaking tour of Ireland and England to remove himself from immediate danger. In 1846, his supporters in England made arrangements to purchase his freedom. They contacted Hugh Auld, whose family had held Douglass (then known as Frederick Bailey) in slavery.

These documents illustrate some of the negotiations between Anna Richardson in England and Hugh Auld in Maryland as they arranged Douglass's manumission. The situation was complicated by the fact that Hugh Auld and his brother, Thomas Auld, had both owned Douglass at different times. Through Walter Lowrie in New York, the Richardsons insisted that Hugh prove his full ownership of Douglass or have Thomas sign the paperwork as well. Thomas sold his portion to Hugh, and Hugh proceeded to finalize the paperwork to "render him entirely & Legally free" in December 1846. As a result, Douglass was able to return to the United States a free man.

### Excerpt

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Hugh Auld to Anna Richardson, October 6, 1846 (GLC07484.04)

In reply to your Letter dated Newcastle on Tyne 8<sup>th</sup> mo 17<sup>th</sup> 1846 I State that I will Take 150 £ Sterling for the manumission [*sic*] of my slave Frederick Bailey, alias, Douglass – I am prepared to give such papers or deed of Manumission as will forever exempt him from any claims by any person or persons, in other words the papers will render him entirely & Legally free.

As soon as your agent is prepared to deliver me the money I will hand him the papers.

### Questions for Discussion

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Read the introduction, the excerpt, and the transcripts, and study the images. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions:

1. A) Define the term "manumission."  
B) Identify the following: Frederick (Bailey) Douglass, Hugh and Thomas Auld, Anna Richardson, Walter Lowrie.
2. Why did Frederick Douglass travel to Ireland and England in 1846?
3. Explain why the legal transaction described in these documents had to take place before Frederick Douglass could return to the United States.
4. How do these documents illustrate the care taken to protect the interests of those involved?

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### Transcripts

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Hugh Auld to Anna Richardson, October 6, 1846 (GLC07484.04)

Baltimore Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 1846

Madam

In reply to your Letter dated Newcastle on Tyne 8<sup>th</sup> mo 17<sup>th</sup> 1846 I State that I will Take 150 £ Sterling for the manumission of my slave Frederick Bailey, alias, Douglass – I am prepared to give such papers or deed of Manumission as will forever exempt him from any claims by any person or persons, in other words the papers will render him entirely & Legally free.

As soon as your agent is prepared to deliver me the money I will hand him the papers.

In haste Resp'uly yours &c

Mrs. Amy [*sic*] (Henry) Richardson

Newcastle on Tyne

Baltimore Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 1846

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Walter Lowrie to Hugh Auld, November 24, 1846 (GLC07484.03)

New York 24 Nov. 1846

M<sup>r</sup> Hugh Auld

Dear Sir

M<sup>r</sup> Henry Richardson of New Castle upon Tyne England has sent me, by the last Steamer, one hundred and fifty pounds sterling to purchase the freedom of Frederick Bailey alias Douglass. At the present rate of Exchange this amounts in dollars to seven hundred and eleven 66/100 dollars.

As Douglass, it is said was owned at one time by your brother Thomas Auld, M<sup>r</sup> Richardson desires that the evidence of the legal transfer of Douglass to you from Thomas Auld accompany the freedom papers, or that you both join in the Deeds of manumission

He requests further, that the freedom papers be examined by a lawyer, and be accompanied by a note from him that they are correct and legal you will please therefore to submit them to – Merideth Esqr. in Baltimore, (I forget his first name, altho' I was formerly slightly acquainted with him) whose opinion that the papers are correct & legal will be perfectly satisfactory.

In making out the papers use the name of Henry Richardson, as I do not wish my name connected with this transaction. My agency in it, as I have already stated to you, has been an unpleasant one from the first.

## Buying Frederick Douglass's freedom, 1846

As soon as these papers are received I shall forward to you the above sum, or pay it here to your order.

I am yours with respect

Walter Lowrie

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J. Meredith to Hugh Auld, December 12, 1846 (GLC07484.05)

December 12<sup>th</sup> 1846. Received from Mr Hugh Auld twenty five dollars, being my fee for professional services in relation to the manumission of his negro slave, Frederick Baily.

\$25

J. Meredith

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## Images

Baltimore Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 1846

Madam

I reply to your Letter dated  
 Newcastle on Tyne 2<sup>nd</sup> mo 17<sup>th</sup> 1846 I state that I will  
 Take 100 £ Sterling for the manumission of my slave  
 Frederick Bailey, alias Douglass. I am prepared to give such  
 papers or deed of Manumission as will forever exempt  
 him from any claims by any person or persons, in other  
 words the papers will render him entirely & legally free.  
 As soon as your agent is prepared to deliver me  
 the Money I will hand him the paper.

In haste Respectfully yours H<sup>o</sup>

Miss Amy (Henry) Richardson  
 Newcastle on Tyne

Baltimore Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 1846

Hugh Auld to Anna Richardson, October 6, 1846. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07484.04)



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New York 24 Nov. 1846

Mr Hugh Auld

Dear Sir

Mr Henry Richardson of Newcastle upon Tyne England has sent me, by the last steamer, one hundred and fifty pounds sterling to purchase the freedom of Frederick Bailey alias Douglass. At the present rate of Exchange this amounts in dollars to Seven hundred and eleven 66/100 dollars.

As Douglass, it is said was owned at one time by your brother Thomas Auld, Mr Richardson desires that the evidence of the legal transfer of Douglass to you from Thomas Auld accompanying the freedom papers, or that you both join in the Deeds of manumission.

He requests further, that the freedom papers be examined by a lawyer, and be accompanied by a note from him that they are correct and legal. You will please therefore to submit them to - Meredith Egge in Baltimore, (I forgot his first name, altho' I was formerly slightly acquainted with him) whose opinion that the papers are correct & legal will be perfectly satisfactory.

In making out the papers use the name of Henry Richardson, as I do not wish my name connected with this transaction. My agency in it, as I have already stated to you,



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the first.

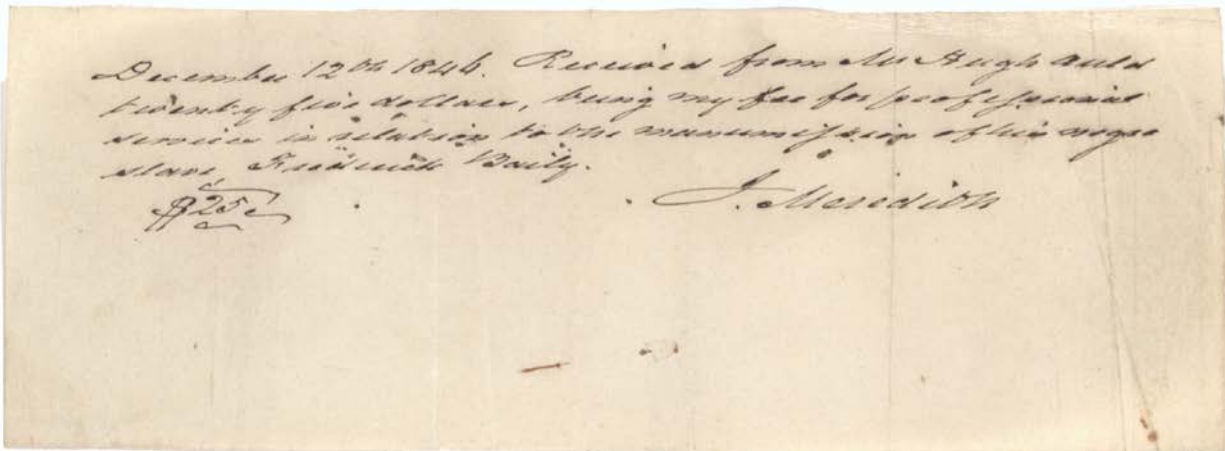
As soon as the papers are received  
I shall forward to you the above sum,  
or pay it here to your order.

I am, yours with respect

Walter Lowrie

Walter Lowrie to Hugh Auld, November 24, 1846, p. 2. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07484.03)

## Buying Frederick Douglass's freedom, 1846



December 12th 1846. Received from Mr. Hugh and Sidney five dollars, being my fee for professional service in relation to the manumission of his negro slave Frederick Douglass.

\$25 J. Meredith

J. Meredith, Receipt for \$25, December 12, 1846. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07484.05)