

Teacher Page: Resource Sheet #13

Source: Deed of Manumission for Robert Hemings, December 24, 1794.
From *Free Some Day: The African-American families of Monticello*, by Lucia Stanton, and Courtesy of the University of Virginia Library.
<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/small/collections/tj/deed.html>
Albert and Shirley Small: Special Collections Library

Note: Robert Hemings (1762-1819) was the son of Betty Hemings, a slave of John Wayles, Jefferson's father-in-law. Born in 1762, he was the first child of her alleged relationship with her master. Betty Hemings and her children became the property of Martha and Thomas Jefferson after Wayles' death in May 1773. Just a few weeks later, eleven-year-old Robert became part of the Jefferson domestic staff. Robert Hemings, the first slave freed by Jefferson, had evidently fulfilled his engagement by 1799, when he first appears in the Richmond tax rolls. Later entries give the impression that he operated a livery or hauling business. In 1802, he lived on a half-acre lot he owned at the corner of Grace and Seventh Streets. He died in 1819.

Document Analysis:

1. Define or describe exactly what the term manumitted means to a slave.
The slave is set free and will remain that way, without obligation to the owner or his family or estate.
"...shall be discharged of all obligation of bondage or servitude whatsoever: and that neither myself, my heirs executors or administrators shall have any right to exact from him hereafter any services or duties whatsoever..."
2. When Robert was freed, what happened to his possessions?
It appears that he would be able to keep all of his personal possessions.
"...so that in future he shall be free and of free condition, with all his goods and chattels..."
3. If Jefferson were to die, what would Robert's obligation be to the Jefferson family?
Robert would be a free man, now and in the future. He would have no obligation to the Jefferson family.
"...and that neither myself, my heirs executors or administrators shall have any right to exact from him hereafter any services or duties whatsoever..."
4. Explain how this document could be used to help answer the question, "Where Did Thomas Jefferson Stand on the Issue of Slavery?"
According to this document, Jefferson was opposed to slavery. He willingly manumits one of his own slaves.