

# The Palmer Family

## Fairfield Plantation, Paramaribo, Surinam

Accounts of the 'Stock' at Fairfield in 1774 and 1805. The numbers of slaves had increased from 119 to 180 and their considerable value was given in Dutch guilders - the total in 1805 was worth around £4000. The fact that slaves were listed as 'Stock', alongside mules and horses, shows how they were just considered as commodities.

Acc <sup>t</sup> of Stock upon the Fairfield Estate at the beginning of the Year 1774, when Tho: Palmer arrived.	
119 Slaves @ 50/1000	5000
120 750	4000
50 500	2500
80 @ 500	11200
69 @ 2000/30	2970
	18000
6 Horses @ 200	1200
20 Mules @ 250	5000
	17000
	35070

Acc <sup>t</sup> of Stock on the Plantation Fairfield the year ending Decr 21, 1805	
Slaves 180	8000
2 Head Oxen @ 1000	2000
2 Cows @ 200	400
6 Cows @ 1800	10800
3 Horses	1125
15 Pigs @ 750	11250
50 Pigs @ 200	10000
10 new	2000
	38800
Slaves 18000	700
Boys, Girls, Infants, old & infirm	40000
set at 9/2 and at 1/260 a pair	14100
mules 35 @ 1650	57750
Horned Cattle 52 @ 115	5980
Slaves 18900	162900
mules 15750	157500
Horned Cattle 16550	188300
	16750
	79450

Thomas Palmer acquired this plantation through his mother's family, the McIntoshes and the Royalls. As a loyalist, he fled Boston for Surinam in 1774, shortly before the American Revolution. He increased his already large fortune by converting a bog to arable land and expanding the sugar business. He spent the last few decades of his life in London, where he led an extravagant lifestyle on the proceeds. When Thomas died unmarried in 1820, he left the plantation in trust for the three granddaughters of Isaac Royall and their husbands, including Sir Charles and Lady Harriet Palmer of Wanlip.

Surinam, on the north-east coast of South America, had become a Dutch colony (Dutch Guyana) in 1667, but was occupied in 1799 by the British during the Napoleonic War; it was returned to the Dutch in 1816. The plantation was sold by the Palmer family in 1833, the year slavery was finally abolished by the British. The slaves, however, were not freed until 1863, when the Dutch became the last European nation to abolish slavery.

List of Slaves on the Plantation, 1813. The 110 slaves are divided into 'Able Men', 'Able Women', 'Able Boys', 'Able Girls', 'Infants' and 'Invalids'. Their names vary from Christian and Roman to African, European and nicknames. The type of work to which they were put is noted and there are a number of interesting comments, such as 'an incurable thief and always in Confinement' (no. 63, Yankie).

An accompanying letter to Thomas Palmer from the plantation Director reveals that certain slaves received special treatment: 'If you suppose that the Beads that were sent, are at a cheap rate, more of them would be very acceptable, for the use of the women. Betty, Quassies daughter, shall have a second Petticoat of the best Check as you desire. Quassie, & January shall not be forgotten in their old days, Mr Whites particular Orders are, that those old Men, receive every Care, & Attention'.

Plantation Slaves Going to Work, Surinam, 1839. John Carter Brown Library at Brown University



*Copy of a letter from the Administrator, A. W. White, to the Director, dated January 1813.*

...I am made most happy indeed to carry Orders so benevolent as yours towards your Slaves into effect.... we have put a Stop to all Nightwork. Our operations commence at 4 in the morning, and Man & Beast are at rest after 9'.

'....we have had a lenient hand over your people - Corporal Punishment has been long abolished - indeed I believe there is no plantation in the Colony, where there is such real contentment as at Fairfield - I feel a pleasure in going there, because I receive tokens of the people's gratitude; they do not receive me as a Tyrant with fear and trembling - but from experience, as the Assuager & Alleviator of their Condition with joy and pleasure in their countenances. If man is ever happy in this life, it is Surely in the Act of administering Comfort to those who look up to him, it is a Sumptuous repast, and more easily felt, than described'.

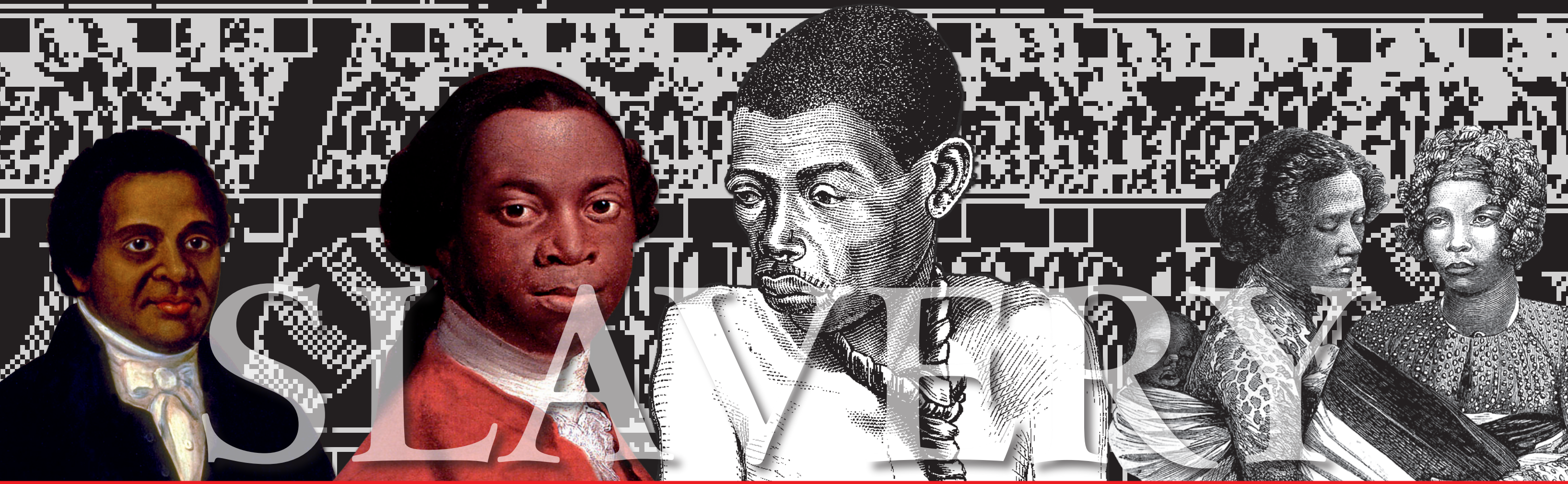
Slave Account, 1813. Incredibly, this is a balance sheet of slaves, written on the back of the list. The plantation was 'compensated' for the deaths of slaves, noted on the right, by the births on the left.

*Letter to Thomas Palmer from A. W. White about the 'Happy' Conditions, 1815.*

'It is a source of Satisfaction to me to have conducted this property for so many Years without recourse to corporal punishment. Experience has taught me that more was to be done without it, & you have the consolation always to reflect that whatever you receive from the labor of the hands of the Slaves does not proceed from oppression or an under exaction of labor. In one word, My dear Sir, you may rest perfectly satisfied that nothing in my power shall ever be wanting to make them happy & contented'.

This situation is in contrast to the ill-treatment of slaves on plantations elsewhere, which led to uprisings.





# The Palmer Family Fairfield Plantation, Paramaribo, Surinam

Paramaribo, Surinam, 1816.

Agreement of agreement between A. W. White Esquire, an Administrator of Plantations, and the said Frederick Johann van Friderici, with the said...

That the said van Friderici having an infant daughter named Clarissa a slave on the said Plantation Fairfield, whose Mother is named Abigail, Offers to A. W. White Esquire of the Creole Negro Boy his property named Winst, in exchange for his said infant Daughter named Clarissa, in order that she should be manumitted & made free & instructed in the Christian Religion.

That the said A. W. White in his Capacity as Administrator of Plantations, do hereby give up to the said van Friderici the said property of the said infant daughter named Clarissa, in consideration of the said property named Winst, in order that she should be manumitted & made free & instructed in the Christian Religion.

In witness whereof, we have subscribed our names at the said Plantation Fairfield, this 18th November 1816.

**A Former Slave Trades His Own Slave For His Daughter's Freedom, 1816**  
This agreement between the Administrator and 'the free Negro Man named Frederick Johann van Friderici' is a stark illustration of the effects of slavery on families.

Frederick 'having an Infant Daughter named Clarissa a slave on the said Plantation Fairfield, whose Mother is named Abigail, Offers to A. W. White Esquire the Creole Negro Boy his property named Winst, in exchange for his said infant Daughter named Clarissa, in order that she should be manumitted & made free & instructed in the Christian Religion'.

A similar agreement survives among the plantation papers and also shows the complications of relationships between Europeans and their slaves:

'...the free Mullatress' [who appears to have married a Dutchman] '...having a Sister named Swankie a Negresse, who is Mother of a Mulatto child, one year Old, named Maria, both Slaves belonging to the Plantation Fairfield, offers to A. W. White the Negresse Francina of equal value, for her said Sister Swankie and the Sum of Five hundred Guilders, as a compensation for the infant Child...'

The term 'Mulatto' is today considered offensive and referred to a person of dual black and white parentage.

liberty experienced - and gives me every reason to hope we shall under all circumstances make a saving crop. The Slaves had received the usual allowances at New Year, and were all contented and happy. Their Conduct has been uniformly good - they give me no trouble, and I feel an uncommon Interest in the welfare of the Plantation and Slaves.

**Letter From the Administrator to Thomas Palmer, Remarking on the Slaves' Welfare, 1814**  
'The Slaves had received the usual allowances at New Year, and were all contented and happy. Their Conduct has been uniformly good - they give me no trouble, and I feel an uncommon Interest in the welfare of the Plantation and Slaves'.

The large cultivation immediately for the better. I am further sorry to remark that one of the Carpenters Philip & a Girl named Isabella have been discovered to have caught the Leprosy.

**Outbreak of Leprosy Among the Slaves, 1813**  
A. W. White, the Administrator, informs Thomas Palmer 'that one of the Carpenters Philip & a Girl named Isabella have been discovered to have caught the Leprosy'.



**Sale of a Slave Woman and Her Children, Surinam, 1839**  
John Carter Brown Library at Brown University



**Sugar Mills, Surinam, 1839**  
A water-powered mill, with slaves feeding canes into rollers. In the background, there is a cattle mill similar to the one in use at Fairfield.  
John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

The Governor of Surinam, November 18th 1820.

Dear Sir,

I have in due time been favoured with your letter of the 28th of August, in answer to mine of the 9th & 12th last, and can assure you that your recommendation with regard to a legal Obedience, is strictly observed, and that although the repairs of buildings have required many extra Carriens expense, and will require some more yet, you may well depend upon that nothing will be expended but what is absolutely wanted. I am sorry that you can not give me the full sum required in addition to the Stock, but hope that you will support the purchase which I have made in October last, at a price of really not to high, and certainly the lowest for which Slaves are sold in our Town. Since the Slaves are all well and of good Service, and appear well satisfied with their Situation.

**Letter From the New Administrator About the Purchase of More Slaves, 1820**  
'I am sorry that you can not authorise me to buy Some Negroes in addition to the Stock, but hope that you will approve of the purchase which I have made in October last, as the price is really not to high, and Certainly the lowest, for which Slaves are Sold in those times - Those 5 Negroes are all well and of good Service, and appear well Satisfied with their Situation'.

Our present Constitution is in 1771... The number of Slaves are 71 Men, 47 Women, 16 boys and 21 Girls making together 155 - and I am glad to say that they are in general all in good health and very Satisfied.

The number of Slaves are 71 Men, 47 Women, 16 boys and 21 Girls making together 155 - and I am glad to say that they are in general all in good health and very Satisfied.

The Small Pox hath Carried off a Vast number of Slaves as well in Town as at Several estates, but by the Goodness of God, this disease has not reached us and we have till now Completely been preserved, and I hope Heaven will further preserve us.

**Report on the Health of the Slaves and Concern About Smallpox, 1820**  
'The number of Slaves are 71 Men, 47 Women, 16 boys and 21 Girls making together 155 - and I am glad to say that they are in general all in good health and very Satisfied'.

'The Small Pox hath Carried off a Vast number of Slaves as well in Town as at Several estates, but by the Goodness of God, this disease has not reached us and we have till now Completely been preserved, and I hope Heaven will further preserve us'.

Surinam 24 Sept 1814.

Gentlemen!

I have to confirm the preceding Resolutions of my last report. And to request you that if any more Months are devoted to the purchase of young Slaves for the plantation, that they should be presented during the high rate, at which persons of that description have been sold, finding however that there is no chance of obtaining them at a lower Price, I have purchased every prime young Slave, 2 Men Boys, & a Girl at £100 each, payable in a Bill of Exchange of the date at our Bank, in favor of the said Plantation, in your Name. Should Mr. Palmer think these people high, I can dispose of them at any Time for the same price. I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient Servant.

**Letter from the Administrator to Agents About the Purchase of Slaves, 1814**  
Despite the abolition of the trade in 1807, existing slaves could still be bought and sold:  
'...I was some Months ago directed by Mr. Palmer to purchase a lot of young Negroes for Fairfield Plantation, but that I have been prevented doing so from the high rate, at which persons of that description have been sold. Finding however that there was no chance of obtaining them at a lower Price, I have purchased 3 very prime young Slaves, 2 Men Boys, & a Girl at £100...Should Mr. Palmer think these people high, I can dispose of them at any Time for the same price'.





# The Palmer Family

## Lower Works Plantation, St Elizabeth, Jamaica

In 1813, this plantation passed to Thomas Palmer and Lady Harriet Palmer's father and brother-in-law, as executors of the estate of Joseph Royall, their relative. Joseph had probably acquired Lower Works through Isaac Royall and left it in trust for the family of a friend. The executors were instructed to manage the plantation and keep up 'the efficient strength of the Slaves & Stock'.

List of Slaves on the Plantation, 1782  
The head slaves, Jack (cooper), Dick (driver) and Johnson and Neptune (penkeepers), are followed by 'Field Negroes', 'Field Wenches', children and invalids. Nancy (no. 34) was 'troubled with Soars' and 10 year old Polly (no.38) was 'Weakly'.

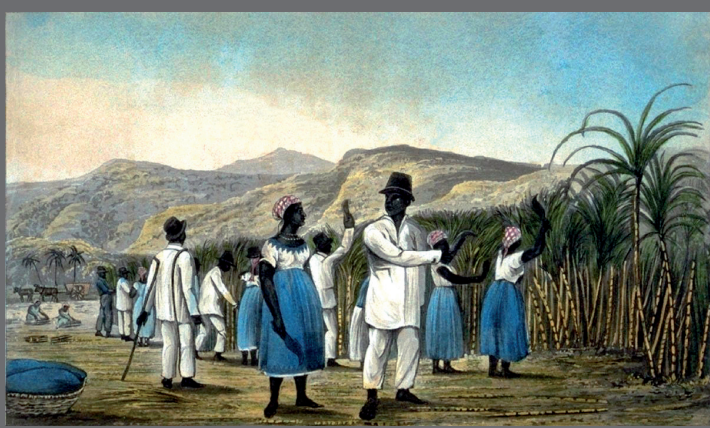
Handwritten list of slaves on the plantation in 1782, including names like Jack, Dick, Johnson, and Neptune.

Handwritten list of slaves on the plantation in 1783, including names like Cooper Jack, Dick, and Johnson.

Handwritten 'Slave Account' from 1782-83, showing financial details and notes such as 'Rachael died this day' and 'Solomon had been born this day'.

Slave Account, 1782-83  
The account balances because 'Rachael died this day' and Solomon had been 'born this day'.

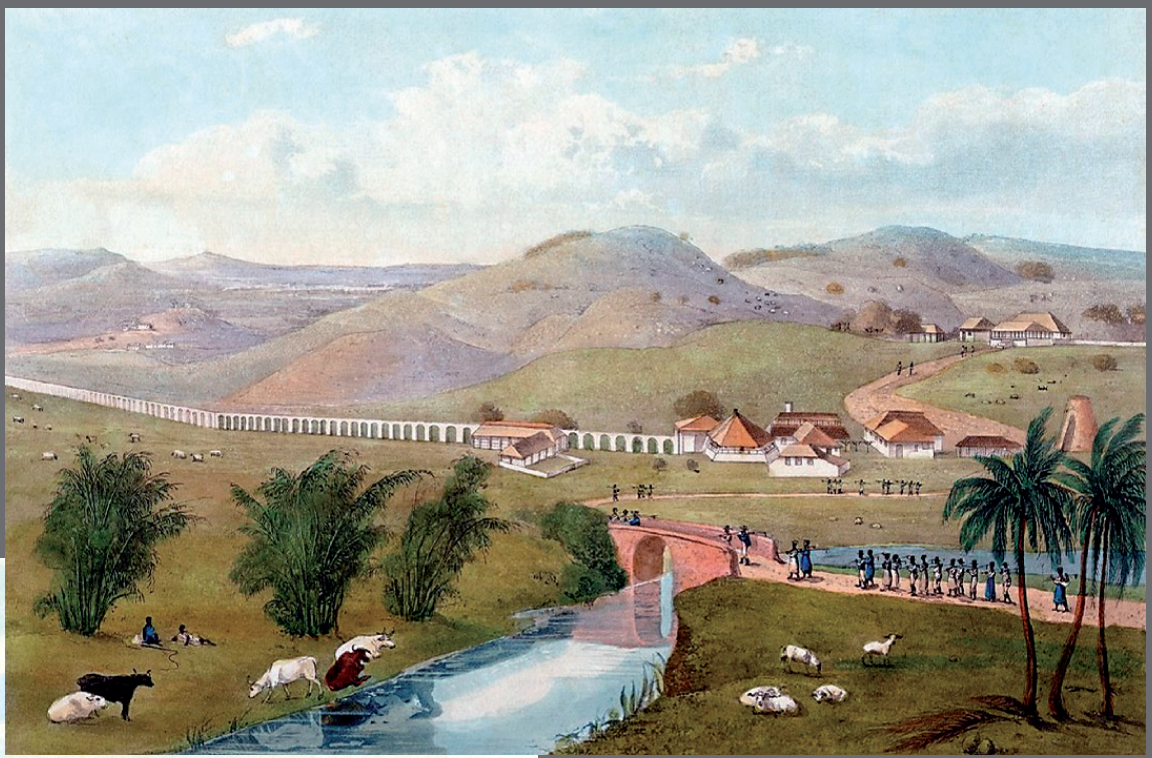
'List of Negroes', 1783  
A year later, 'Cooper Jack' was 'very Old'. Poor Nancy (no. 27) was now described as 'Invalid, Soar', but Polly (no.41) had recovered to become a 'House Girl'. Note also no.10, Will, 'a Rogue' and no.26, 'Juba Big Girl'.



Sugar Cane Harvest, Jamaica, 1820s  
A gang of slaves cutting cane, with their driver.  
John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

Handwritten list of slaves on the plantation in 1815, including names like Solomon, Will, and Neptune.

List of Slaves, 1815  
Top of the list is Solomon, the driver, whose birth had been recorded in the slave account for 1782-83! Will, the 'rogue' in 1783, was now 'Head Pen Keeper' and 'old'. Neptune was still a penkeeper, but 'very old'. Dick, the driver in 1782, was also 'very old' and had been demoted to the field. Towards the bottom, Bessy Royal was 'Blind', but 'Not very old'.



A Jamaican Plantation, Showing a Gang of Field Slaves and Sugar Works, 1820-21  
Archives & Special Collections, University of Miami Library

Sugar Plantation, Jamaica, 1820-21  
The plantation yard is in the centre, with the slave houses on the hillside on the right.  
Archives & Special Collections, University of Miami Library

