



## Anastacia “Stacia” Hepburn (1801-1895)<sup>1</sup>

Anastacia “Stacia” Hepburn was born about 1801, likely in Montgomery County, Maryland, enslaved to the Peter family.<sup>2</sup> Almost nothing is known about Stacia’s adolescence and early adulthood, including the names of her parents or when she was moved to Tudor Place. However, the names of Stacia and her sisters, Elizabeth and Tabitha “Brythe”, were recorded by Britannia Peter Kennon in her reminiscences.<sup>3</sup> Britannia recalled that:

*Stacia [took care of me]...Stacia’s sister was named Brythe & another sister whose name was Elizabeth—father [Thomas Peter] gave her to Meck [America, Britannia’s older sister], an excellent nurse. Capt. Williams [America’s husband] ordered to Cape Cod, took her and she ran away.<sup>4</sup>*

Different interpretations of Britannia’s single memory about Stacia, Elizabeth and Brythe have led to several theories regarding the sisters’ fates: all include that Elizabeth was given to America P. Peter by her father, Thomas, upon her marriage in 1826. Stacia and Brythe may or may not also have been given to America at the same time. According to Britannia, when America’s husband, Captain William George Williams, a topographical engineer for the United States Army, was posted out of state, he took Elizabeth with him and she self-emancipated.<sup>5</sup>

Recent research has uncovered additional information showing all three sisters were enslaved by Thomas Peter for much longer than Britannia remembered. Based on this new evidence, Stacia, Elizabeth and Brythe were enslaved in Georgetown until at least 1834, according to a Catholic confraternity register for the Cent Society from Holy Trinity Church, a Jesuit parish located in

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<sup>1</sup> For consistency, this biography will refer to Anastacia Hepburn as “Stacia,” for that is how Britannia Peter Kennon and other Peter family members referred to her. Alternate spellings of Stacia’s given name, found in religious and government records, include Anastasia, Anastatia, Stasia, Stata, Stalia and Stacie, and her surname has been spelled alternately as Hebborn, Hebbon(s) or Hebron(s).

<sup>2</sup> “Anastacia” or “Stacia” does not appear on any known Custis lists of enslaved, nor do the names of her sisters, Tabitha (“Brythe”) or Elizabeth. It is likely that Stacia and her sisters were born enslaved to Thomas Peter, later of Tudor Place; his father, the merchant and first mayor of Georgetown, Robert Peter; or one of Thomas’s many siblings. The Peter family, as a whole, enslaved hundreds of people, a full account of which has never been compiled.

<sup>3</sup> For consistency, this biography will refer to Stacia’s sister Brythe, for that is how Britannia Peter Kennon referred to her, though her given name was Tabitha.

<sup>4</sup> “Britannia’s Reminiscences, 1895-1900,” in Armistead Peter, Jr. Papers, MS-14, Box 69, Folder 24, and Box 70, Folder 1-3, Tudor Place Manuscript Collection, Tudor Place Historic House & Garden, Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to mention that no deed between Thomas Peter and his daughter, America P. Peter, memorializing this “gift,” has been located. The exact date and place for Elizabeth’s self-emancipation is unknown. No newspaper advertisements seeking her capture or return have been found. Britannia indicated that Elizabeth “ran away” when Captain Williams was stationed in Cape Cod, Massachusetts in 1832 for a period of about ten months. Supposedly, Elizabeth self-emancipated in Provincetown, Massachusetts (located at the northern tip of Cape Cod), but no direct evidence for this has been found. For more, see Grant S. Quertermous, *A Georgetown Life: The Reminiscences of Britannia Wellington Peter Kennon of Tudor Place* (Georgetown University Press, 2020): pp. 65, 166-67, 207; Cassandra A. Good, *First Family: George Washington’s Heirs and the Making of America* (Ontario: Hanover Square Press, 2023): p. 284; and “Enslaved Labor,” Tudor Place Historic House & Garden, <https://tudorplace.org/museum/slavery-at-tudor-place/#toggle-id-7>, accessed 27 Dec 2023.



Georgetown and the only Catholic church in Washington, D. C. from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Peter J. Albert, a present-day parishioner at Holy Trinity Church:

*...The Cent Society was organized in 1834. Subscribers agreed to pay a penny a week to be used for 'ornamenting the Holy Altar, Tabernacle, Sanctuary & Church, & to promoting the Solemnity of Divine Worship.' The names of the contributors were recorded in a ledger, and a Mass was offered 'for all the Members of the Society, living & dead, at least once a month, on a Sunday,' and the ledger was 'placed on the Altar during that Mass, because it contains the Names of all Members of the Cent Society.'*<sup>6</sup>

Listed on the “H” index page of this register, under the heading “Coloured Females,” are Tabitha Hepburn (with the word “dead” beside her name), Anastatia Hepburn and Elizabeth Hepburn – undoubtedly, the three sisters enslaved to Thomas and Martha Peter at Tudor Place. Two additional Hepburns were also written under the “coloured” headings: a woman named Charity Hepburn and a man named Samuel Hepburn. When Holy Trinity reconstituted the Cent Society in 1865, only Stacia’s name appeared, albeit twice – once as Anastacia Hepburn and again as Stacie Hepburn.<sup>7</sup>

Stacia, Elizabeth and Brythe’s membership in the Cent Society in 1834 indicates that they were likely raised Catholic from birth. It casts some doubt on the date that Elizabeth left with Captain Williams, if these two Elizabeth Hepburns are one and the same. This entry also reveals something important about Brythe: her full name as Tabitha. The Holy Trinity Church deaths sacramental register indicates that on “September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1838, Tabitha Horven (col’d) a Slave to Mrs. Martha Peters, age 26, was buried in T. C. V. G. Y.” Brythe was buried in the “free range” plot at Trinity Church Upper Grave Yard, now known as Holy Rood Cemetery, which was “for coloured people who cannot pay for the ground.”<sup>8</sup> The Cent Society ledger entry from 1834, and Brythe’s burial record from 1838, are the last known records for Elizabeth and Brythe Hepburn.

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<sup>6</sup> Peter J. Albert, “African American Membership in Religious Confraternities at Holy Trinity,” *Cura Virtualis*, 19 July 2023, <https://www.curavirtualis.org/post/african-american-membership-in-religious-confraternities-at-holy-trinity>, accessed 27 Dec 2023; “Holy Trinity Cent Society Ledger, 1834-1865,” Holy Trinity Church Archives, box 13, folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

<sup>7</sup> A family connection, if any, between the Hepburn sisters and Charity Hepburn and Samuel Hepburn is undetermined. Aside from the entry in the Cent Society ledger, no additional records for Samuel Hepburn have been found. Charity Hepburn died in July 1859, likely the same woman identified as “Charity Hebons (coloured), [aged] about 83 years” entered in the Holy Trinity deaths sacramental register for that month and year and buried in Holy Rood Cemetery at Georgetown University. At 83 years old in 1859, Charity was old enough to have been Stacia, Elizabeth and Brythe’s mother or aunt, but an official genealogical connection to the Peter family’s enslaved has yet to be made. See “Holy Trinity Cent Society Ledger, 1834-1865,” and “Holy Trinity Church, Deaths (1818-1867),” p. 103, Digital Georgetown Manuscripts Collection, Georgetown University Library, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

<sup>8</sup> “Holy Trinity Church, Deaths (1818-1867),” p. 77, Digital Georgetown Manuscripts Collection, Georgetown University Library. For a full explanation of Georgetown’s early Catholic cemeteries and associated timelines, see Carlton Fletcher, “Holy Rood Cemetery,” *Glover Park History: Historical Sketches of Glover Park, Upper Georgetown, and Georgetown Heights*, <https://gloverparkhistory.com/cemeteries/holy-rood-cemetery/holy-rood-cemetery/>, accessed 27 December 2023.



The Hepburn sisters' membership in the Cent Society at Holy Trinity Church during enslavement raises questions as to the Peter family's leniency toward the religious practices of the individuals they enslaved. The Holy Trinity Church sacramental registers record the births and deaths of additional people enslaved to the Peters, indicating to some extent that Thomas and Martha Peter permitted the enslaved to practice the rites of their preferred faiths. This was not limited to the Catholic enslaved. Patty Allen and Eliza Gray, also enslaved to the Peters, were communicants at Christ Church Georgetown, an Episcopal church.<sup>9</sup> Practically speaking, the Peters must have permitted their enslaved to walk (several blocks) to their respective church services, whether Episcopalian or Catholic. In addition, the Cent Society required a tithe of a penny per week; that is laid out in the membership rules in the front of the membership ledger. In the case of Stacia, Elizabeth and Brythe, if they were not permitted to earn money for themselves, it is likely that the Peters gave the sisters pennies for their tithes.

While enslaved to the Peters, and later, Britannia Peter Kennon, Stacia served primarily as a nursemaid, first to Thomas and Martha Peter's children and then to their grandchildren.<sup>10</sup> As an enslaved house servant and nurse, Stacia would have been responsible for supervising the children throughout the day and night, tending to their every need. She lived at Tudor Place and was always on call, ready to respond to any sign of illness and slept on a pallet in the hallway or other space close by, if not in a child's bedroom. Stacia would have likely learned from an enslaved family member how to treat common illnesses before being moved to Tudor Place. In 1847, Martha Peter recalled in a letter to her granddaughter Martha "Markie" Custis Williams (America P. Williams' daughter) that Stacia had nursed Markie's brother, William Orton Williams, through a severe bout of typhoid fever, sleeping on a cot by his bedside.<sup>11</sup>

The complicated relationship between Stacia and her enslavers, and their children and grandchildren, is reflected in two separate diary entries written by Martha "Markie" Custis Williams. As with her siblings, Markie was born at Tudor Place and would have known Stacia all her life. In August 1856, Markie was 29 years old and living with her great-uncle, George Washington Parke Custis, at Arlington House. Markie recalled after a visit to Tudor Place that month:

*Poor Stascia's hospitality and kindness was very touching she told me in the kindest manner, that any time I wanted to come over to Town and did not like to stay all night with any of my friends, she hoped I would come to Tudor Place – She would heartily share with me what she had and my room was always there & she*

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<sup>9</sup> "Communicants among the Coloured People," Christ Church Georgetown Registers, Vol. I, 1820-1865, ca. 1831, p. 69, from typewritten notes held in Tudor Place's vertical files.

<sup>10</sup> The Peter children were Columbia Peter (1797-1820), John P.C. Peter (1799-1848), G. Washington Peter (1801-1877), America P. Peter (1803-1842) and Britannia Wellington Peter (1815-1911).

<sup>11</sup> "Martha (Williams) Carter Papers," MS-6, Box 1, Folder 5, Tudor Place Manuscript Collection, Tudor Place Historic House & Garden, Georgetown, Washington, D.C.; Quertermous, *A Georgetown Life*, p. 65n12; Leni Sorensen, "Enslaved House Servants," 7 Dec 2020, in *Encyclopedia Virginia*, <https://encyclopedia.virginia.org/entries/enslaved-house-servants>, accessed 29 Dec 2023.



*ready to serve me, and if I feared sleeping in the room alone, [she] would bring her bed & put it on the floor of my room – that anything in the world she could do for me she was ready & would be pleased to do it.*<sup>12</sup>

Martha “Markie” Custis Williams ended the above entry noting that she told Stacia she would come by sometime, “expressly to see her.” In March 1859, Markie wrote:

*A lovely day for my Birth-day... This morning after Orton went to the office, I went to dear old Georgetown, to see poor Stasia, to whom I had long promised a visit. The getting to her abode, was quite a pilgrimage, but I was fully repaid by her hospitable greeting – over & over again, did she assure me, that she was “so glad to see me.” How strong the tie that binds one to an old family servant – one who has known you from baby-hood & witnessed for all the years of your life, the numerous vicissitudes of the family-circle. It seemed to me a sacred duty to go see Stasia and therefore I selected my birth-day for its fulfillment.*<sup>13</sup>

It is important to first acknowledge that these diary entries reflect the paternalism inherent in the institution of slavery. Martha “Markie” Custis Williams did not see Stacia as an equal, nor did she perceive her as a respected elder. It is possible that by the late 1850s, Stacia was the only enslaved person remaining at Tudor Place. Having lost Brythe twenty years before, and with the whereabouts of Elizabeth remaining unknown, Stacia likely felt, at times, very lonely.<sup>14</sup> These entries are included here to demonstrate the isolation that Stacia may have felt during her life as an enslaved woman, especially as she aged.

Stacia’s whereabouts during the Civil War are unknown. Britannia left Tudor Place at the start of the war, but returned in 1862 and, for fear of the house being seized, offered it for boarding to Union soldiers.<sup>15</sup> It is unknown if Stacia would, or could, have remained at Tudor Place during the Civil War, given the Union Army’s presence, but having nowhere else to go, she likely embedded herself in the newly-freed community in Georgetown. The first record of Stacia post-Civil War is her name again in the Cent Society ledger, recorded when the confraternity was reconstituted in 1865. Stacia received aid from the Freedmen’s Bureau – these records show that in December 1866, Stacia resided in Georgetown on Frederick Street between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets and received \$1 for groceries and \$1.50 for fuel due to her “aged” condition, her being around 65 years old. About two weeks later, in January 1867, Stacia’s residence was recorded as “Phoenix Hall”, and she received an additional \$3 for groceries. Finally, in May 1868, the Freedmen’s Bureau recorded Stacia’s residence as “Fenwicks Hill” and received \$1 for groceries. The cause of her destitution was given as “sickness.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Douglas Breton, *The Arlington Journals of Martha Custis Williams*, National Park Service, March 2023, p. 110, <https://www.nps.gov/arho/learn/historyculture/upload/Diary-of-Martha-Custis-Williams.pdf>, accessed 28 Dec 2023.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174. The “abode” to which Markie refers is unidentified.

<sup>14</sup> The 1880 United States Census, and her death record from November 1895, show that Stacia never married. She was marked as “Single” on both records, which is an intentionally different category from “Widowed” and “Married.”

<sup>15</sup> Britannia was a southern sympathizer. For more information about Britannia and Tudor Place during the Civil War, see Quertermous, *A Georgetown Life*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>16</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., Freedmen's Bureau Records, 1865-1878* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2021. See Assistant Commissioner Records, Series M1055, Reel 16, dates 14 December 1866, 4 January 1867, and 5



Like the information recorded in the Freedmen’s Bureau records, the District of Columbia city directories from 1868 through 1881 showed that Stacia moved residences frequently, though she always remained in Georgetown, just a few blocks from Tudor Place. Her specific residence between the years 1882 and 1892 is unknown. Though Stacia moved frequently, one part of her life appears to have remained consistent – her faith. Stacia joined several Catholic confraternities at Holy Trinity Church in the 1870s and remained a member of the parish until her death in November 1895. According to historian Diane Botts Morrow, Catholic confraternities did not discriminate against members on the basis of age, sex, class or race. However, social conventions did not permit white and black Catholics to participate in religious services together. Morrow notes that “each confraternity selected one act, such as reciting a specific prayer, wearing a certain medal, or regular assistance at Mass as its distinguishing feature of bond or association. Such groups might also hold regular, exclusive meetings or weekly rites, thus fostering a sense of bonding and cohesion.”<sup>17</sup>

The Holy Trinity Church archives show that in addition to her membership in the Cent Society in 1834 and 1865, Stacia joined the Confraternity of the Rosary (Coloured People) and the Bona Mors Society in 1875 (listed as “Anastasia Hebbons”), as well as the Peter Claver Beneficial Society, likely formed in the 1870s. In the Rosary and Bona Mors Societies, Stacia, along with dozens of other African American congregants at Holy Trinity, pledged to meditate on the Rosary, recite daily prayers and gather weekly to discuss ministering to their communities. As stated by Peter J. Albert, “The ongoing commitment we see reflected in these ledgers underscores the importance for African American parishioners [to] their life of faith and their involvement in Holy Trinity’s parish community.”<sup>18</sup>

Stacia’s death certificate and obituary, recently identified, shed light on the last few years of her life. Stacia died on November 10, 1895, at the age of 94, from “senile debility [and] exhaustion,” having suffered from illness during the last six months of her life. At the time of her death, her residence was given as “H and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets NE, Home for the Aged,” where she had resided for the previous three years. The Home for the Aged in Washington, D. C. was established in 1871 by the

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May 1868. “Phoenix Hall” and “Fenwicks Hill” are likely the same place, but its exact location has not yet been identified in newspapers or on contemporary maps for Georgetown.

<sup>17</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011; see Wm. H. Boyd, *Boyd’s City Directory of the District of Columbia, together with a compendium of its Governments, Institutions, and Trades* (Washington, D. C.: W. H. Boyd, 1868), p. 108; *Ibid.*, 1877, p. 339; *Ibid.*, 1878, p. 358; *Ibid.*, 1881, p. 414; Diane Botts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence, 1828-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002): pp. 18-20.

<sup>18</sup> Albert, “African American Membership in Religious Confraternities at Holy Trinity.” Very little is known about the Peter Claver Beneficial Society, except that it was formed by Father Aloysius Roccofort at Holy Trinity Church during Reconstruction era (1865-1877), and served African Americans in Washington, D. C.. Peter Claver (Spanish name: Pedro Claver y Corberó) was a Jesuit priest born in Spain in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, who, during his life, ministered to enslaved and free people in South America. He was canonized in 1888 and became known as the “patron saint of enslaved people.” Historian Katie Grimes provides an analysis of Peter Claver and his ministry in “Racialized Humility: The White Supremacist Sainthood of Peter Claver, SJ,” *Horizons* 42, issue 2, December 2015: pp. 295-316. For individual confraternity ledgers, see Holy Trinity Church Archives, box 15, folders 5 and 10, Georgetown University.



Little Sisters of the Poor, a Catholic aid society run by consecrated women. Stacia's obituary provides more insight:

*Died Old in Years – Mrs. Anastasia Hebron, a colored servant of the Kennon family for many years, died at the Little Sisters of the Poor on Sunday in her ninety-fourth year. For the past five years she has been blind. During her last days at the Kennon home, Anastasia set herself on fire several times accidentally, and Father Roccoort, who is the director of the Peter Claver Colored Beneficial Society, of which she was a member, thought it wise to have her installed at the Little Sisters' Home, where she would be under a constant eye. Deceased was a remarkably well-preserved woman, bearing but few of the wrinkles of time. She was buried today at Holy Rood with Catholic rites, the society attending in a body.*<sup>19</sup>

Stacia's obituary raises many questions that are presently unanswerable. The obituary's author is unknown, though one can speculate that it was someone who knew her intimately, given the details included. It is unclear what is meant by "during her last years at the Kennon home, Anastasia set herself on fire several times accidentally;" specifically, *when* these accidents happened at Tudor Place (before or after the end of slavery) and *how* they occurred. At the end of her enslavement, Stacia was well into her sixties, and may have suffered from illness or injury which made her unsteady on her feet. It is also impossible to know if Britannia and Stacia ever saw each other in Stacia's last years of life. Perhaps not coincidentally, from February through October 1892, Britannia Peter Kennon's account books record \$1 in monthly payments to Stacia; this being the year that Stacia entered the Home for the Aged. In 1893, 1894 and 1895, Britannia accounted for a \$1 yearly donation to the "Home for the Aged," "Colored People Home," and "Colored People House."

Stacia was buried on November 12, 1895, at Holy Rood Cemetery at Georgetown University, perhaps not far from where her sister, Brythe, was laid to rest almost 60 years earlier. The last known record for Stacia comes from Holy Trinity's "Weekly Announcements" ledgers. On November 17, 1895, during Sunday Mass at Holy Trinity Church, the reverend asked the following of the congregation: "Your prayers are requested for the repose of the soul of Anastasia Hebron, who died last week."<sup>20</sup>

---Heather Bollinger, Research Archivist & Historian<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The "Kennon family" referenced here means Britannia Welling Peter Kennon. See "Death Certificate, Anastasia Hebron," Record Number 104915, 10 Nov 1895, Office of the Secretary, District of Columbia Archives, Washington, District of Columbia; "Died Old in Years," *Evening Star (Washington, D.C.)*, 12 Nov 1895, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Holy Trinity Church Archives, Box 8, Folder 7, Georgetown University Archives. Based on currently available records, no residents of Tudor Place attended Stacia's burial. Stacia is likely buried in Section 26, Lots 323 or 345, which were both purchased by Father Aloysius Roccofort in 1884 for the deceased members of the Peter Claver Beneficial Society. Unfortunately, Stacia's name is not individually listed in either lot, nor are the names of any others. See "Record of Holy Rood Cemetery Lot Owners, 1864-1931," Holy Trinity Church Archives, Box 5, Georgetown University.

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