THE SALE OF MOLLY

OBJECTIVES - Students will :
* transcribe an original slave Bill of Sale;
* discover the presence of slavery in New Paltz in 1798;
* discuss the reality of people being bought and sold.

LEARNING STANDARDS – See chart

MATERIALS
* Copy of original Slave Bill of Sale
* Teacher Transcription Sheet
* Student Transcription Sheet

✎ BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Individuals involved in the sale of Molly:

As found in the exchange of the most common goods and services, the buying and selling of African slaves was most readily documented using receipts and Bills of Sale. Mundane in their composition, these legally binding contracts are comparable to Bills of Sale found for the exchange of textiles, household goods, and livestock. It is the clinical and legalistic nature of these documents that reveals the accepted attitudes towards the value of an African life. While phrases such as "to have and to hold" conjure thoughts of marriage, it is important to recognize that this language was used for no other purpose than to protect the seller and the purchaser in the exchange, and cement the transfer of ownership. Such is the case in this Bill of Sale, documenting the exchange of fifteen year old "Negro Wench Molly" to Peter Lefever from Mathusalem Dubois for the sum of sixty-eight pounds and ten schillings, dated March 5th, 1798. This value in 1798 is roughly equivalent to $1,300 today.

Mathusalem Dubois was born in 1751, in the hamlet of Poughwoughtenonk (Libertyville) in New Paltz, NY. He eventually settled in the town of Shawagunk , Ulster County , NY , in the area now known as Bruynswick. He married twice, first to Gertrude Bruyn and secondly to Katherine Bevier. Throughout the Revolutionary War, Mathusalem served as Ensign in the 1 st , 3 rd , and 4 th Regiments of the Ulster County Militia. By the time Mathusalem reached the age of 39, he held 12 people of color in bondage. According to the first Federal Census of New York (1790), there were only two other men in the town that had more slaves than Mathusalem. In 1810, he was listed as having five slaves living in his household, and continued to keep five slaves until 1820, nine years before his death at the age of 78. Molly would serve 29 more years in bondage until she would be freed by the 1827 Law to abolish slavery in New York.

Peter LeFevre was born in the town of New Paltz, NY, on February 10, 1759. Peter and his wife Magdalene lived in one of the stone houses on the LeFevre family estate called the Bontekoe (Bontecou) farm. The 1790 Census lists him as having five enslaved Africans living in his household.

Transcription notes: The term SIC in brackets [sic] after a word signifies that the word is written exactly as it appears in the documents. Often refers to a misspelled or duplicated word.

TEACHING SEQUENCE
Do not tell the students anything about this document. They will have an opportunity to come up with their own conclusions.

1. ANALYZE A DOCUMENT
    a. Divide the class into seven groups. Each group is assigned a number (1-7).
    b. Distribute Document 1 and the accompanying sheet to each group. Students will transcribe only the section that correlates to the number on their worksheet.
    c. After each section is completed, each group will choose a speaker to read their section out loud in a round-robin format. The teacher may choose to read the entire document again if the students appear confused.
        *The teacher will discuss the word wench. This term was used to describe a young woman or girl. A servant was often referred to as a wench.

2. CLASS DISCUSSION
    a. The teacher can pose the following questions to the class or use the Activity Sheet provided:

        • When was this document written?

        • Who is Molly? How old is she?

        • What is happening to her?

        • Who are the people involved in this situation?

        • What do you think this document is? How do you know this?

        • How long would it be until Molly would be free? How old would she be?