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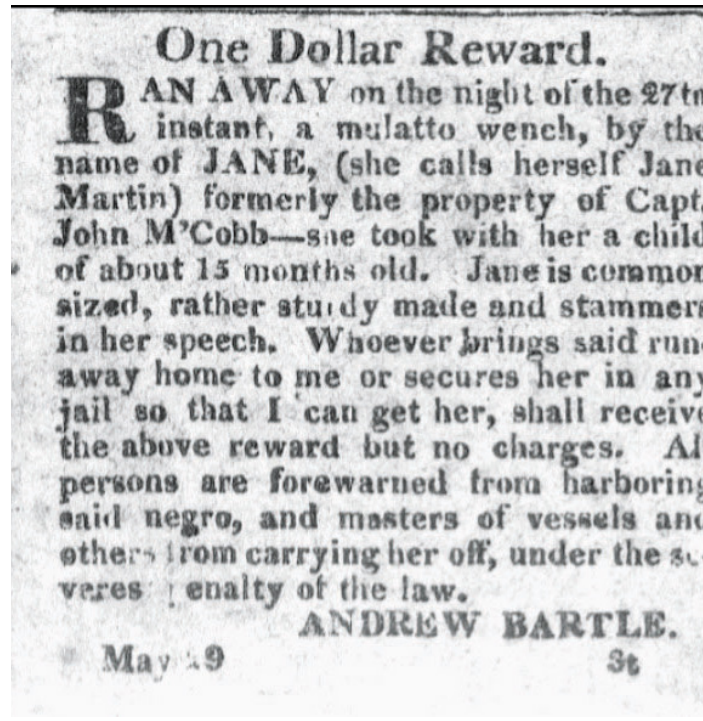
Jane Martin, freedom seeker

Jane Martin was an enslaved, mixed-race woman, who enjoyed the prospect of future emancipation as a “term slave.” John Carlyle Herbert, who claimed ownership of Martin, guaranteed her freedom after a defined term of years when he sold his Virginia plantation, along with the livestock and enslaved workers, in 1805.

Herbert moved to Maryland but owned land in Alexandria’s waterfront between Queen and Cameron Streets. Martin was among the many enslaved people of the Chesapeake who, in the post-tobacco economy, were considered surplus labor. In cities like Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and Alexandria, a greater number of enslaved people were made into “term slaves” or were rented out to households, small industries or infrastructure projects like the C&O Canal. Martin was likely a household worker, though the nature of her work is unrecorded.

Herbert sold Martin’s term of labor to Andrew Jamieson, an Alexandria baker whose bakehouse was located at Union and King Streets. Jamieson then sold Martin’s term to Capt. John McCobb, a lumber merchant, who in turn sold to Andrew Bartle.

Bartle was a wharf and bridge builder who briefly



PHOTO/OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

Andrew Bartle, “One Dollar Reward,” Alexandria Gazette, May 29, 1817.

owned a wharf at the foot of Queen Street, north side. Bartle was locally infamous. He sued Andrew Jamieson for fraud related to the waterfront parcel, however Jamieson won in court and Bartle was evicted.

Bartle was credited with devising a new strategy to remove obstructions and improve the catch for Potomac fishing. Bartle accused another local wharf builder, William Stoops, of stealing white oak timbers and using them to build Jonah Thompson’s wharf in Alexandria. The two

exchanged barbs in the local newspaper, but ultimately in court Bartle won: Stoops ended up in debtors’ prison.

While Bartle’s legal and financial troubles played out, Jane Martin’s work carried on. She gave birth to a baby, name unknown, in February 1816. After enduring Bartle’s “very severe and cruel manner” for over a year, Martin took her baby and self-emancipated. The circumstances of her return are unknown, however Martin remained under the control of Bartle until June 1817.

Bartle sold Jane Martin and her small child to Eli Legg, a slave trader who was known to sell enslaved people to the deep south. At that time, with the support of Thomas F. Herbert, Jane Martin sued for an injunction to stop the sales.

She argued that with around three years left to serve in her term, she feared Legg intended to sell her to the deep south without her term attached, thereby making her a slave for life. Further, she expected Legg would sell her child separately and they would be permanently separated.

Martin’s request to the court was to forbid Legg to sell her or her child out of the District of Columbia, and her request was granted. The injunction continued until November 1819, which may be when Martin’s term of slavery ended.

Thomas F. Herbert paid her court costs, and the outcome of her life after that point is unknown.

Historic Alexandria celebrates Women’s History Month throughout the month of March. For a listing of virtual events and celebrations, please visit alexandriava.gov/WomensHistoryMonth.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.