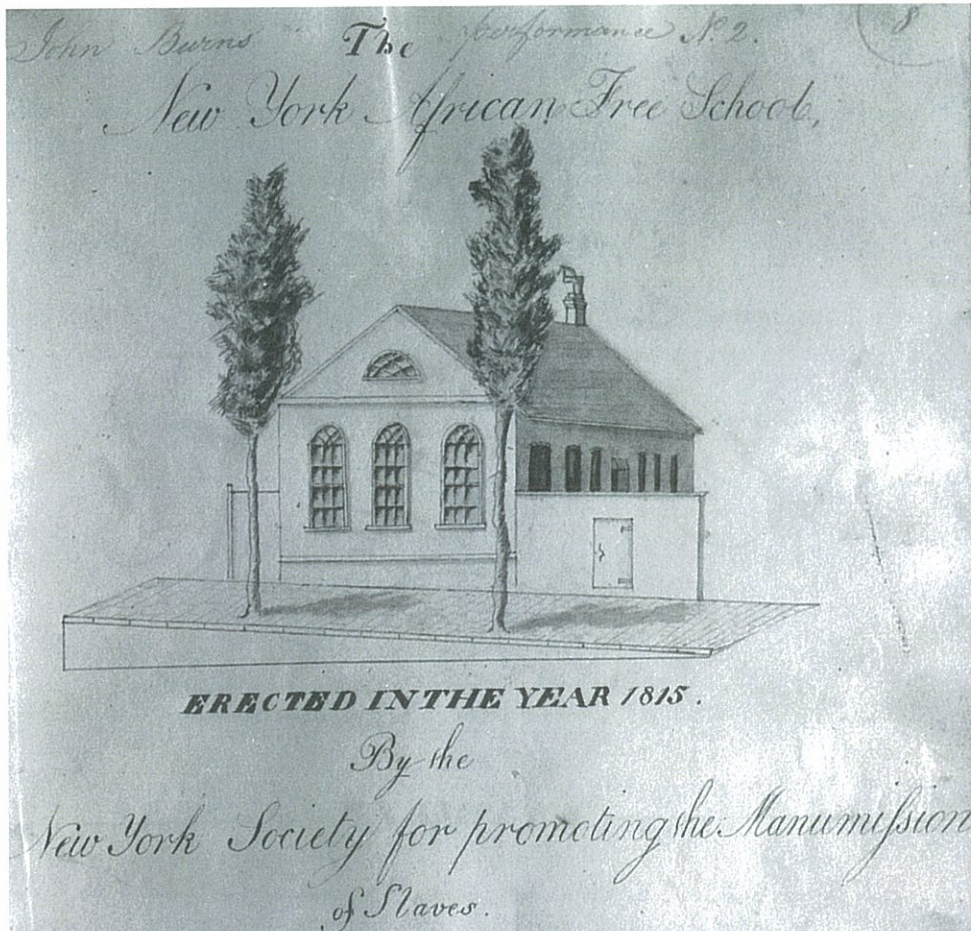


## SLAVERY IN THE FOUNDING ERA



*Page reproduced from the African Free School Records, 1817-1832.  
The New-York Historical Society.*

Established in 1787 by John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and other New York anti-slavery activists, the African Free School symbolized these founders' ideals and their faith in the equality and educability of Blacks. The drawing of the school was made by one of its African American pupils, apparently the "John Burns" identified upper left.

## SLAVERY IN THE FOUNDING ERA

### William Hamilton (fl. 1808-1815)

Once rumored to be a descendant of Alexander Hamilton (probably because Alexander had humble Caribbean origins and fought against slavery), William Hamilton left few biographical traces. An African American writer, actor, composer, and activist based in New York City, he produced hymns and orations, and, with Peter Williams, Sr., founded the New York African Society for Mutual Relief in 1808. These hymns were composed and set to music by Hamilton, and were sung during commemorative services at the African Church in New York on January 1, 1810.

#### "Hymns Sung on the Second Anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade"

##### HYMN I

Great God, what wonders have been wrought, For us by thy almighty hand, In cutting off the trade which brought Direful confusion in our land. Its cruel power with dreadful sway, On Afric's peaceful, happy shore, Spread war, confusion and dismay, And drench'd its fields with human gore. Those dwellings where true happiness, Did long and constantly reside, Were robb'd of peace, content, and bliss, And every pleasing hope beside. Those knit by soft conjugal love, Were sever'd by a barb'rous stroke; And doom'd in distant climes to prove A tyrant's cruel galling yoke.	Parents from children oft were torn, Relations from relations near; And doom'd forever thence to mourn The loss of friends by nature dear. But in supreme, unbounded love, Thou did'st behold their suff'ring plight, And from thy splendid courts above Asserted injur'd Afric's right. Thy powerful arm the host restrain Which ravag'd wide its golden shore; And crowns its spicy, fertile plains, With peace and happiness once more. Let ev'ry heart then join to bless And glorify thy holy name, Let every tongue thy love confess, And shout aloud thy matchless name. (1810)
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Hamilton's tone of unreserved celebration differs sharply from the mixed emotions of Peter Williams's hymns on this occasion the previous year (included earlier in this section). Hamilton's private feelings remain unknown, but the circumstances suggest that perhaps some people had objected to Williams including complaints about slavery in lines ostensibly devoted to giving thanks for the abolition of the trade itself.

##### HYMN II

Now let a burst of sacred joy, And unmingled delight, Ascend the hill of God our king, Who doeth all things right. Now let the sons of Africa, In loudest strains rejoice; God is our king, his loudest praise Sing forth with cheerful voice. No more can avarice, that foul fiend, To human peace a foe; Thy sons, O Africa, beguile, And liberty o'erthrow.	No more shall foul oppression's arm, From your once peaceful shore, Drag your defenceless, harmless sons To slavery no more. God is our king, let all rejoice, The SLAVE TRADE is no more; God is our king, let Afric's sons His matchless name adore. (1810)
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## **SLAVERY IN THE FOUNDING ERA**

Anon  
Brittania droops the pensive head,  
While round increase the rising hills of dead.  
Ah! cruel blindness to Columbia's state!  
Lament thy thirst of boundless power too late.

Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,  
Thy ev'ry action let the goddess guide.  
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,  
With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! be thine.  
(1775)