



Bringing Northwestern Virginia's History  
into the Classroom

## *It happened near me . . .*

### Pieces of the Past from Where *I* Live

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**County:** Fauquier/Prince William      **Date:** 1859

**Topic :** The Nature of Slavery in Northern Virginia

**Background:** Harriett Newby was an African-American woman owned by a local doctor who owned a house in Warrenton (Fauquier County) and a farm in Prince William County near Brentsville. She shuttled between the two. Her slave husband Dangerfield, meanwhile, was freed when *his* owner (a different man named Newby) moved from Fauquier to Ohio, a free state, in 1858. Dangerfield moved to Ohio to make money with which to purchase the freedom of his wife so she could join him. Harriett wrote him regularly. Here are two of her letters.

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Brent[s]ville, April 11, 1859

Dear Husband:

I received your letter today, and it gives me much pleasure to here [sic] from you, but was sorry to [hear] of your sickness [sic] ; hope you may be well when you receive this. I wrote you several weeks ago and directed my letter to Bridge Port [Ohio], but I fear you did not receive it as you did not mention it in yours. I wrote in my last letter that Miss Virginia had a baby—a little girl. I had to nurse her day and night. Dear Dangerfield, you cannot imagine how much I want to see you. Com[e] as soon as you can for nothing would give me more pleasure than to see you. It is the greatest Comfort that I have . . . thinking of the promist [sic] time when you will be here. The baby commenced to crall [sic] to-day it is very delicate. Nothing more at present, but remain

Your affectionate wife  
Harriet Newby

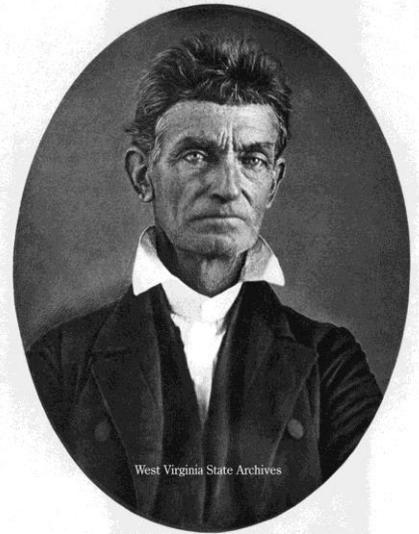
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Brent[s]ville August 16, 1859

Dear Husband:

Your letter came duly to hand and it gave me much pleasure to here [sic] from you, and especely to here [sic] you are better of your rhumatism. I want you to buy me as soon as possible, for if you do not get me some body else will. Dear Husband, you [know] not the trouble I see; the last two years has been like a trouble[d] dream. It is said that Master is in want of money. If so, I know not what time he may sell me, and then all my bright hopes of the future[e] are blasted, for their [sic] has been one bright hope to cheer me in all of my troubles, that is to be with you. If I thought I shoul[d] never see you this earth would have no charms for me. Do all you can for me, witch [sic] I have no doubt you will. The children are all well. The baby cannot walk yet. It can step around everything by holding on. I must bring my letter to a Close as I have no newes [sic] to write. You mus[t] write soon and say when you think you can come.

Your affectionate wife,  
Harriet Newby



West Virginia State Archives

*John Brown*

Harriett Newby was writing to her husband Dangerfield, above, who had been freed in 1858 when his owner moved to Ohio. When Dangerfield could not purchase Harriett's freedom from the Warrenton doctor who owned her although he raised the money, he joined John Brown (right) for his Harpers Ferry raid. As a slave, Harriett was shuffled by her owners between the village of Brentsville Courthouse, at left below, and Warrenton, shown in 1862 at right. After John Brown's Raid, she was sold into the Deep South, picking cotton in, Louisiana. Dangerfield Newby was killed in the Raid.



## Making Sense of Evidence from the Past.

1. Why can Harriett, a slave woman, *write*? Was it legal to teach a slave to write?
2. Were slave marriages *legal*, or just unofficial? Why would/wouldn't they be allowed in a major slave exporting state like Virginia, the largest slave state?
3. Harriett speaks of a letter she mailed to Dangerfield at Bridgeport (Ohio), which is just across the Ohio River from Virginia. Why might he never have received it?
4. How would Harriett nurse both Virginia, her mistress' child, and her own child?
5. Harriett writes, "*I know not what time he [Master] may sell me . . . If I thought I should never see you, this earth would have no charms for me . . .*" What is she saying or threatening?
6. Dangerfield Newby became one of John Brown's raiders—when the price for Harriett was suddenly raised after the doctor was diagnosed with cancer. What is the connection?
7. Harriett was sold away to Louisiana. How did slaves or former slaves find each other after such an out-of-state sale?