

# Reuben Benthall Story

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From: <https://freeafricanamericans.com/Roberts-Sawyer.htm>

About mid-way down on this webpage, we find the following words:

*2. Sylvia Sampson, born say 1745, was a "free negro Woman" living in Carteret County, North Carolina, on 17 September 1771 when her unnamed two-year-old son, a "Negro boy," was bound to Reuben Benthall [Minutes X:403]. ...*

I can't find anything on the website that tells me what "[Minutes X:403]" means as a source. At first, I thought it was the Minutes of the Provincial Congress of North Carolina, Vol. 10, page 403. However, this does not appear to be the source of this information.

I first was curious about what "bound to" meant, desperately hoping it wasn't slavery. I researched it and found that it typically meant "[apprenticed](#)". IF that is true, I wondered what trade Reuben would be teaching this young, 2-year old boy. Reuben was a plantation owner, as his will in 1779 mentions several plantations being divided among his family:

- a 200 acre plantation to his wife, and then to one son after her death
- 2 more large plantations split among 4 other sons

The other thing he mentions in his will is that he is leaving his smithing tools to be hired out and the funds derived from that to be used for the education of his children.

So I wonder if smithing is the trade that Sylvia's son was apprenticed for? My hope is that he did learn his trade and made it back to his family, and also was able to visit his family during his apprenticeship.

I have no idea how Reuben ran 3 large plantations without slavery, but there are no slaves mentioned in his will. Reuben lived and died before the US Federal Census started in 1790, so I don't have any of these documents with their count of slaves and free colored people to refer to. I have other ancestors who also ran large plantations (~1000 acres) without slavery (they were Quakers), but I guess plantations in 1600s and 1700s weren't 100% planted and tended like modern farms are.