

Apprentices, Indentured Servants and Redemptioners The Beginnings of White Servitude in America

Peggy Clemens Lauritzen, AG, FOGS

MissPeggy55@gmail.com

The indenture came from the practice in England of tearing a contract for an apprenticeship into two pieces that could then be matched to prove the original document. ~James L. Tanner

Apprenticeship	Indentured Servants	Redemptioners
Young, inexperienced workers could learn a skill from someone who knew the trade well. Both would benefit, for the workers would emerge with a way to earn a living, and the tradesman benefitted from inexpensive help. A contract would be recorded just like a land contract. Room and board were provided for the time period of the contract.	An unfree laborer who was under contract for a period of time, usually seven years. This practice helped to populate the colonies, and provided cheap labor. They were not treated well, and many escaped. Some were British convicts. At the end of seven years, they would receive freedom and a gift; usually clothing, tools, and perhaps some land.	Most often came into Pennsylvania through indentured servitude, which means they sold themselves. Contracts were negotiated after their arrival after a long and difficult voyage without hope of return. British indentured servants had laws to protect them. All others negotiated their contracts before they could get off the ship. More than half of German-speaking immigrants came this way.

Where to Find

Apprenticeships	Many were conducted as a court appointment, so look at local, county, and state court records. Some may have been moved to libraries and archives.
Indentureships	Similar to above. Bound out by a county court until the age of 21 (age 18 for young women). May contain parents' or guardians' names, length of indenture term, trade, whether allowed to attend school, or be taught to read.
Redemptioners	First hand accounts, as well as compiled lists are found in the bibliography listed below.

Court Orders & Minute Books

Apprenticeships:

Court orders: give a more complete record of the daily proceedings.

Minute books: give a short synopsis of daily court proceedings.

Both of the above may be found at:

1. Courthouses
2. Local libraries, genealogy societies, historical societies and archives.
3. FamilySearch

Some may be found in loose pages. There may be indexes or abstracts. Be prepared to spend some time looking through them.

- Minors who were orphans were bound out as apprentices. These records may list the names of the parents and the exact date of birth.
- Orphan does not always mean parentless. Perhaps the mother was still living, and gave consent to the child who was apprenticed out to learn a trade.

- Guardians were appointed if the orphan had an estate.
- If the orphan was over 14 years of age, they could choose their guardian.
- Sometimes the mother of an illegitimate child would bind out the child, and even name the father.

Indentured Servants

- Term comes from medieval English “indenture of retainer.”
 - Contract was written in duplicate on the same sheet, then separated with a jagged cut. (“Toothed” edge = *indenture*). Later, the two edges would fit together perfectly. □
- First appeared in America about ten years after the founding of Jamestown in 1607.

After Jamestown was settled, there was a need for laborers. Owners of indentured servants received benefits, as well; a headright. (Fifty acres of land for each ‘head’ purchased.

Cost of passage: £12 from England to Virginia.

- English servants were preferred. The Irish were considered as wild as the Indian savages.
- Many came as immigrants, children, convicts, widows, and debtors.
- More men than women came as indentured servants.
 - Women were outnumbered four to one – 20% of the population.
 - Women were not allowed to marry while a servant, so many became pregnant out of wedlock. Two years were added to their term of service. ➤ African slaves were not offered freedom as the Europeans were.

Approximately 350,000 to 500,000 indentured servants were brought to America before the Revolution.

- 17th century court order books contain Headright Certificates. ○ Were given to those who brought immigrant into the colonies.
- Non-British made Oaths of Allegiance, and even Naturalizations.
- Indentured servants could bring suits against masters for cruelty. They could also sue if they did not receive what was due them at the end of indentureship.
- Bearing an illegitimate child or running away could extend the indentureship.
 - Those situations would also be found in order books.

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