

## **10 Questions for Christopher Sheels**

Lives Bound Together Interview Activity

Interviewers: Gianna Kolar, Katie Hunter

**Background: When did your subject live on Washington's Mount Vernon, what was their role, and what were their connections to the Washington family and other free and slave who lived and worked on the plantation?**

Christopher Sheels started his work for George Washington at age 13, he was born on the plantation in 1776 and started his work in 1789. Christopher Sheels had 4 other siblings. Their mother Alce worked in the Maison House Farm as a spinner. His father, Charles was free and did not work for Mr. Washington. Christopher's job was as a personal assistant to George Washington, Christopher had a stronger connection with the Washingtons compared to other enslaved people who lived on the plantation, because Christopher was to help Washington with his everyday needs around the plantation. Becoming this close to the Washington family led to many positive outcomes such as promotions, trust, and loyalty between Christopher Sheels and President George Washington.

**Question 1: You were able to become George Washington's assistant at such a young age, what were some of the factors that led to Washington choosing you as his assistant?**

Answer- I did have family members that were assigned to the house at Mount Vernon, my mother worked at the Mansion House Farm as an enslaved spinner. My father, however, Charles is free and has no work with Mr. Washington. Meaning Mr. Washington could have seen me with my mother at the Mansion house or had chosen me because he saw potential between me and the eight others assigned to Mount Vernon. But with all honesty, I am not sure why Mr. Washington choose me to be his personal assistant.

**Question 2: How did Mr. Washington treat you personally compared to the other houseworkers?**

Answer-Since I was a personal assistant to Mr. Washington he treated me with more respect. Once I had gotten rabies caused by a rabid dog, Mr. Washington commanded that I should be rushed to a doctor and treated, to ensure I would survive. He had trusted me to go to the doctor, giving me \$25. This showed a more respectful bond between me and Mr. Washington because he trusted that I would not run away.

**Question 3: Was there a time when Mr. Washington doubted you or dis-trusted you?**

Answer- Yes, I got illegally married in 1779 to an enslaved woman owned by Colonel Roger West. While this marriage was illegal Mr. Washington still allowed it until he found notes written between us both. We talked about running away, we planned to run away on a ship to Alexandria, a town 10 miles north of Mount Vernon. After this event, it became a different trust between me and Mr. Washington but even after this, I was able to keep my position as his assistant.

**Question 4: What happened after this plan to run away?**

Answer- I was demoted quite a bit but still kept my position as Mr. Washington's assistant. About 4 months after this event occurred I was one of the 4 enslaved people including Caroline Branham, Charlotte, and Molly to stand by Mr. Washington's bedside when he came down with a throat infection. I stood by Mr. Washington throughout his illness and was there when he passed from the infection.

**Question 5: How did Mr. Washington's death change your way of life?**

Answer- After his death, I was not among the 123 enslaved people who were freed in his will, and once Mrs. Washington died I was inherited by Mr.Washingtons grandson Mr.Cusits and was moved to the Arlington house where I was valued at 120 euros (127 US dollars). My sister eventually was moved to the Arlington house as well where she became the nanny of the Custis children, Mary.

**Question 6: Who were some of the people you worked with while at Mount Vernon?**

Answer- I worked with many people but some I encountered every day, such as William Lee who was also an assistant to Mr.Washington. William Lee and I would rotate between their Virginia house and Pennsylvania house to ensure we could not declare our freedom due to Pennsylvania laws. I and William were both valet and wore White and Red suits to ensure Mr.Washington would remain tolerable to the rich.

**Question 7: What happened to the rest of your family members after the death of Mr.Washington?**

Answer- Much of my family was inherited by Eliza Parke Custis, the oldest of Martha Washington's grandchildren. Eliza Parke Custis inherited about 80 slaves, who were mostly taken by her husband Thomas Law.

**Question 8:**

Answer-

**Question 9:**

Answer-

**Question 10:**

Answer-

**Scoring- 20 points... Please format it so that this rubric follows your interview on its separate page.**

Criteria	5 Points	4 Points	3 Points	2 Points
<b>Knowledge Gained and Shared</b>	Students accurately answer 7-10 questions about the person who was interviewed/studied and can tell how this interview relates specifically to the topics being studied in class.	Students accurately answer 4-6 questions about the person who was interviewed/studied and can tell how this interview relates in general to the topics being studied in class.	Students accurately answer 2-3 questions about the person who was interviewed/studied.	Students invent answers to questions about the person who was interviewed/studied.
<b>Questions</b>	Students carefully studied the biography and related sources about their subject	Students studied the biography and related sources about their subject and created an	Students asked questions about their topic in general but didn't make them specific	Students asked random questions that didn't follow the biography or other sources related to

	and created informative and interesting series of relevant questions and follow-up questions for their subject.	informative and interesting series of relevant questions that stand alone.	to the life experiences of their subject.	their subject.
<b>Presentation</b>	The presentation is well organized, polished, and full of accurate facts that connect multiple sources that teach about slavery from the particular experiences specific to the subject.	The presentation is organized and easy to follow and has accurate facts about the particular experiences specific to the subject.	The presentation is not organized, but has accurate facts about slavery in general along with some experiences specific to the subject.	The presentation is not organized and is hard to follow. Generalizations about slavery are not supported by specific facts.
<b>Formatting and Editing</b>	Students edited and organized the transcript in a way that made the information clear and interesting.	Students edited and organized the transcript in a way that made the information clear.	Students edited and organized the transcript, but the information wasn't as clear as it could have been due to grammar, spelling, and capitalization errors.	Students typed a transcript, but there is no evidence of proofreading or editing.
<b>Total Score</b>		Comments		

## References

*Christopher Sheels (1776 - ?) · George Washington's Mount Vernon.* (n.d.). Mount Vernon. Retrieved

December 13, 2022, from

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/christopher-sheels-1776/>