

## **Solomon Santomee and Family**

Solomon Santomee, also known as Solomon Pieters, was one of the first Black members of our church. Though he was born into slavery around 1642, by the end of his life, Solomon had gained his freedom, owned land, amassed wealth, built a family, and contributed to one of the earliest Black communities in New Amsterdam.

Solomon's father, Pieter Santomee, was one of the first 11 Africans brought to New Amsterdam and enslaved by the Dutch West India Company (DWIC). He was from São Tomé and Príncipe, an island off the west coast of Central Africa. He petitioned for and was granted half freedom by Willem Kieft on February 25, 1644. However, in the eyes of the DWIC, his children were still considered "property," so Solomon was also enslaved until petitioning and receiving full freedom in 1664.

Between 1659 and 1660, then-Governor Peter Stuyvesant granted parcels of land and a small house to at least nine African farmers, including Pieter Santomee, along a wagon track near Stuyvesant's farm (along current-day Bowery and 4th Avenue). In 1667, Pieter's sons, Solomon and Lucas, inherited the 6-acre farm. In 1680, Solomon was also able to purchase a 30-acre plot of land near what is now 23rd Street and Broadway. The Dutch land grants were farming land in Lower Manhattan around what is now Little Italy and south of Washington Square Park. Called "the land of the Blacks" in legal documents at the time, this was a thriving community of free people of African descent. It is likely that many in the community were laid to rest at the African Burial Ground.

Solomon officially became a church member on November 29, 1677. He married Maria Anthony, also known as Maria Antonis Portugues, who was also born in Manhattan to enslaved parents. They were married for at least 30 years and had eight children. The couple amassed considerable land in their lifetime. Solomon's will included houses, lands, household goods, iron tools, guns, swords and pistols, which he left to his wife and children.

Solomon's brother Lucas was also successful, and was one of the first Black doctors in the United States. He was a Dutch-trained physician and practiced in New Amsterdam during the 1660s. He became the primary doctor for the Dutch West India Company and worked at their hospital for Black folks and captive soldiers. He was granted six acres of land in what is now Greenwich Village in recognition of his service as a doctor in December 1644. According to church records, Solomon's and Lucas's children served as sponsors for each other's offspring as late as 1719.

As a result of harsh laws passed by the British following the 1712 Slave Uprising, freed African New Yorkers were prohibited from owning real estate, and were forced to forfeit their property to the British crown. A white man bought the last parcel of Santomee land from Solomon's wife Maria in 1716.

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