



Eleanor Solomons with Willie Munnerlyn, the son of a friend. After Willie's mother died, Eleanor raised Willie as a member of her own family. The identity of the man in the photograph is not known; he may be Eleanor's husband, Israel Solomons, or Willie's father.

Eleanor Solomons (1794–1856): The Lovely Eleanor

Eleanor’s loveliness is embodied in the quilt her sister Charlotte made for her on the occasion of Eleanor’s move to Savannah (Chapter Three). The quilt’s sentimental inscriptions, typical Victorian expressions of the day, attest to the affection she inspired in her friends and kinswomen. That affection seems to have been well deserved. Eleanor’s reputation as a generous, kind person is mythologized with the family story of Willie Munnerlyn (page 48). Willie’s mother, a friend of Eleanor’s who was dying, asked Eleanor not only to be a foster mother to her son but also to raise him in the Episcopalian faith of his birth. This Eleanor did.

Born in Black Mingo, South Carolina in 1794, Eleanor grew up in Georgetown, the third child and eldest daughter in a family of ten children. Her father, Lizar Joseph (born in Amsterdam in 1760) provided well for the family. A salt merchant in Georgetown, he also owned wharfage there and had been appointed to various positions including clerk of the market. Lizar was also a member of the prestigious Winyah Indigo Society, a social group of white, mostly Christian, indigo planters and merchants. Eleanor’s mother, Sarah Judith Judah Joseph, came from Philadelphia. Sarah Judith’s paternal grandfather, Hillel Judah, originally

emigrated to Canada, presumably from central Europe, before moving to Philadelphia.

In 1814, Eleanor married Israel Solomons in Georgetown. The two were distant cousins, through Israel’s mother. Eleanor was 19 to Israel’s 44—an age difference only slightly greater than the norm—and, judging from the inscriptions in the religious volumes that Israel gave Eleanor, he was apparently beloved by his wife. However, he was not well suited to the world of business. When he and Eleanor married, Eleanor’s uncle Abraham Alexander, Jr., set Israel up in a dry goods store in Georgetown. Within a few years the business failed, and by the time Israel Solomons died in 1830, the modest assets Lizar Joseph had given Eleanor at her marriage were gone.



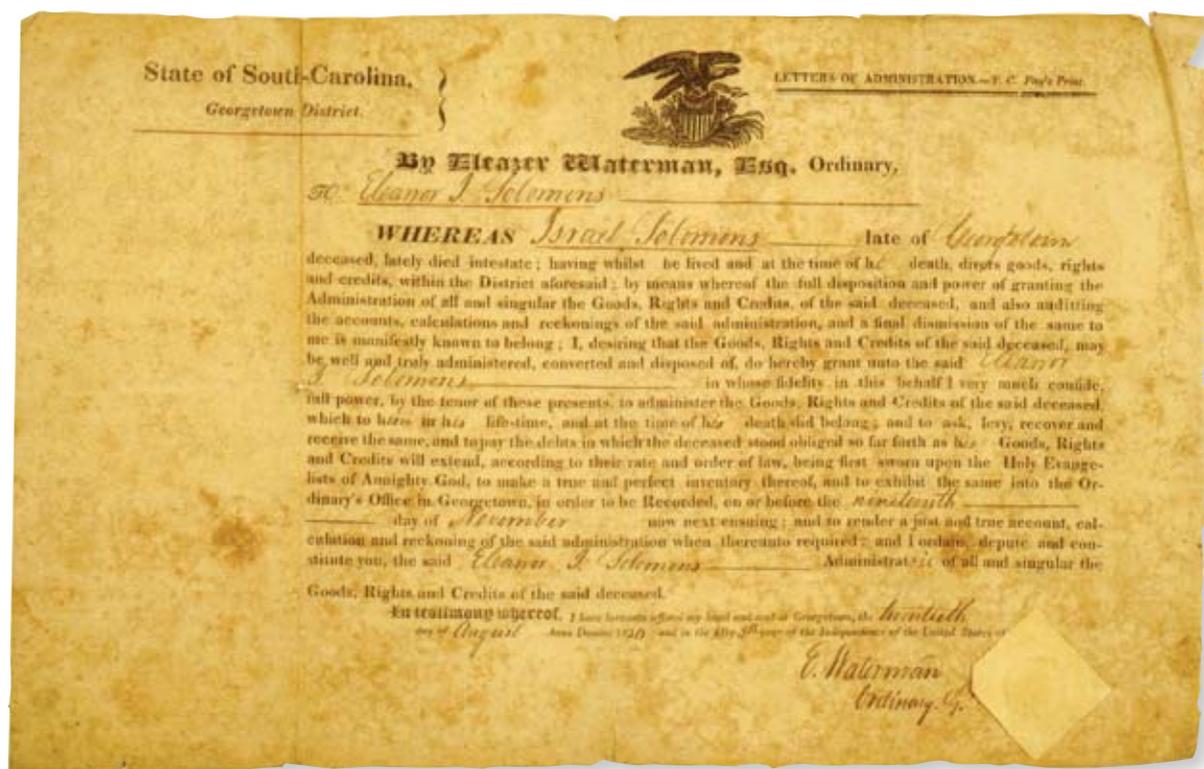
Israel Solomons’ red leather pocketbook.

OLD FAMILY THINGS: AN AFFECTIONATE LOOK BACK

Widowed at 36, Eleanor was made administrator of Israel's estate, but she and her children—who ranged in age from 14 to 4—were near destitute. Fortunately, Eleanor's sister Charlotte stepped in to help support the young Solomons family.

Several years after Israel's death, Eleanor moved to Charleston to give her sons better opportunities for earning a livelihood. Her eldest, Abraham

(also referred to as A.A. for Abraham Alexander) became a pharmacist. Next eldest, Lizar, apprenticed to a bricklayer. Later, after Abraham had moved to Savannah and bought the drug store from his employer, his brother Joe joined him, and the business was renamed Solomons Brothers. Eleanor followed her sons to Savannah in the early 1850s, where she died in 1856.



Israel Solomons died intestate in 1830, and his wife Eleanor, named as "Administratrix," was responsible for dealing with his "goods, rights and credits." Because his debts exceeded his goods, Eleanor had to bear the consequences, including paying off the mortgage of several family slaves (pages 55-57).

Eleanor Joseph's Marriage Documents

When Eleanor Joseph married Israel Solomons, she had a *Ketuba* (below), just as Rebecca Moses did, to record the financial obligations of the bridegroom to his bride. However, Eleanor also had a civil marriage settlement, a common practice in South Carolina in the early 19th century. In typical settlements, the bride brought certain assets to the marriage and retained control of them throughout her life and through her estate, with her trustees acting on her behalf.

Under English common law at the time, a married woman had no legal standing and no legal voice. Any assets she brought to the marriage became the property of her husband, and she was not legally empowered to own assets in her own right. By contrast, American marriage contracts often stipulated that property given to a daughter by her family was to be held in trust, beyond her husband's control. The usual practice was for families to settle real estate on sons, slaves and moveable property on daughters. Slaves were Eleanor's gift from her father, Lizar Joseph.

Eleanor's *Ketuba*, written in Aramaic, the legal language of the Talmud, is a formulaic document traditionally executed by the groom and a male, usually a family member, acting on behalf of the bride. (See Appendix for English translation.) The document then becomes the legal property of the bride.

Eleanor's marriage settlement (pages 52-54) was atypical in one significant aspect. The groom, Israel Solomons, contracted to make a settlement of 500 pounds sterling for Eleanor and Rinah Ottolengui Solomons, his daughter by his deceased first wife. Abraham Alexander, Jr., Eleanor's uncle, acted as trustee on her behalf, and Abraham Ottolengui, Rinah's maternal uncle, acted as her trustee.



OLD FAMILY THINGS: AN AFFECTIONATE LOOK BACK

Close reading of Eleanor Joseph's marriage settlement raises some questions for which we don't have answers. The document begins with the declaration that Israel Solomons is obligated to Abraham Alexander (Eleanor's uncle) and Abraham Otolengui (Rinah Solomons' uncle) for 1,000 pounds sterling. However, the circumstances of that obligation are not described.

Next the document says that since a wedding is about to take place between Israel and Eleanor, Israel agrees to give the two men (as trustees) 500 pounds sterling, specifically to be put in a trust for the support and maintenance of Eleanor Joseph and Rinah Solomons. The trust is for both the women, presumably because once Israel and Eleanor are married, Eleanor will be Rinah's stepmother and they would all be under one roof. This 500 pounds seems to be separate from the 1,000 pounds mentioned earlier.

State of South Carolina
Know all Men by these presents that I, Israel Solomon formerly of Amsterdam one of the Provinces of Holland but now of Geo. Town in the State aforesaid, am held and firmly bound unto Abraham Alexander Junr. and Abraham Otolengui, the full & Just Sum of One Thousand pounds Standing to be paid to the said Abraham Alexander Junr. and Abraham Otolengui, their Executors, Administrators and assigns to which Payment well and truly to be made and done I bind myself my Heirs Executors & Administrators firmly by these presents Sealed with my Seal and dated this fifth day of May in the Year Eighteen Hundred and fourty - Whereas a Marriage is about to be had and solemnized between the said Israel Solomon and Miss Eleanor Joseph Daughter of Isaac Joseph of Geo. Town, and the said Israel Solomon hath agreed to pay into the Hands of the said Abraham Alexander Junr. and Abraham Otolengui as Trustees the Sum of Five Hundred pounds Sterling in a convenient time after the intermarriage aforesaid to be held by them and the Survivors of them, and the Heirs Executors and Administrators of such Survivor to and for the following uses and none other, that is to say, In Trust for her the said Eleanor Joseph and Rinah Solomons Daughters of the said Israel Solomon during their mutual lives to pay and apply the Interest of the said Sum of Five Hundred pounds to the Support and Maintenance of the said Eleanor Joseph and Rinah Solomons and from and after the Death of the said Eleanor then in Trust for the said Rinah and the Child or Children of the said Eleanor Joseph to be divided between them Share and Share alike, in the mean time

to apply so much of the proceeds or principal as may be necessary to the support of the said Eleanor Joseph and also the support and education of the said Rinah and of such Child or Children as the said Eleanor may have, now the Condition of the above obligation is such that if the said Israel Solomons his heirs Executors or Administrators should shall sell and truly pay or cause to be paid to the said Abraham Alexander Junr and Abraham Otolengui or the survivor of them the heirs Executors or Administrators of such survivor in a convenient time after the intermarriage about to be solemnized as aforesaid the sum of Five Hundred Pounds to be applied & used upon the Trusts aforesaid then the above obligation to be Void, or else to be and remain in full force and Virtue in Law

Sign'd Seal'd & deliver'd

In the presence of Israel Solomons (S.)
Nathaniel Coggeshall
Jacob Myers

South Carolina }
Geo: Town (Witness)

Personally appeared before me Nathaniel Coggeshall who being duly sworn said he was personally present and did see Israel Solomons Sign Seal and as his act & deed deliver the within instrument writing to and for the uses and purposes therein expressed and that he also saw Jacob Myers sign his name with this deponent as a Witness thereto.

Sworn to before me

the 10th May 1814

Thomas Carr

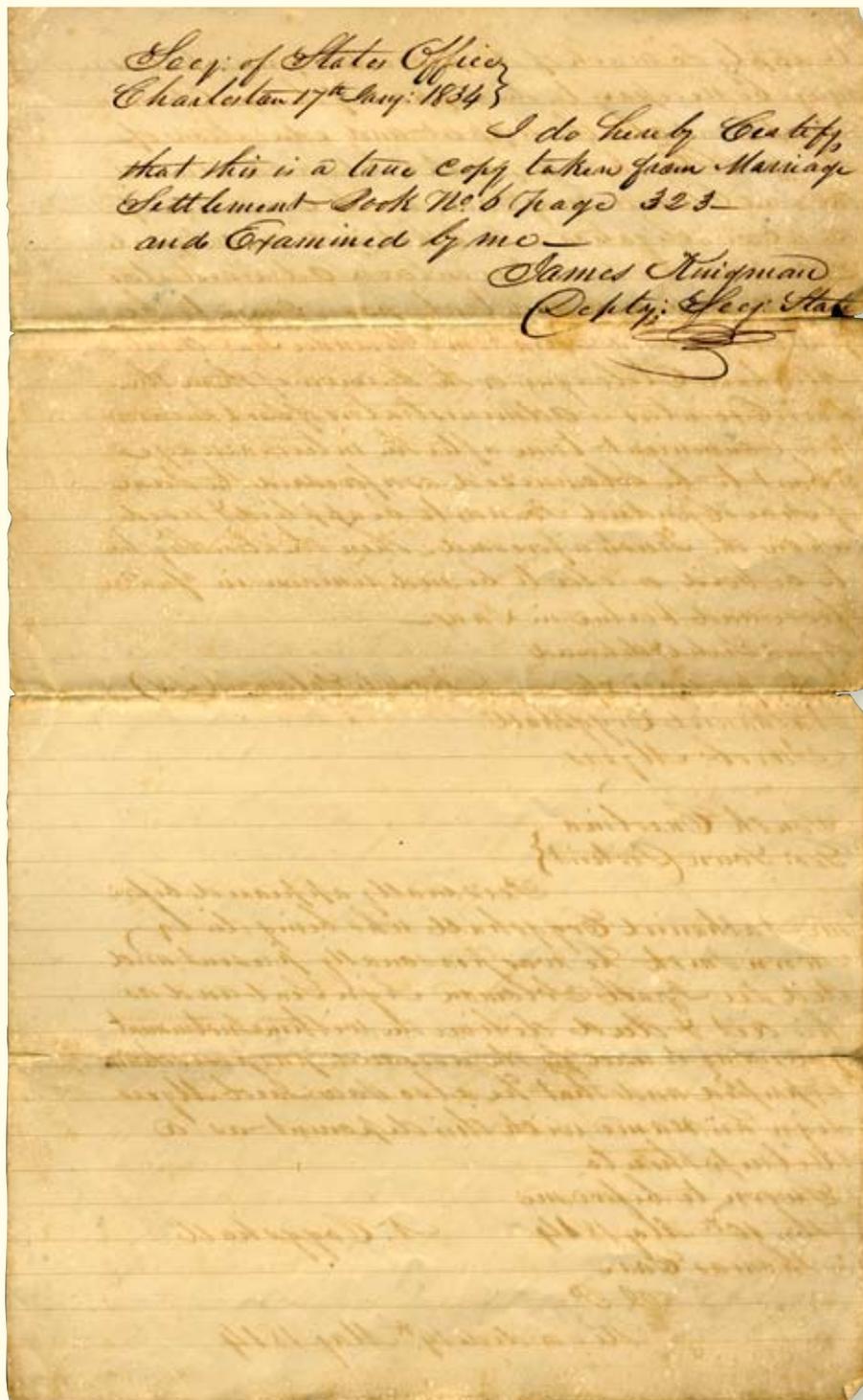
J. P.

Recorded 19th May 1814

The next page of the document describes an intriguing situation: It says that if Israel pays the 500 pounds to put in the trust, "the above obligation"—namely, the debt of 1,000 pounds sterling—will be void; Israel will no longer owe it. However if Israel does not fund the trust in the amount of 500 pounds, then "the above obligation" remains "in full force and virtue in law"—that is, he would have to pay Abraham Alexander (Eleanor's uncle) and Abraham Otolengui (Rinah's uncle) 1,000 pounds. Interestingly, no specific due date is mentioned; the settlement says only that Israel is to give the uncles 500 pounds for the trust "in a convenient time after the intermarriage aforesaid."

OLD FAMILY THINGS: AN AFFECTIONATE LOOK BACK

A "true copy" of the marriage settlement was made from the document recorded with the Georgetown District of the State of South Carolina.



Mortgages of Slaves

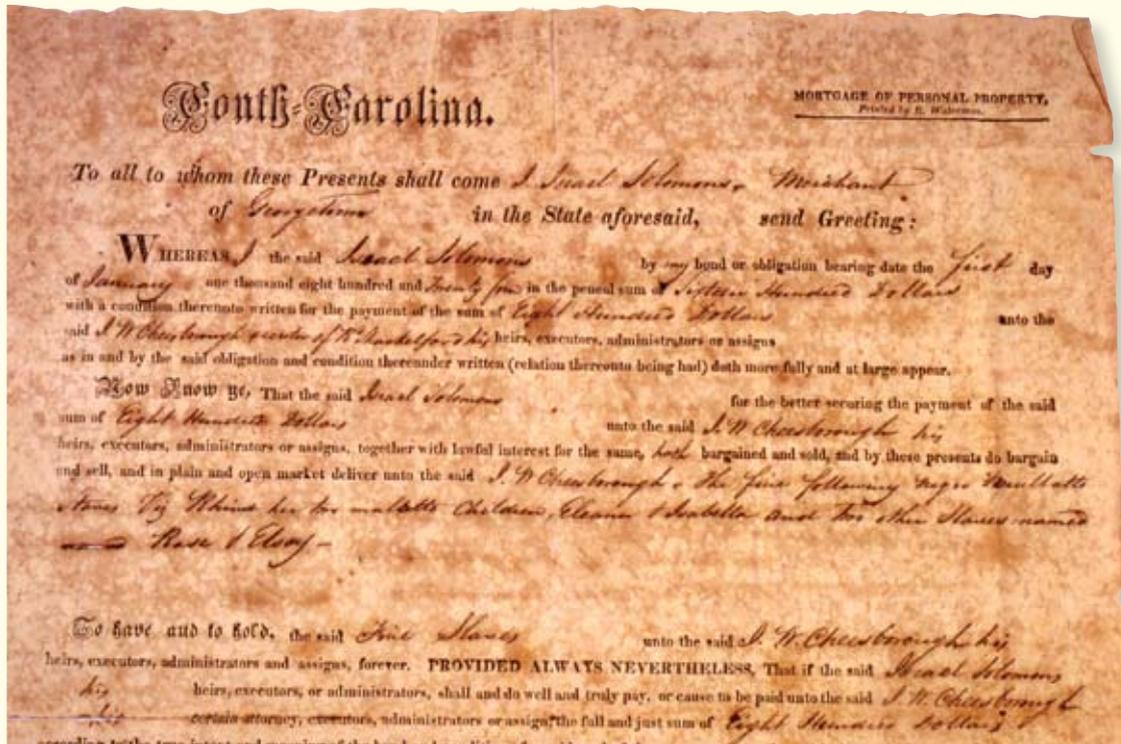
Over time, Israel Solomons fell into debt and used slaves that Eleanor’s father had given her as collateral on loans. In Harry Alexander’s files relating to Eleanor, the oldest mortgage of slaves is dated 1824 (below). The mortgaged slaves were Rinah (“Rhina”), her children Eleanor and Isabella, her children Eleanor and Isabella, and two other slaves named Rose and Elsey.

Two years later, on December 21, 1826, Israel mortgaged these same five slaves again, along with two others (page 56). This time, the mortgage holders were Abraham Alexander and Abraham Otolengui. In both instances, it seems likely that at least some of the slaves remained in the Solomons’ household—Rinah, in particular, since she was nurse to the Solomons children.

After Israel Solomons died in 1830, Eleanor was named Administrator of his debt-ridden estate (page 50). Eleanor managed somehow.

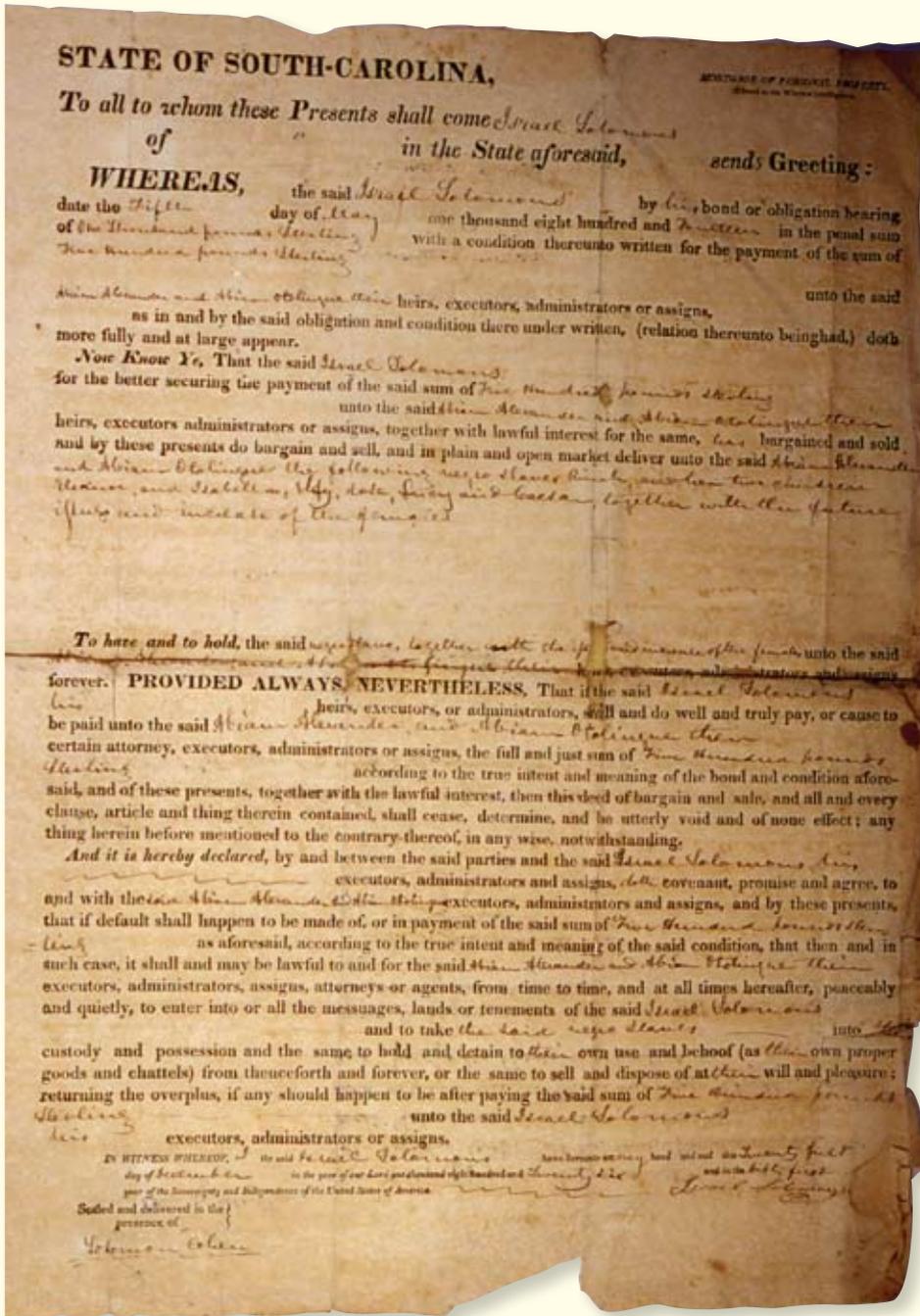
Among the documents in Harry Alexander’s files was a receipt of payment, dated 1830, for medical bills from Lopez and Burton, “for care of Rinah’s child.” And an 1836 bill of sale of slaves indicates that Eleanor Solomons bought back some of her slaves for the nominal sum of \$100. I speculate that the forgiving mortgage holders were her uncle Abraham Alexander and Rinah Solomons’ uncle Abraham Otolengui.

In language similar to that in Eleanor’s marriage settlement, Israel declares himself obligated to pay one I.W. Cheesborough 1600 dollars if he doesn’t repay 800 dollars. The larger amount is characterized as a “peneal” (penal) sum—clearly a strong incentive to repay the original loan amount.



OLD FAMILY THINGS: AN AFFECTIONATE LOOK BACK

On December 21, 1826, Israel again mortgages Rinah and her children—Eleanor and Isabella—along with four other slaves, this time to Abraham Alexander and Abraham Otolengui. The “obligation” mentioned in the first line refers to that incurred more than 12 years earlier, when Israel signed Eleanor Joseph’s marriage settlement. It appears that he still has not established a trust in the amount of 500 pounds sterling.





In a photograph taken around 1870, the adult children of Israel and Eleanor Solomons pose with three of the family's servants, former slaves who remained with the family after emancipation. In the foreground, from left to right, the Solomons siblings are: Moses Joseph Solomons, Mordecai Solomons, Judah Joseph Solomons, Lizar Joseph Solomons, Sarah Joseph Solomons Cohen, Joseph M. Solomons, and Abraham Alexander (A.A.) Solomons. The servants are (from left to right in the background) Rev. Alex Harris, a preacher; Eleanor (b. November 3, 1820), daughter of Rinah and one of the children mortgaged by Israel Solomons; and Jack (b. March 26, 1838), son of Rinah and Watch. After the Civil War Rinah had remained a servant in the household of Eleanor Solomons' daughter, Sarah. The surname(s) taken by Rinah and her children upon emancipation are unknown.