

Dinah French

God is infinitely wise and good. In all his plans I cheerfully acquiesce.



D. Jacques.

from *Poems by Mrs. D. Jacques*
with a sketch of her life

Dinah French, the youngest of eight children, was born in Hook Norton on 13 June 1790. As she wrote, without irony, "The descendants of pious parents are highly privileged; we enjoyed this great blessing."

Her grandmother, Sarah Gibbs, was, she wrote, "emphatically one of those who fear God and work righteousness". Sarah's two sons and a daughter named Mary were brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

At 24, Mary Gibbs married Samuel Mayo French, described in the parish records as a labourer. They lived in Hook Norton, and Samuel worked for Mr Lampet, a local landowner. He and his wife treated Samuel kindly, and Mr Lampet spent the winter evenings in educating their young servant. Mary and Samuel saved up enough money to start working a small farm. Legacies from Mr Lampet and then from an uncle should have set them up for life but there were complications and a law suit, which diminished their capital. Nevertheless Samuel did well, and left his children a good inheritance. He and Mary had been regular in their attendance at the established church, but in about 1786 both Dinah's parents had become Methodists.

Dinah claims that John Wesley came to Hook Norton and attempted to preach in St Peter's church. A second visit, she said, led to the founding of a Methodist society here. [See the article on "Wesleyan Methodists" under [Religious Life in Hook Norton](#) on this site.] There appears to be no other record of Wesley visiting Hook Norton, but he was a tireless peripatetic preacher and might well have been in the area. Certainly Samuel and Mary provided hospitality to leading Methodist

preachers like Joseph Entwistle and Richard Reese (who attended a conference in America and published his findings in the *Methodist Magazine*).

Methodism dominated Dinah's later life, not just her childhood. She took her religion seriously. On 16 June 1813 Dinah Mayo French of Hook Norton married William Jaques, a farmer and Methodist preacher, and moved to Stourton with him. There she taught in a Sunday school, and raised her own children. In time, though, Jaques began to plan a new life for his family. He wanted his sons to possess land, and saw the future in America:

It had been suggested to my husband, that if he were to dispose of his estate and lay out the proceeds to purchase land in the United States, it would be advantageous to his family. He felt himself inclined to go over and locate on American ground. My judgment was against it. An idea prevailed in his mind that in America would be the scene of his childrens conversion. He confidently anticipated their further usefulness, and expressed his hopes that his sons would take a part in the abolition of slavery.¹

Three of his children (William, Dinah and Sarah Ann) emigrated in 1837, but Jaques having "engaged to follow them if they could give a favorable account of the country", died in January 1838. His widow Dinah left at 48 with six children under age did take most of them to join their siblings that spring. (Her daughter, Mary, had married and lived in Middleton Cheney.) Jaques, though he had some financial problems associated with interest due on loans for the building of a chapel in Stourton, must have been reasonably well off as Dinah's memoir of the journey makes it clear that she did not travel steerage. She took a carriage to Birmingham and the train to Liverpool. Then she boarded "Splendid":

We.... were accommodated by what they called a state room. This place was partitioned from the other part of the cabin with rough boards. One one side it was left a little way open at the top to admit light and air ; there we were much crowded ; some of the boxes would not go under the berths. After all our endeavors to make the best of the room, some of the family, when below deck, had to be always in the berths.

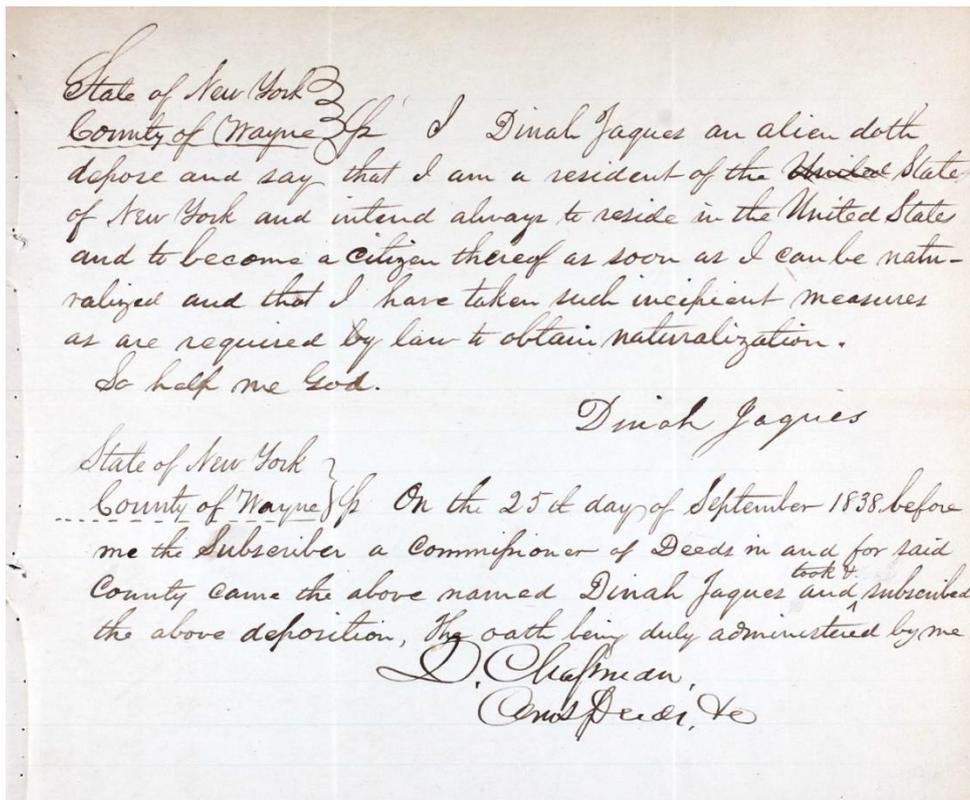
¹ *Poems by Mrs. D. Jaques with a sketch of her life* (New York, 1853)

H O O K N O R T O N L O C A L H I S T O R Y G R O U P

Dinah had asked her family to find a house for her, but the only one available, "a bathing house" gave her great anxiety: "This place did not meet my approbation; I judged it would not be a favorable situation in sustaining the morals of my family". Even worse, the most popular day for bathing was Sunday and Dinah did not approve of wasting the Lord's day on secular activities. However, there was nowhere else available, and though her sons bought a farm at Syracuse, she later moved to Palmyra, Wayne County:

We had been ten weeks in America when we purchased an excellent farm, with a good house and outbuildings. It was a beautiful location, four miles west of Palmyra. I expected here to end my days... it seemed like beginning life anew.

So much so, that Dinah declared her intention to become an American citizen.



New York, Aliens' Depositions of Intent to become U.S. Citizens, 1825-1871
accessed via <http://www.ancestry.com/>

Hook Norton Local History Group

Palmyra, in Wayne County, New York State, just south of Lake Ontario had been founded in 1789, a year before Dinah's birth in Hook Norton. The land was fertile, and by the time Dinah arrived the Erie Canal had been built, facilitating transport from the Great Lakes to the Hudson River and ultimately to New York city. Palmyra is now regarded as the birthplace of the Mormon religion: Joseph Smith had his first vision near there in 1820. There is also a family link to Winston Churchill whose mother's family had lived there. Dinah's late husband, William Jaques, would have been delighted to learn of the town's association with the underground railroad that smuggled slaves out of the southern states to freedom in the north.

Dinah decided to move from the farm to the township (to make attendance at church easier), and she is recorded in the census there in 1840.

(4.) **SCHEDULE of the whole number of persons within the division allotted to** *Henry Spencer* 21926

NAMES OF HEADS OF FAMILIES	FREE WHITE PERSONS, EXCLUDING HEADS OF FAMILIES																				FREE COLORED PERSONS													
	MALES										FEMALES										MALES					FEMALES								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
<i>Isaac Thomas</i>	1	1																																
<i>Math Rogerson</i>	1	1																																
<i>Wm Jaques</i>			1																															
<i>James Cole</i>																																		
<i>Thomas Lammy</i>				1	2																													
<i>Wm Howard</i>																																		
<i>Wm Beckwith</i>	1																																	
<i>Wm Kirkman</i>		2																																
<i>Thomas Hartine</i>																																		
<i>Wm Larnal</i>	1																																	
<i>Abner Cuffman</i>																																		
<i>Wm Wood</i>																																		
<i>Abner Cuff</i>	1	1			2																													
<i>Wm Hillman</i>	2																																	
<i>Wm Gardner</i>	2																																	
<i>Wm Denton</i>	1	2																																
<i>Wm Howard</i>	1																																	
<i>Total Males 823</i>										<i>Total Females 757</i>										<i>Total Free Colored Persons 853</i>														
<i>Wm Cuffin</i>			1																															
<i>Wm Sherman</i>																																		
<i>Wm Langston</i>		2	1																															
<i>Wm Scovell</i>	1																																	
<i>Wm Moore</i>	2																																	
<i>Wm Barker</i>	3	1																																
<i>Wm Brant</i>	1	2																																
<i>Wm Eastwood</i>	1	2																																
<i>Wm Wade</i>																																		
<i>Wm Thompson</i>	2																																	
<i>Wm Newberry</i>	1	1																																
<i>Total Males 856</i>										<i>Total Females 781</i>																								

1840 Census: Palmyra, Wayne County. Dinah Jaques is third from the top
 United States Census Bureau, accessed via <http://www.ancestry.com/>

***I failed in asking counsel of God, and too much in my own will
resolved to return to England the next spring***

Dinah decided to sell the farm at Palmyra and, in order to sort out her finances and to see her daughter, Mary, she went back to England. At first she was delighted to be home:

I could not avoid contrasting the substantial, and well finished buildings the handsomely trimmed green hedges, and the well cultivated fields and gardens, with those I had seen in America.

Within six months, in December 1841, she married "Mr J. Greenhill, an acceptable Methodist preacher of long standing" but was unhappy away from her children in the United States.

*Sons and Daughters ever dear
Subjects of my hope or fear
You I love whate'er betide
Say can Mothers love subside?
To my children*

She returned to America in 1848 on "The Sea" – without her husband. "On account of religious and other engagements, he could not see it his *duty* to leave England." It was a wretched voyage and nearly ended in disaster:

Our Captain was not sufficiently affable to gain respect from the passengers. The mates were harsh in manners. On the third day while some of us were sick the first mate without giving warning came to fumigate our room. The windows being closed some of us were nearly suffocated. He set down the smoking kettle by my side and told me that he was come to *renovate my food...*

The ship bulwarks were low - consequently waves frequently washed over us. The fires were extinguished, and the coals, mixed with water, made our room black and wet constantly. The last three weeks out of the six we were at sea, I was reduced by disorders, caused by improper food...

The night had been dark and stormy ; about three o' clock in the morning, as the men on watch was sleeping, we had a collision with another ship.— The shock was dreadful ! I thought we had struck a rock. The passengers were in a

moment out of their berths and calling out : "*Lord have mercy on us!*" If I had not *before* known the value of religion, I should at that awful moment. I was calm...

However, two months after leaving England Dinah rejoined four of her family in Syracuse. Her children had settled and married. Jabez Robert had studied at the Genesee College, founded as a Wesleyan Seminary in 1831, and was to become a professor of ancient and modern languages and a leading Methodist preacher, which must have gratified his devout mother.

Dinah had written poems and hymns for the children she had taught in Stourton and for her family and friends. In 1853 a collection of these poems and her autobiographical sketch were published. She concluded her life story with a fervent statement of faith from the Psalms:

The Almighty hath proved me He hath tried me as silver is tried But verily he hath heard me He hath attended to the voice of my prayer Blessed be God who hath not turned away my prayer nor his mercy from me.

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Further reading

Poems by Mrs. D. Jaques with a sketch of her life, New York, 1853, accessible through various online libraries, e.g. <https://books.google.com/>