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## **1791 New York City Legal Deposition by Free African American Woman Nelley Mumpherd14363912**

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Rare Book and Manuscript Library
<b>Creator:</b>	Mumpherd, Nelley
<b>Creator:</b>	Wool, Jeremiah, 1735 or 1736-1807
<b>Title:</b>	1791 New York City Legal Deposition by Free African American Woman Nelley Mumpherd
<b>ID:</b>	14363912
<b>ID:</b>	MS#1997
<b>Date:</b>	1791
<b>Physical Description:</b>	1 item 1 document box
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English .

### Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Deposition by Free African American Woman Nelley Mumpherd; Box and Folder; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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## Content Description

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Defending her very liberty by taking legal action, a 1791 deposition signed by a free African American woman in New York City, here accusing a man of stealing from her a £14 note and her "freedom Paper." The latter document was literally her slim connection to freedom, proof that she was a free woman and not a slave. This is a civil rights document. The deposition is docketed with the name of the case: "The People and Nelly Mumford [sic] vs. Henry Hurt, 25 July 1791." The deponent was likely a basket maker. The documents stolen from her were laid inside what is called her "basket book," likely a ledger or receipt book in which she kept her business accounts or recorded sales and expenses. No helpless victim, Nelley Mumpherd publicly called out the thief and took him to court. As she recounts the incident in her deposition statement, she asserts that Hurt tried to force his way into her bed: ...in the evening of the Twenty second day of July Henry Hurt came to the deponandts [sic]

house in order to take lodgings with her Landlord, that in a short time he insisted to lay with this deponant That in order to avoid complying with his request and get out of his way she removed her bed in an other place. The following morning Mumpherd realized her basket book containing the handwritten £14 note and her "freedom Paper" was missing: ...she accused the siad [said] Henry Hurt in the fly [flea?] market of stealing her basket book, who at first denied it but at last shewed it to her, upon which she caught it out of his hands, and found the said note of fourteen pounds together with her said freedom Paper was missing.

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## Biographical / Historical

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Mumpherd swore to her deposition and signed the document using an "X." It was sworn before New York City alderman, Jeremiah Wool (c.1740–1807), who also signed the document. During the American Revolution, Wool was a member of the Sons of Liberty and later of the Committee of Safety in New York City. He was an alderman for many years.<sup>1</sup> A note below Wool's signature states "Committed to Goal." Mumpherd had successfully prosecuted her antagonist, a man who had literally stolen her liberty and potentially exposed her to enslavement.

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## Biographical / Historical

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An additional contemporary note, written in a different hand and in darker ink, provides Mumpherd's dwelling place in Manhattan: "the complainant [sic] lives in ferry Street in a house belonging to Docter [sic] Broder." A remarkable legal deposition signed by a named, free African American woman, shining biographical light on her, chronicling her bravery in the face of injustice, and directly concerning her "freedom Paper." Its true import, however, is the documentation of her civil rights—her right as a person, together with "The People" of New York City, to claim redress for a crime interfering with her livelihood, her property, and her very liberty. Note. 1. The Brouwer Genealogy Database - Person Page 735 accessed online and citing Conklin, "The Wool Family of New York," New York Genealogical and Biographical Record vol.72 (1941), pp.295-307.

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## Scope and Contents

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Document signed. Approximately 12 x 8 inches. Laid paper with deckled edges. Watermarked "M C". Contemporary docketing. Folds with a short tear at the center.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

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## Existence and Location of Copies

The item has been digitized.

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- Depositions
- African Americans -- History -- To 1863
- African Americans -- Civil rights
- African American women
- Women -- New York (State) -- New York

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## Collection Inventory

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Title/Description	Instances
Deposition <a href="#">Digital Object: Deposition</a>	box 1