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WHEN MEN
WERE SOLD

*Elizabeth Powell Bond
from her friend
Edward H. Magill.*



AN ADDRESS BY
EDWARD H. MAGILL
BEFORE THE
BUCKS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

When Men Were Sold

The Underground Railroad

In Bucks County, Pa.

An Address

Delivered Before The

Bucks County Historical Society

BY EDWARD H. MAGILL

JANUARY 18, 1898

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WHEN MEN WERE SOLD

The Underground Railroad in Bucks County
Pennsylvania, An Address Delivered before the
Bucks County Historical Society, Jan. 18, 1898

BY EDWARD H. MAGILL

It is always a source of great pleasure to me to return to my native county of Bucks, and it is an especial pleasure to-day to meet this Historical Society of our county, which is so laudably engaged in collecting, and placing in permanent form, the various means of preserving the memories of the past. The subject which you have given me is one which has special attractions, presenting, as it does the opportunity to do justice to those brave and loyal men and women of the earlier day whose loyalty consisted, not in obeying wicked laws of human enactment, but in unswerving fealty to what they so appropriately called the Higher Law, the law of God, written indelibly in the human heart. It was obedience to this law that enabled those brave fathers and mothers of ours to prevent this fair country from becoming a free hunting ground for the Southern task-master pursuing his fleeing fugitive, and to open through our county a comparatively safe passage to that land of freedom which, by the unerring guidance of the North Star, and long and lonely midnight travel, they sought in the good Queen's dominions, and which they failed to find under the broad aegis of our national flag, the Stars and Stripes. My subject, then, may be announced as, "Some Reminiscences of the Underground Railroad in Bucks County, and its Managers."

It is difficult for the present generation of young people to imagine the necessity for the existence, in this free country, of such an organization as the Underground Railroad. The institution of American Slavery, by which more than three millions of human beings were held in the most abject servitude and regarded as chattels, to

be bought and sold, ruthlessly separated by the will of the master, regardless of family ties and all the horrors attendant upon the public auction sales of men, women and children to the highest bidder, and their being driven daily to their labor in the fields by ruthless and heartless task-masters, have now, happily, become a thing of the past, requiring a strong effort of the imagination even to conceive.

It was early in the present century that the comparatively small number of slaves held in the Northern States were gradually set free, and a very distinct line between the free and the slave states became fully established. This line (to which the name of Mason and Dixon's Line was given, on the southern border of our state of Pennsylvania), separating, as it did, so widely varying views and interests, was early felt by the most far-seeing of our statesmen, to be a serious menace to the well-being of the Republic, if it did not actually threaten its destruction at no very distant day. As a result of this distinct division of interests, and consequently, difference of views upon so important a question as that of human slavery, hostile feelings were on the increase between the North and the South during the first quarter of the present century. These were especially manifested in our National Councils at Washington, and a growing tendency was observed to form, regardless of political differences, a pro-slavery and an anti-slavery party. The value of property in slaves became more and more precarious along the northern border of the Slave States, owing to their facilities to escape into a free territory in the North, and this escape began to be more and more promoted by the spread of the anti-slavery sentiment in the Northern States. As a consequence, the practice became more common for the planters of the border states to sell to the far off cotton plantations of the Gulf States, those slaves who were most restless under the yoke, and especially those who attempted to gain their liberty by flight, aided by friends in the North.

Before the end of the first decade of the present century the hegira of the Southern slaves toward the promised land of Canada had fairly set in. It will be observed that this land of promise was not reached until they had past the limits of this boasted land of liberty, and arrived in a territory governed by an English Queen. When the hunted fugitives started on their Northern journey, following the light of the North Star by night, and hiding during the day in the

barns, deep woods, under haystacks, corn shocks, or any other available place of concealment which they found upon their route, they but little appreciated the long way before them. Indeed, many were grievously disappointed on finding that, on reaching a free state, they were still within easy reach of their pursuing masters, who sought them eagerly to increase their stock of slaves for the Southern market. The fact that being sold to the far South was the almost certain penalty of an attempt to secure their freedom greatly increased their fear of recapture, and made to every colored family the name of kidnapper a terror indeed. Yes, to every colored family, for even free colored persons, who had never been in slavery, were, not infrequently seized as fugitives, and hurried away, sometimes without even the form of a trial, to the southern market.

The northward migration toward the promised land of freedom was naturally greatest in the State of Pennsylvania, the states further west being comparatively unsettled at that early period; and perhaps no counties were traversed by so great a number of fugitives as those of York, Adams, Chester and Lancaster. These counties, especially the two latter, were settled by Friends very generally, and they were well known to be in deep sympathy with the escaping slaves. Dr. Hiram Corson, in a paper before the Montgomery County Historical Society a few years since, stated that nearly all those in that county who were accounted as abolitionists were members of the Religious Society of Friends. Of course even there there were notable exceptions, prominent among whom for many years was the Reverend Samuel Aaron, of Norristown. These counties of Chester and Lancaster were also far enough from the border to afford a temporary place of safety after passing the line of the Slave States. In the little town of Columbia, incorporated a few years later, there was, at the time of which I speak, near the year 1810, a considerable settlement of colored people, and to these a number of escaping fugitives became united. But the danger of pursuit, and the restoration to bondage constantly increased. It was soon after this period that the thought was conceived of forming a line of stations from Columbia toward the north, the north-east, and the north-west, these stations to be the homes of well known friends of the slave, and about ten miles apart, making it a comfortable night's journey on foot from one to another. These three northern routes were decided upon that the fugitives

6

When Men Were Sold

should not travel in so large numbers together as to increase the danger of discovery. Thus, after passing Columbia, all large groups being divided there by the careful friends of the slave having charge of the route, the danger of discovery and arrest was very much diminished.

It is said that the baffled and disappointed masters, on reaching Columbia, instead of securing their fugitives there, as they had done on various occasions in previous years, now found that after following them so far all trace of them suddenly disappeared, and they angrily declared that there must be an *underground railroad* somewhere in the neighborhood. This is said to be the origin of this expression which has since become so familiar. This method of transporting the escaping slaves through the Free States of the North, a method which extended later to our own and other countries, and which was kept up even after the keepers of the underground stations assumed so much greater risk, after the passage, in 1850, of the infamous Fugitive Slave Law, was originated, and first carried into effect by that staunch and faithful friend of the oppressed, William Wright, of Columbia.

As the principal line of escape through Pennsylvania was by way of York, Adams, Lancaster and Chester counties, the underground line through Bucks county was less used, and consequently less perfectly organized. Still many slaves came through the county reaching it through the Northeastern Chester county line, by way of Norristown, or coming up through Philadelphia. Farmers on their way home from market frequently brought them up, sent on by the Abolitionists of Philadelphia, and these very frequently found homes and occupation with the Bucks county farmers, some of them remaining for several years. At the house of my father, Jonathan P. Magill of Solebury, many were thus received, beginning as far back as my memory extends. Many stories, of their experiences as slaves, and their efforts to escape, were told my brother Watson and myself by our hired colored men, which stories are more or less distinct in my memory. The general impression left on my mind by these in my early boyhood was the sad and helpless condition of the slave; the inexpressible terror which these affectionate creatures experienced from their fear of separation from their families; their bravery in setting out unaided and alone to seek a land of liberty by hundreds.

...of night travel, guided only by the North Star, and incurring the constant risk of recapture and being sold to a far off southern market, and the great cruelty and inhumanity of a system which could thus deprive human beings of their inalienable right to life and liberty.

I have spoken of the constant increase of the feeling of opposition to slavery in the Northern States through the first quarter of the present century. This feeling intensified as the years passed on, and the consequent hostility between the North and the South became more and more pronounced. But while the South was practically united in support of their cherished institution of slavery, the North did not present the same undivided front in opposition to it. Many at the North, having family or business connections with the South, were lukewarm, or even sided with the slave power, in its constantly increasing demands. It was at this time that the opposition to slavery first took organic form by the establishing of the American Anti-Slavery Society, about 1832. It was on the 1st of January, 1831, that William Lloyd Garrison began, in Boston, the publication of the *Liberator*, the leading paper throughout the long struggle of more than thirty years, advocating the doctrine that "The immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery was the right of the slave and the duty of the master." He had promulgated this doctrine two years before in the paper published by him in connection with Benjamin Lundy, in the city of Baltimore, called "The Genius of Universal Emancipation," and for severe denunciation of slavery had been fined and imprisoned in Baltimore several months. His motto, now adopted by the *Liberator*, of "No Union with Slaveholders," aroused still more hostility in the South, and through sympathy with the South, and the influence of Southern trade, the Garrisonian Abolitionists were kept in a small minority for a number of years. But the little band stood firm, and in their "Declaration of Principles," drawn by Garrison, and signed by fifty earnest and devoted men, in advance of their age, they declared: "We may be defeated, but our *principles never*." The only Bucks county name found in this list of early signers is that of Robert Purvis, and he is the only one among them that is still living.* In a recent conversation with me he expressed his great satisfaction that, in that early day, women were conspicuous in the advocacy of the cause of the

*He died soon after this address was delivered.

slave, and were present and gave their counsels when the Declaration of Principles was adopted. That the equality of women was not then acknowledged as it is to-day, is evident from the fact that no woman's name appears upon the list of signers of that first declaration. When they were about to sign the paper, knowing that it would destroy their business if engaged in Southern trade, a friend, whose name I know, but forbear to mention, said to James Mott, "Remember that thou art in business with the South, and that it may ruin thy trade to sign it." Whereby Lucretia Mott, sitting by, promptly said, "Put down my name, James." Such was the spirit of the Abolitionists of that early day.

From the first appearance of Garrison's *Liberator* it was ever a welcome weekly visitor at my father's house. Although but six years of age, I well remember the thrill with which we heard our father read, in our little sitting room that memorable editorial of the great Anti-Slavery leader, closing with the words: "These are the principles by which I shall be guided; I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard." I may here add that besides the *Liberator*, the other principal anti-slavery papers, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, were regularly received at my father's house,

Of the comparatively small band who entered thus early upon the anti-slavery work in Bucks county, there were none who were not actively interested, from the beginning, in the operation of the underground railroad. Indeed for membership in that organization, (of which our own Robert Purvis was president for so many years, and whose only dividend received by the shareholders was unpopularity among their fellowmen), there were no hard and fast rules of admission, but all were gladly welcomed, without formal enrolment, who were able and willing to lend a hand. I should say here that there were some most efficient workers among them, led by kindly motives of humanity, and sympathy for the oppressed and downtrodden race, who did not consider themselves Garrisonian Abolitionists, being too cautious and conservative to rally under the revolutionary banner of "No union with slaveholders." Some of these were afterward active in the Liberty and Free Soil Party.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, the routes of the Northern travel for the slaves, were less clearly marked through Bucks than

they were through Chester and Lancaster counties. The ten miles limit for the distance between the stations was also far less frequently observed. The escaping fugitives entered the county from the south, by way of Philadelphia, but many came by the northeast Chester county route already referred to, by way of Norristown. In naming families who were especially interested in this humane but unlawful (?) work of aiding slaves through Bucks county, I shall doubtless omit some who were equally interested with those named, and who performed with those an equally important part of the work, and incurred with them an equal risk in carrying out their principles, in direct violation of what they justly regarded as iniquitous laws. Of course I must name those with whose work I have myself been most familiar.

In the lower part of the county, among those who were ever ready to receive with sympathy these unhappy fugitives, to care for them, and give or obtain for them employment, so long as they dared to stop on their Northern flight, and then, with the proper credentials to their friends further North, help them on their way, either by taking them in their own conveyances, sometimes covered over or disguised to avoid detection in case of pursuit or search, or by sending them on by trusted friends travelling in that direction, or sometimes, when it seemed safe to do so, paying their fares and sending them by stage, (Bucks county being then without railroads); I may mention the names of Robert Purvis, Barclay Ivins, the Pearces, the Swains, the Beanses, the Lintons, the Schofields, the Buckmans, the Janneys, the Twinings, Jonathan Palmer, William Lloyd, William Burgess, and the Longshores.

After the journey northward of from ten to twenty miles, the fugitives were received and kindly cared for until ready to go further north, by the Atkinsons, the Browns, the Tregos, the Blackfans, the Smiths, the Simpsons, the Paxsons, John E. Kenderdine, Jonathan P. Magill, Jacob Heston, William H. Johnson, Joseph Fell and Edward Williams.

Having but slight acquaintance with friends of the slave in the northern end of the county, I can only say that the friends of the middle section of the county generally forwarded fugitives to Richard Moore, of Quakertown, or sometimes more directly, further on by stage or private conveyance to the Vails, or to Jacob Singmaster, of

Stroudsburg. On reaching these Northern points, having put so many miles of weary travel between them and their masters in the South, their feeling of security generally increased, and still more was this the case on reaching Montrose or Friendsville, in Susquehanna county, where under the kind care of Israel Post, in Montrose, or Caleb Carnault, in Friendsville, and other friends to aid them, they had reached ground on which, in those days of difficult travel, the slaveholder but rarely ventured in search of his slaves. A comparatively short journey from these places brought them to the state of New York.

The home of our friend Richard Moore, in Quakertown, being the last important station of the Underground Railroad in our county, and being the point where the northeastern Chester county line and most of the Bucks county lines converged, I have felt that it would be a matter of especial interest to know all that I could learn of this station from the best authority. To this end I have been twice granted an interview by Alfred Moore, grandson of Richard Moore, at his office in Philadelphia. I learn from him that Richard Moore, while not ready to unite with the early abolitionists in their revolutionary motto: "No Union with Slaveholders," still felt prompted by kind sympathy many years ago to aid on their way the escaping fugitives. His home soon became known to the friends further south as a place where all fugitives forwarded would receive kindly care and needed assistance in their continued flight. Hence they soon began to come directed to his home in very considerable numbers. Although slaveholders rarely proceeded so far as this in pursuit of their slaves, they occasionally did so, and more than once the master has presented himself at the front door of Richard Moore a few moments after the object of his search, being forewarned of his approach, had escaped by a back door to a place of concealment in the rear. Many of the fugitives on reaching Quakertown, feeling comparatively safe, were willing to hire out there, and Richard Moore was ever ready to give them work himself or find them employment among his friends and neighbors. Still there were many of the slaves whose terror was so great that they were anxious to be passed on as soon as possible to a real land of freedom in Canada. These were, of course, sent on at once, and generally with letters to friends in Montrose or in Friendsville. Much of the route between Quakertown

and these farther stations, up the valley of the Lehigh and the Susquehanna, was through a then unsettled country, where the probabilities of discovery and arrest were but slight. But there, as elsewhere, most of their travelling was done at night, they lying concealed in some dark ravine or impenetrable morass or brushwood during the day. The cruel treatment of these poor creatures at home may be well conceived on considering the terror of many of them by day and by night, even in the depths of those interminable forests, with hundreds of miles between them and their masters, whom they so greatly feared.

One of the slaves who reached this safe station at Quakertown about the year 1850, just about the time of the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, seemed especially brave, being destitute of fear, even in that most trying time. He was a slave of Abraham Shriner, of Pipe Creek, Maryland, and was known as Bill Budd at home, but on running away from bondage assumed the name Henry Franklin, it being naturally a very common practice with runaway slaves to take an assumed name. This man did not care to be sent to Canada, and was employed as a carter by Richard Moore for several years. During this time he was much engaged in carting coal from the Lehigh river, there being then no railroad to Quakertown. There were often slaves to be sent northward, and he would lead his wagon with them in the evening, cover them well with straw, and take them so much of a start on the lonely road to Friendsville, and return with a load of coal the next day. Alfred Moore was quite confident that one of the slaves thus carried north by Henry Franklin was Parker, the principal hero in the *Christiana* tragedy. This brave Franklin, who was thus instrumental in aiding so many slaves to secure their freedom, afterwards came to Philadelphia, where he was for a number of years janitor in the Academy of Fine Arts, and lived in Philadelphia until his death. Richard Moore had sent on fugitives several years, and when the number became quite large he began to keep a regular record, and after that time, until the war made escape from slavery unnecessary, he recorded the names of about six hundred. Many of these, however, did not come through the lower end of Bucks county, but reached his station by way of Norristown, and the northeastern Chester county line.

Thus far, (except for the case of Bill Budd, alias Henry Franklin)

I have spoken rather on the general aspect of the question under consideration. I now proceed to give, with some detail, a few individual cases of the escape of slaves through our county, and their recapture in it, which details I have endeavored to confirm by a careful personal investigation.

Although the case of Big Ben has been fully stated in the public press, as it occurred more than half a century ago, it has been suggested to me that the young people of this generation know little or nothing about it, and I would better include at least a brief outline of it in these reminiscences.

It was about sixty-five years ago that a slave of one William Anderson, near York, Maryland, name Benjamin Jones, (called Big Ben, from his immense size, measuring, according to his own and others' testimony, six feet ten and one-half inches in stature) with four other slaves, fearing that they were to be sold to the Southern market, started on a Northern journey by night toward a land of freedom. After many risks and hardships, being frequently aided by kind friends of the Underground Railroad by the way, they succeeded in reaching Buckingham and Bucks county, where some of them found employment. Big Ben worked for Jonathan Fell, father of Joshua Fell of Mechanicsville, Thomas Bye, William Stavely and others, for about eleven years. He was one day chopping in the woods near Forestville, when his former master, William Anderson, with four other men, one of them, at least, a noted slave catcher of that day, came suddenly upon him to arrest and take him back to the south. His fellow laborers were frightened and fled, leaving Ben alone to cope with five men. He defended himself desperately with his axe, and said afterwards that at one time he had all five on the ground at once. But at length he was tripped up and overpowered, but not without seriously wounding several of his captors, and receiving injuries himself from which he never wholly recovered. This seems to be one of those cases where a slave was returned to the south without even the form of a trial. He was taken to Baltimore and placed in Hope H. Slater's notorious slave prison, to await sale to the far off cotton fields of the Gulf States, the usual fate of returned fugitive slaves. But his wounds made him unsalable, much to his master's chagrin, who had hoped to take him unharmed for obvious reasons, with which humanity had little to do), and he

was confined in this slave-pen, when a meeting was called at Forestville, of which I take the following report from the Pennsylvania Freeman of June 6, 1844 :

“An animated meeting was held on the subject of Big Ben on the 26 ultimo, in Forestville, at which George Chapman presided and R. H. Donatt acted as secretary, and the following among other spirited resolutions was adopted :

Resolved, That it is the duty of every one to do all that he constitutionally can to defeat and baffle the slave catcher, to protect his prey from his grasp, and to hold up to public scorn and indignation the infamous conduct of the Baillys and Hubbards and all other Northern men who sell their principles and barter the rights of their fellow men for Southern gold.”

The sum of \$700, the amount demanded by Slater, was soon after raised, and George Chapman and Jonathan K. Bonham were sent on behalf of the citizens, who paid the ransom and restored the kidnapped slave to his adopted Northern home.

After his return to Bucks county he was never the same man that he was before. His physical strength was much impaired by the wounds received in his struggle for liberty, and his spirit seemed much broken. He worked for a time in Buckingham, and in my own native township of Solebury, where I remember seeing him occasionally, and although bowed down somewhat by the hardships which he had undergone, I was always impressed by his enormous stature. He married some ten years after his return from the south, and his wife spent with him the last ten years of his life in the Bucks county hospital, where they told visitors that they were well off and happy, for they always had something to eat and wear.

For information as to the case of Big Ben I am especially indebted to Alfred and Edward Paschall, former students of mine at Swarthmore College, and later successful editors of the Bucks County Intelligencer.

I am informed by John S. Brown, formerly, for many years, the honored and successful head of the Intelligencer, that some time in 1837, he having finished his apprenticeship, and living with his mother in Plumstead, he was one day in Doylestown on business, and as he passed the Temperance Hotel, his brother-in-law Kirk J. Price stepped out and asked him, in a mysterious manner, to keep a

sharp lookout as he passed Academy Lane, and a passenger would present herself, whom he was to take to the house of Charles and Martha Smith, in Plumstead, ask no questions, and leave her to their care. He did as directed, and soon saw a woman looking cautiously out from between the corn rows, stopped and took her in, conveyed her to the house of his Aunt, as directed, who gladly received her, and no doubt forwarded her on her way to the next Underground station at either Quakerstown or Stroudsburg. In that way, he said, he became, for one day, a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

From Isaac Warner, of Hatboro, I learn that his father's house was one of the stations of the Underground Railroad, and that slaves would frequently stop there, hire out in the neighborhood for a few days and then be directed, with, of course, the necessary letters and needed aid, to the house of Isaac's wife's father, Richard Moore of Quakertown, whose home has been described as the last, and one of the most important stations in the northern part of our county. This was during the thirties, early in the history of regular anti-slavery organizations. About 1835, one Joe Smith, who had worked for Isaac Warner's father some two years, being one of that large number who did not care to be forwarded to Canada, went to Byberry and engaged with a Mr. Walton there, and soon after married a free woman, by whom he had two children. Early in the spring of '37 or '38, learning that his master was seeking him in the neighborhood, he was at once sent on to Quakertown, of course to the care of Richard Moore. Soon after, Isaac informs me, the wife and children were sent to his father's house, where he had them covered up in a wagon with plenty of straw, and started with them to Quakerstown. He was directed to stop nowhere on the road, for fear of detection, and to take with him a bucket in the wagon to water his horses at some stream in the road. If inquired of on the way he was to say that he was going to Richard Moore's Pottery, the abundance of straw being, of course, to be for packing the wares on his return. He made the journey without molestation, united the man and his family, and they were properly forwarded to Canada, by the Underground Railroad by the usual route.

The following amusing circumstance will illustrate one of the difficulties incurred in investigating this subject of the Underground

Railroad. Wishing to know more about one of the points where an important Underground station seemed to have been successfully worked for a number of years, and knowing no one in the vicinity, I addressed a letter of enquiry to the postmaster there, stating briefly what I desired and why. In a week I received the following reply :

“There is a mistake about there being an Underground Railroad here. There is no railroad, nor were there ever any slaves here that anybody here knows anything about. I am sorry I can't give you any information on the subject you have so much at heart, but indeed I can not.”

Another case was given me by Isaac Warner, but as it did not pass through any part of Bucks county, (being confined wholly to Montgomery county) I will pass it by saying that the parties who interfered with the arrest of a fugitive were fined to the amount of four or five hundred dollars, which amount they had to pay. If the case had occurred after the passage, in '50, of the Fugitive Slave Law, the fines would have been \$2,000, with imprisonment for a term not to exceed six months.

I will now briefly state a case with which our family have been quite familiar. Rachael Moore was a slave near Elkton, Maryland, more than fifty years ago. She was manumitted by her master, and received free papers from the court at Elkton. I had hoped to present these papers, as they were long carefully cherished in her possession, but they have been mislaid since her death. She had six children who were still slaves, and succeeded in carrying them all off, and bringing them to the North, aided by the Underground Railroad. As usual they traveled only by night, resting in concealment during the day. Think of a mother starting unaided, with her six children, to a distant and unknown country, seeking for her children the blessings of freedom which she already acquired! Does not the fact speak volumes for the cruelty of the system of oppression from which she was making her escape? They sometimes met with friends who took them in and cared for them during the day, and sent them on at night. Sometimes they were less fortunate, and spent the day in anxious concealment all alone. The first names that I have of those with whom they stopped are a family of Lewises with whom they seem to have spent some days, a few miles from Phoenixville. Grace Anna Lewis, now of Media, Pennsylvania, (a daughter of this

family), thus describes the sad family on their arrival at their hospitable home. "This woman reached us in a most pitiful condition. Soon after she and her children left the home of the master, a rain came on, and the flapping of their wet garments against their unprotected limbs wore off the skin, until it bled with every step, yet their sense of danger of capture was so great that they pressed forward with all the speed possible to them. I think the mother carried the youngest child to hasten them forward. When they reached our house they were too sore to do any thing but rest and recuperate. In addition to their need of rest was that of northern clothing. My memory is that the mother wore but a single garment, a coarse heavy dress made of tow, woven in broken stripes of red, an inch or more in width, and totally unlike any thing of northern manufacture, the children dressed in the same material. Of course this clothing exposed them to detection by the first pro-slavery person they should meet; and it had to be burned immediately, as soon as other clothing could be provided. A store for such cases was constantly kept on hand at our house, much of it being prepared by a number of anti-slavery families, who sent it to us in quantity. Our home was usually the first on the line where southern clothing could be exchanged for northern. The haste was frequently too great to admit of delay for this change at any earlier time." Miss Lewis closes her interesting letter thus: As was usual in such cases, we never heard further of this woman and her children, until I listened to thy account in the *Intelligencer*. The gathering up of the ashes "for history's golden urn" is not alone for succeeding generations, but for the old workers too. It was very pleasant for me to know that after all her trials, this woman had found a safe home with thy father and mother." The Lewises seem to have sent this family on in a wagon at night to Jacob L. Paxson, a well known friend of the slave at Norristown, where they remained two weeks. From there they were forwarded to the home of another most faithful and devoted friend of the slave, Wm. H. Johnson, of Buckingham where homes were found for the four eldest children in the Friends families of Thomas Paxson, Joseph Fell, Edward Williams, and John Blackfan. Rachel, with her two youngest children, came to the home of my father, Jonathan P. Magill, of Solebury, where they remained several years. I am indebted to Fanny, one of these children, for some of the details of this account.

The Christiana tragedy, sometimes known as the Gorsuch murder case, which occurred in 1851, and was one of the early test cases of the Fugitive Slave Law, which was passed in 1850, is too well known to require an extended description here ; but I may say that I am credibly informed that some of the slaves concerned in that tragedy passed through the upper end of our county, by way of Norristown, were received and cared for by Richard Moore, at Quakertown. Dr. Smedley, in his interesting history of the Underground Railroad in Chester and Lancaster Counties, gives quite a full account of this case, and speaks of three principal actors in it, Parker, Pinckney and Johnson, as passing through Quakertown. But there was another of these fugitives, who passed over much more of our Underground Railroad, in this county, as I have learned from the lips of an actor in the case within a few weeks. This man was brought by a Friend to Philadelphia on a Sixth day evening, soon after the Christiana riot, probably by previous arrangement with William Lloyd of Dolington. William being in market on that evening, arranged to take the slave home with him, and then send him on toward the North. He agreed to do this, knowing full well the heavy penalty of \$2000 fine and six months imprisonment to which the new law would make him liable, if detected. What a sad condition of our country when the lawmakers were so overawed by the slave oligarchy of the South that they would frame laws that the best of our citizens must evade, being unable conscientiously to obey them. The country being aroused by the tragedy in Christiana, and pursuit and search being therefore especially to be feared, William started home late on the Seventh day, covering his man completely with straw in the back part of his covered wagon. On approaching home during the night, he took the slave to a colored family whom he knew, living in a small house in the edge of a wood on the Newtown and Yardleyville Pike, close by Janney's dam. The next morning he sent for Henry H. Twining, (from whom I received this account a few weeks ago) and ask him to call at the house of the colored man, and take this slave on toward the north the next evening. He took the proper conveyance and drove him, during the night, to the house of my father, Jonathan P. Magill, in Solebury, arriving there after midnight. When called up by Henry's knocking, my mother and father were much startled, and seemed to hesitate what to do, but my

sister Rebecca, the only other member of the family then at home, came to the door of their room and said, "we can not do any thing but admit them, and take care of the fugitive." So they came in and were kept over night, Henry M. Twining returning home in the morning with the assurance that the slave would be cared for, and promptly forwarded and aided on his way to the north. Later the word came that he was safe in Canada, and he doubtless went from our home to Richard Moore's, or took the more eastern or Stroudsburg route, perhaps going in the stage line then running between New Hope and Eaton. It must have been by this stage line, with letters either to the Vails, or to Jacob Singmaster of Stroudsburg, that, when quite a small boy, I sent forward three men and two women, as I remember driving these five colored people to New Hope, and putting them in the care of the stage driver, and paying their fare to some point in the north.

I proceed now to state the outlines of the case of the slave Jane Johnson (which case was connected with the imprisonment of Passmore Williamson), as she passed on her way north over a part of the Underground road of Buck County. For the facts in this case I am indebted to a paper prepared a few years since for the Historical Society of Montgomery County by Dr. Hiram Corson of Norristown, after he was 21 years of age, a paper full of interesting reminiscences of the Anti-Slavery movement, and those most prominent engaged in it, which paper will probably be given to the public, in some form, at an early day.

Jane Johnson and her two boys, 7 and 11 years of age, were brought to Philadelphia by their master, a man named Wheeler, of Virginia, then United States Minister to Nicaragua. Learning that they had arrived on a steamer lying at Walnut Street wharf and soon to sail on to New York, William Still and Passmore Williamson of Philadelphia found means to inform the slave that being brought to Pennsylvania by her master, she was free by the law of our state. She therefore made her escape from the boat with her two little boys and they were secreted by anti-slavery friends in Philadelphia. Still and Williamson were tried before Judge Kane for the abduction or attempted abduction of a slave. When Williamson was required by the Judge to produce the slave in court he was unable to do so, as the mother and her two boys had been aided by friends in making

their way to Boston, where they were kept concealed. Williamson was consigned to prison on the frivolous charge of "contempt of court." As the case proceeded and the false testimony of the master seemed likely to imperil the case of the slave, the great risk was incurred of having Jane Johnson brought from Boston to confront him with her testimony. The public feeling was wrought up to a very high pitch and there was danger of collision in the court, the U. S. District Attorney declaring that he would take the slave before she left the court room, the state authorities declaring that he should not. But she quietly left the room unmolested after her clear and impressive testimony was given, and was accompanied in her carriage by James Miller McKim, Secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Lucretia Mott, and an interpid officer named George Corson. A carriage load of officers also followed them as a guard. Soon after she was brought to the house of George Corson, of Plymouth, where she received kind care. I will give the conclusion of the case in the words of Dr. Hiram Corson.

"Mahlon Linton and wife, Abolitionists of Bucks County, happened to be on a visit to George Corson and family, and it was concluded that a son of George Corson, then only eleven or twelve years of age, but now Dr. E.M. Corson, of Norristown should, with a carriage having Jane in it, as he did not know the road, closely follow Mahlon's carriage through the night to Mr. Linton's house, beyond Newtown, Bucks County. After dark they started and all through the night went on, reaching this next Underground station, (Mr. Linton's home) before the morning dawned. From there she was helped on to Canada, where two her boys had been already sent."

Dr. Corson's paper contains numerous references to interesting cases of slaves who were passed on by him either to Richard Moore, in Quakertown, to William H. Johnson in Buckingham, or to Mahlon B. Linton, as in this case. It will be seen that the Underground Railroad, with its numerous stations and sub-stations, often pursued a very zigzag and irregular direction, sometimes to elude pursuit, and often according to the convenience of various agents of the road.

I come to an important case with which Robert Purvis was closely identified, several details of which I had heard, at different times from John S. Brown, Henry M. Twining, and others. Feeling the

importance of having these details properly connected, that I might present a clear statement of the whole case, I have had two very satisfactory interviews with Robert Purvis at his home in Philadelphia during the past few weeks. He is now past 85 years of age and quite feeble, his memory of recent events (not those of his earlier life), showing the effect of age. He received me most cordially, with all the grace and dignified courtesy for which he was so notably distinguished in his early life, and at the close of each interview of more than one hour, he dismissed me with the same dignified and gracious manner, begging me to call at any time when he could render me the least service upon any subject. In his account of the case that had especially brought me to his house he fully confirmed all that my other friends had said, and added some important points. The case as he gave it to me is substantially as follows :

He said that he was living in Bensalem about the year 1838. He had then living with him a most excellent and faithful colored man named Basil Dorsey, who had been with him about two years. At this time Dorsey was visited by a brother-in-law of his wife, from the state of Maryland, whence he came. This brother-in-law, for some reason, became jealous of Dorsey in his happy home, and betrayed Dorsey and his three brothers to their master, from whom they had escaped in '36. The master, their reputed father, aided by a notorious slave catcher, came to Philadelphia and arrested Thomas, one of the brothers, and hurried him away to slavery, from which he was soon redeemed by his friends upon the payment of \$1000. Soon after the arrest of Thomas, these men secured the aid of a constable from Bristol and obtained warrants from Judge Fox, at Doylestown, for the arrest of the remaining brothers. Two escaped them and were taken by night by Robert Purvis' brother, Joseph, to a friend's house 40 miles distant, in New Jersey, whence they were forwarded to Canada. Basil alone now remained, and the slave hunters came upon him toward evening as he was ploughing at a distant point on Robert Purvis' farm. Word came quickly to Mr. Purvis, brought by the son of a neighboring farmer, of the attempt to capture and handcuff Dorsey, and he hastened to the spot, where he learned that they had already started to Bristol with their prey. Robert immediately had his fleetest horse harnessed and made pursuit, reaching Bristol as they were locking up Dorsey in a cell where criminals were con-

fined. He remonstrated, and addressed a crowd who assembled, telling them of the outrage, and warmly enlisting their sympathy. The master informed him that they would go to Doylestown the next morning, and bring the case before Judge Fox. In the morning, taking Dorsey's wife and two young children, Mr. Purvis drove to Doylestown, and employed as counsel Thomas Ross, one of the ablest lawyers then at the bar. When the case came up the judge was deeply moved, for, said Purvis recently, as he told me the story, "He was a man with human feelings if he was a judge;" and the forlorn condition of the hand-cuffed, dejected prisoner, and the tears of his young wife and their two children, moved every heart to pity. To gain time, and make the best possible defense, and for other reasons which appeared later, (but not before the court); the lawyer for the defense succeeded in putting off the case for two weeks, and the hand-cuffed prisoner was remanded to a cell. These two weeks were well used by Purvis and his friends. The colored people were thoroughly aroused, and preparations were made for a forcible rescue if the case went against Dorsey. As the time for the trial approached Purvis drove to Philadelphia, and called upon the best criminal lawyer at the bar in those days, David Paul Brown. He stated the case in a few words and offered Brown a fee of \$50 if he would come to Doylestown and defend Dorsey. To this Mr. Brown replied, almost indignantly, that he had never charged a dollar for defending a slave, and never would, but that he would gladly come to Doylestown and take the case as requested. At the end of two weeks the case came on before Judge Fox, and a young rising lawyer at that bar was the claimant's counsel. Mr. Brown was promptly on hand for the defendant. Although it was against the principle of the Abolitionists to pay for a slave, the great sympathy felt for Dorsey, and the fear of losing the case, had caused two attempts to be made to purchase him. The master asked \$500; when that price was offered by his friend, he raised the price to \$800; and that sum being also offered he demanded \$1000. "No," said Dorsey, when consulted, "do not pay it. I am prepared to take my life in court, if the case goes against me, for I will never go back to slavery." Mr. Purvis said to me that he could but commend the man for his brave resolution—and the case came on. The prosecuting attorney made a clear statement of the claim, presenting the bill of sale, and the necessary evidences

of the legality of the demand of the master. Robert Purvis felt, as he listened to the plea, and considered that the interpretation of the law which at that time was favorable to the slaveholder, that Dorsey's fate was practically sealed, unless the forcible rescue, contemplated and prepared for, was resorted to, upon which hundreds of well prepared colored men were resolved, but which they wished only to use as a last resort.

At this moment David Paul Brown arose, and his erect and stalwart form, and dignified and earnest manner, at once arrested the attention of the crowded court. He began by admitting the force of the arguments which the claimant's counsel had adduced, saying, "unfortunately, by the laws of this boasted land of freedom, the right of one man to claim another as his chattel slave in many of our states is unquestioned; and even in the states called free the slave owner from another state is permitted by the laws to seek his flying fugitive wherever he can be found; thus practically making these Northern States free hunting ground for the master seeking his fleeing bondmen." At this point he paused, and the anxiety of the friends of the fugitive on hearing this admission may be imagined. Then Mr. Brown suddenly drew himself up to his full height, raised his forefinger, pointing most earnestly to the opposing counsel, and continued in his most impressive manner; "Thus far I freely admit the force of the argument of the claimant's counsel, but there is one fatal flaw in this indictment, and upon that I take my stand. This is a land of law; this is a court of law; and nothing can be decided in this court but under the strict sanction of law. Am I not right?"

The judge, apparently deeply moved by the manner of Mr. Brown, graciously bowed assent. Mr. Brown proceeded: "The opposing counsel has made a clear case for his client except in one important point: he has not shown by proper evidence that under the laws of Maryland, a man may be held as a slave, and not showing this, his case goes by default." "But," exclaimed the young prosecuting attorney, "Maryland is a slave state. Everybody knows that Maryland is a slave state." "Everybody is nobody," thundered Mr. Brown. "Common report does not pass before a court of justice. You must prove it by the proper documents. The right to hold a fellow man as a slave is too important a right to rest upon any but th

most direct and substantial evidence." Here the young attorney stepped out and quickly brought a copy of the laws of Maryland, which Mr. Brown, after a glance at the title page, returned saying that it was not a properly certified copy. The young attorney then begged for a brief delay, that the demanded proof could be secured. But Mr. Brown was unrelenting and demanded the dismissal of the case for want of proper proof on this point. The Judge, who had been deeply moved by the plea of Mr. Brown, and his earnest manner grew more and more uneasy on his seat, and the whole feeling of the court and of the assembly was now evidently on the side of mercy. At this juncture the Judge arose and said suddenly: "The case is dismissed." Instantly Robert Purvis was at the elbow of Dorsey, leading him toward the door. A crowd of sympathizers rushed out with them and were just in time to see Purvis and Dorsey in a light carriage behind a fleet horse, disappear down Academy lane. So far as appears that was Basil Dorsey's last visit to Doylestown. They drove rapidly to Philadelphia, where Robert Purvis left Dorsey at his mother's, telling her to ask no questions, and keep him well concealed. Soon after he took him on to New York, where he was taken care of by good friends of the slave, and later was joined by his wife and children in New England.

Twenty-five years after, during the war that ended slavery, the door bell of Robert Purvis in Philadelphia was rung and a young colored man, of refined appearance and bearing, was ushered into his parlor. When Mr. Purvis came in he rose and said, "Is this Robert Purvis?" When told it was, he said, "My name is Robert Purvis Dorsey. You saved my father twenty-five years ago, and he has always told me that I must find your house first whenever I came to Philadelphia."

When Mr. Purvis told me this story a few weeks since, he was deeply affected, and seemed to dwell upon some parts of it especially, repeating them over and over, before he would let me go. He also added that he visited Basil Dorsey and his family a few years after the war, and that he found him a well to do citizen, with an interesting wife and a number of children, all of whom had received or were receiving a good education. "The whole case of Basil Dorsey," said Mr. Purvis, "I have always considered the most interesting case of my long and eventful life."

Wishing to know something of the later life of this hunted fugitive, I have made inquiry in different directions, but seemed to obtain no clue, when, a little later, I happened to speak of the case to Elizabeth Powell Bond, Dean of Swarthmore College, "Why," she exclaimed, "I preached the funeral sermon of Basil Dorsey in 1872!" In a few minutes she found among her papers, a printed copy of this admirable sermon, and in it I found printed the bill of sale of Basil Dorsey, executed in '51, soon after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law. He was then in business in Florence, Mass., and often called to Boston and elsewhere, and his numerous friends feared that under the new and infamous law, his liberty, even so far away as Massachusetts, might be again imperilled. So they made up the sum of \$150, which his old master preferred to accept, instead of incurring the risk of his recapture in those troublous years, when the war for freedom was preparing every day and received from the master this bill of sale. I had it carefully copied, and deposited it with our Historical Society, mementos of those dark days which are now happily passed, as I would deposit the slave-driver's whip, manacles, iron collars or any other relic of the barbarous system of slavery, for, in the language of Dean Bond, : "It is of historic value, as really a relic of barbarism as the instruments of torture by which the slave drivers maintained their authority."

As I afterwards told Robert Purvis, a short time before his death, of this interview with Dean Bond, the good old man was deeply moved, and said "Such coincidences, as they are sometimes called, are not accidental, and I firmly believe that you are divinely directed in the work which you have undertaken."

Among the hundreds of cases of fugitive slaves who have passed through our county of Bucks, according to the testimony of eye-witnesses, and especially the careful records of Richard Moore, many more might be verified by a thorough investigation, before the last of these engaged in the Underground Work have passed to the higher life. But these few may suffice as type cases illustrative of the sufferings endured, and the dangers bravely dared by this oppressed and long suffering race. And now that scarcely a generation has passed since their manumission by the brave hand of our first martyred President, let us further rejoice that their own efforts to rise, after their long generations in the house of bondage, have al-

ready resulted in placing rightfully in their hands over Five hundred million dollars worth of property in the Southern States; and that through the influence of their great leader, Booker T. Washington, they are rapidly gaining an interest in the cause of Education, through which they are to be placed in their proper position among their fellow men.

And furthermore, may we not, as American citizens, rejoice that, in the wise ordering of Divine Providence, this dark stain upon our National escutcheon is at last removed, and that our beloved country may now proudly take her place in the vanguard of the world's onward march among the nations of the earth.

ONE OF THE CHATTEL RECORDS OF BALTIMORE
COUNTY.

(BILL OF SALE.)

Know all men by these presents, That I, Thomas E. Sollers of Frederick County, and State of Maryland, for and in consideration of the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars lawful money of the United States, in hand paid by George Griscom, of the city of Philadelphia, in the State of Pennsylvania, Attorney at Law, at or before the sealing and delivery of these presents, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged: Have granted, bargained and sold, and by these presents do grant, bargain and sell, unto the said George Griscom, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, one Mulatto man, named Ephraim Costly, otherwise and now called Basil Dorsey, age about forty-three years, a slave for life. (The said Ephraim Costly, otherwise and now called Basil Dorsey, as aforesaid, having been born a slave for life of Sabrick Sollers, late of said Frederick County, in the State of Maryland, and raised by the said Sabrick Sollers, and owned by him as such slave for life until the decease of said Sabrick Sollers, after which he became the property, as such slave for life, of the said Thomas B. Sollers, (who is a son and one of the heirs at Law of said Sabrick Sollers, deceased), and is now a fugitive from service from said State of Maryland.)

To Have and To Hold the said described Mulatto Man Ephraim Costly, otherwise and now called Basil Dorsey, a slave for life as aforesaid to the said George Griscom, his Executors, Administrators and Assigns forever, and the said Thomas E. Sollers, for himself, his Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, the said Mulatto Man Ephraim Costly, otherwise Basil Dorsey, unto the said George Griscom, his Executors, Administrators and Assigns, against him the said Thomas E. Sollers, his Executors and Administrators, and against all and every other person or persons whatsoever, shall and will warrant and forever defend by these presents.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my Hand and Seal this Fourteenth day of May, Eight hundred and fifty-one, signed, sealed and delivered.

Thomas E. Sollers. (seal.)

In the presence of
P. Gorsuch.

STATE OF MARYLAND, }
CITY OF BALTIMORE, } S. S.

Be it Remembered, That on this fourteenth day of May, 1851 before the Subscriber, a Justice of the Peace for said state and city, appears Thomas E. Sollers and acknowledges the above Instrument of Writing to be his act and deed, according to the true intent and meaning thereof, and also at the same time personally appeared George Griscom and made oath on the Holy Evangels of Almighty God that the consideration set forth therein is true and bona fide as set forth.

P. GORSUCH.





