

## Slaves and Former Slaves in Clarendon?

In the *Stewart Farm* entry in the Farms and Barns collection there is an account from Clara (Stewart) Pierce (1837 – 1925) of what is clearly her parent's participation in the underground railroad from their home on East Street:

*When she and her brother Gilbert were about ten and eleven years of age they became aware that sometimes in the night time there were strange, unusual noises outside their East Street home. They asked their parents about these sounds and were assured that they were mistaken, that nothing unusual had happened. However, childlike they were still curious. The next time they became aware of movements outside their home they crept out of bed and out a window leading to a flat porch roof. From this roof they peered over the yard and saw that their father had harnessed a team of horses to a hay wagon. As they watched they saw their father unlock the door to the spring house behind the house and from this hiding place bring a black man whom he helped hide beneath the hay load. When morning came father was home and the horses and hay wagon were in their proper places.*

One can only wonder how many runaway slaves found temporary safety on the Stewart farm. Where did they go from there? Did any ever return to Clarendon?

The necessarily secretive nature of what the Stewarts did, and perhaps others in Clarendon that we have no accounts of, is such that we can't know the answer to those questions but we have been able to document several former slaves that did come to live in Clarendon for at least a period. There is also the possibility that there were slaves held in Clarendon despite the oft touted 1777 ban on slavery.

In doing this research it became quickly apparent that to a significant extent these people, if we know their names at all, either purposely lived below the radar or perhaps they were just ignored. Birth, marriage, death, burial, census and other commonly found data when researching people in this timeframe was missing in a way beyond what the author typically encounters when doing historical searches. We do know they were here however.

In the book *The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont 1777 – 1810* by Harvey Amani Whitfield, a history professor at the University of Vermont, we learn that the Vermont Constitution of 1777 only outlawed adult slavery (women 18+, males 21+). Minors could still be legally enslaved in Vermont. We also learn that the ban on adult slavery was ignored without consequence. The numbers of slaves in Vermont was perhaps exceedingly small compared to other States but there were still slaves in Vermont for decades after 1777. We do not have any data to know one way or another but the singular "free colored person" found in several households in the listing below may have been hired help or they may have been slaves even if not legally recognized as such under the 1777 VT State Constitution.

Prior to the 1850 census only the heads of households were identified by name. Everyone else in a household was categorized by gender, age, and race brackets; an exception being the 1790, 1800, & 1810 censuses that grouped "Free Colored Persons" all into a single grouping.

A search of the 1790 – 1840 censuses for Clarendon yielded the following:

| <u>Census</u> | <u># Households</u> | <u>Population</u> | <u>#Household w/Free Colored</u> | <u># Free Colored Persons</u> |
|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1790          | 257                 | 1478              | 0                                | 0                             |
| 1800          | 321                 | 1789              | 0                                | 0                             |
| 1810          | 253                 | 1797              | 6                                | 18                            |
| 1820          | 273                 | 1712              | 2                                | 2                             |
| 1830          | 246                 | 1585              | 1                                | 1                             |
| 1840          | 301                 | 1549              | 0                                | 0                             |

What follows are individuals that have been identified to date. Future research may identify more. Additional details beyond what we currently have on these people may as well surface.

### **Catherine Quow**

In 1793 the Town of Clarendon paid David Jewell (1746 - ?) of East St. to care for an indigent Catherine Quow. How old she was, where she came from, how she came to be in Clarendon, or what became of her are not known. That she was a public charge affirms that she was free.

What other members of her family may have been in Vermont at the time is not known but there were several standalone Quow households found in Rutland starting with the 1820 census. In 1864 one of the Quows from Rutland (Hannah b.ca. 1809 VT, married to Sylvester Quow) died of apoplexy in Clarendon.

In the book *Black Lives Native Lands White Worlds, A History of Slavery in New England*, author Jared Ross Hardesty writes that sometimes old or infirm slaves would be freed and turned out by their owners so as not to avoid the expense of caring for them. In such cases they would become public charges. That is one possibility in this case. That the Town of Clarendon incurred expense to care for Catherine is indicative that she was considered a member of the community. In that era it was common for towns, Clarendon included, to order indigents out of town if a case could be made that they were newcomers or should otherwise be more the responsibility of some other community.

### **Asa Blagdon**

In January 1808, "*Asa Blagdon, a negro man*" was warned out of Clarendon. Warnings were legal notices issued by the Selectboard ordering people to leave the community. This typically was to avoid the person becoming a public charge or due to bad behavior. See the *Warned Out of Town* entry in the people collection for more information on this. While we have records of such warnings for the period 1786 –1787 and 1802 – 1816, those records do not say what the specific basis was each person or family. That Asa was warned out affirms that he was free. Nothing further was found on him.

### **Cato Williams**

The 1810 census reflects a 5 person household living in Clarendon Flats next to Mary Hodges, widow of Silas Hodges and owner of the Hodges Inn. Cato was born in 1744 either in the West Indies or Connecticut. He died in Westfield, MA in 1828. With his wife Lydia (1765 – 1847) who was born in the West Indies, he had at least 7 children. He was in Connecticut from at least the early 1780's to the early 1800's. In 1809 they bought property for \$215 in Mansfield, CT where they had been living and then their son Bildad Williams (1785 – 1851) sold it in two transactions in 1815 & 1817. Perhaps they were buying property for Bildad to live in after Cato & Lydia moved to Clarendon? By 1820 they were in Lenox, MA. What brought him to Clarendon is not known, nor why he left but having \$215 to buy property in Connecticut and being a standalone family unit all but assures us they were free well before they came to Clarendon.

### **Pompey Giers**

The 1810 census reflects a 4 person household in the Clarendon Flats area living next door to that of Richard Geers below. Which spelling is correct (Giers vs Geers) is not known. It being an intact family in its own household is indicative that they were free. There were white Giers families in nearby Pawlet, VT and in Argyle, NY in the 1810 census but whether there is a connection is not known. No trace of Pompey before or after the 1810 census has been found. There were white Geer/Geers families in Vermont starting with the 1790 census but again, a connection has not been found.

### **Richard Geers**

This household of 6 lived next door to that of Pompey Giers above. It being an intact family in its own household is indicative that they were free. No trace of Richard before or after the 1810 census has been found.

### **Silas Whitney Household**

Silas Whitney (1736 - 1813) and his family came to Clarendon by 1777 where he worked as a blacksmith and served as Town Clerk as well as being a Rev. War veteran. This household lived on Middle Rd in the North Clarendon part of town. In the 1810 census his household of 9 people included one "free colored person" for which we have no other information as to name, gender, age, occupation, or most importantly what his/her actual status was.

### **Randall Rice Household**

Randall Rice (1769 – 1826) came to Clarendon as a young man, marrying here in 1790. In the 1810 census this 8 person household in Clarendon Flats included one "free colored person" for which we have no other information as to name, gender, age, occupation, or most importantly what his/her actual status was.

### **Phillip Briggs Household**

Phillip Briggs (1756 – 1821) served in the Rev. War and lived on the southern end of East St. His family was amongst the very first settlers in Clarendon. In the 1810 census his household of 8 people included one “free colored person” for which we have no other information as to name, gender, age, occupation, or most importantly what his/her actual status was.

### **Benjamin Roberts Household**

Benjamin Roberts (1788 – 1841) served in the Rev. War and was the son of General Christopher Roberts of Manchester, VT. He came to Clarendon as a young man, marrying here in 1814. His Clarendon Flats household in 1820 consisted of 12 people including one “free colored female” under age 14. Sometimes children were hired out at young ages and that may be the most likely case here but there being only two black people in Clarendon in 1820 and a very low black population in the area from which to hire a child from, it is a fair question as to where she came from and what her effective status was.

### **Jacob Button Household**

Jacob Button (1775 – 1850) lived in the very southern part of Clarendon on what is now Rt 7B South. His Uncle Charles Button and family were the first documented family in Clarendon in 1767. In the 1820 census this 12 person household included one “free colored male” between the ages of 26 and 44. He most likely was a hired hand working on the farm. Who he was, where he came from, and what his background was are questions likely never to be answered.

### **Artemus Oliver Household**

Artemus Oliver (1806 – ca. 1880) does not appear to have lived in Clarendon for very long. In the 1830 census his 3 person household included a “free colored male” between the ages of 24 and 35. He most likely was a hired hand working on the farm but who he was, where he came from, and what his background was are questions likely never to be answered.

### **Brister Bennett**

Most of what we know of Brister comes from Revolutionary War pension application records. He was born ca. 1755 possibly in Rhode Island but more likely in the West Indies. How this question arises is in his 1818 petition for a veteran’s pension he indicates that he has been a resident citizen of the US for more than 50 years and is currently 63 years old. It could mean he was freed as a child and counts his citizenship from that point. It more likely means he arrived in the US as a child and counted his citizenship from that point in time. He was owned by the Bennett family of Warwick, RI and then subsequently Cheshire, MA. Rhode Island was the center of the slave trade in the US and had more slaves than anywhere else in New England. The majority of the slaves coming from the West Indies and Africa to the US were on ships owned and operated out of Rhode Island. Slaves living in Rhode Island but not born there largely came from the West Indies; thus Brister having come from the West Indies as a child is very plausible.

We know that Brister was living in Cheshire by 1777 when he enlisted in the Massachusetts Line for 3 years. He initially served under Capt. Isaac Warren in Colonel Bailey's Regiment. His service took him to Stillwater, NY where his unit faced General Burgoyne, Valley Forge, the battle at Monmouth, NJ, and West Point. Per his petition his only break in service is when he had smallpox. In the book *Dark Work, The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island*, we learn from author Christy Clark-Pujara that it was common for New England slaves to be freed in exchange for their service in the Revolutionary War. 1777 could thus possibly be the point at which Brister was freed.

After the war he was again back in Cheshire where in 1786 he married Patience b.ca. 1759. Patience had been owned by Colonel Lowe. This was most likely Colonel Caleb Lowe of Danvers, MA. How or when she came to be in Cheshire is not known.

Brister and Patience had 4 children; Brister Jr. b. 1787, a daughter who died as an infant, James b. 1792 in Vermont, and another child who died in infancy. Nothing further has been found on Brister Jr. Perhaps he too died young. Before coming to Vermont this family lived in Adams, MA which is immediately north of Cheshire. The 1800 census found the family living in Shoreham, VT, in Benson in 1810, and in 1820 in Leicester, VT living next door to their son James. On Oct. 27, 1810 Brister and family were warned out of Benson. They were again in Benson at the time of his 1818 pension petition. In 1830 Brister and Patience were in Benson living with their son James and family which consisted of his wife Lucy Ann and a son & daughter, both under 10. An affidavit by Alanson Congdon of Clarendon made after Brister's death in conjunction with Patience's petition for a widow's pension seems to indicate Brister was already living in Clarendon by 1830. Brister died in 1835 in Clarendon but no record of his burial has been found in Clarendon or back in Benson.

Following Brister's death Patience applied for a widow's benefit as did a woman named Harriet who represented herself as Brister's wife. Harriet had been living with Brister in Clarendon. Several affidavits were filed in conjunction with this dispute and it appears the defining one in favor of Patience came from Alanson Congdon. It made clear that Brister considered Patience his wife when he was living in Clarendon and that he provided some degree of financial support to her. Patience died in 1844, most likely in Benson. Where she was buried is not known.

At the time of Patience's death James was the only surviving child of Brister and Patience. By the time of the 1850 census James was living on East Clarendon Rd roughly near where the road crosses the rail tracks. He worked as a laborer and died here in 1861 of typhoid. Where he is buried is not known. His widow Lucy Ann is found living in Rutland in 1870 with no further record of her being found. Lucy had been born in Massachusetts but nothing further on her background is known.

James & Lucy had a daughter Frances, 19 years old in the 1850 census. She may have married a Bradish and been widowed by 1880 when a Frances Bradish is found in Woodstock, VT. James & Lucy had a son of which nothing is known and likely also had a daughter Lucy Ann who married Charles Henry Gardner in Dorset in 1865. Nothing further is known about them.

### **Henry Howard**

We have only a single data point on Henry Howard; the 1860 census where we find him living at the Clarendon House in Clarendon Springs. He was 55 years old and working there as a cook. Listed as a mulatto in the census he was the only person of color living at the hotel. Henry was born in Maryland which had a significant free black population by time he was born. It is thus possible he was born free but his coming to be in Clarendon Springs might offer a clue. Migration into Vermont tended to be from elsewhere in New England, not from Maryland or points south. The author speculates that he may have come to know of Clarendon Springs as a servant of a hotel guest. There are accounts of slaves accompanying their masters to Clarendon Springs.

How long Henry lived in Clarendon Springs is not known, nor has any subsequent trace of him been found.

### **James Phillips**

James Phillips is found living in Clarendon Flats in the 1870 census. He was 27 years old and from Virginia. James was living with Elizabeth Phillips who was 40, white, and from Massachusetts. James was working as a farm laborer but we don't know which farm. In 1880 he is found listed as 40 years old and working as a farm laborer in Rutland, living in the Samuel Parker household. The 1880 census also shows him as a farm laborer boarding at the Charles Burditt household in Pittsford. Perhaps he was picked up twice due to the timing of a move from one location to the other. Elizabeth is not with him in 1880. Did James come to Vermont from Massachusetts or did he connect with Elizabeth here? No trace of James Phillips has been found after the 1880 census.

In the Oct. 26, 1875 Rutland Daily Globe there is a report of him *"...undertaking to "play possum" on Valiquette, the shoe merchant, Saturday. He went to him and asked for a pair of shoes, saying that he worked for Thomas Quincy of Clarendon and meant to bring down an order, but forgot it. Valiquette told him that he would give him a pair, but if he wasn't square he would hear from him again. Phillips took a \$2 pair and departed. Monday Quincy came to Rutland and said Phillips did not work for him. Crawford was at once dispatched, and when he found Phillips, that gentleman forked over at once, remarking that he "meant to come up and settle it in a day or two."* Thomas Quincy was a prosperous farmer living on Schoolhouse Hill Rd at the time.

A James Phillips then 8 years old and born in Virginia was found in the 1850 census living in Baltimore, MD with 7 siblings, his mother, another woman and her 5 children but Phillips is a sufficiently common name that something more would be needed to make a connection to that household. The youngest of those 5 children, then 11 months old was born in Maryland, thus possibly indicating this James arrived from Virginia in 1849.

### **Charles Washington**

In the 1870 census Charles Washington is found living on a section of Walker Mountain Rd that was discontinued in 1916 when the road north of the intersection with Schoolhouse Hill Rd was relocated to

the east side of the river. He was 25 years old and from Louisiana working as a farm laborer and living in the Henry Hitchcock household. No other trace of him has been found. Did he come to Vermont before or during the Civil War as a runaway?

**Jack Carpenter**

Jack Carpenter is found living on what is now Pluss Lane in the 1870 census. He was 18 years old and from Tennessee working as a farm laborer and living in the Lucian B. Parker household. No other trace of him has been found. Did he come to Vermont before or during the Civil War as a runaway?

Despite how much we don't know about the people noted in this essay, documenting what we do know might serve to aid future research that adds to this.

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