

Slavery and Emancipation: Contradictions and Challenges

History is not the endless lists of names and dates we remember from school. It is, instead, stories – full of characters, conflicts, and contradictions. So, for instance, while the American South was an economy based, even dependent on the labor of slaves, the North was not free of this “peculiar institution.”

An unexpected connection to slavery was the prosperous mills in Union County in the 18th and 19th centuries. Gristmills produced flour which supported slavery in the South by providing cheap food for slaves who produced the more-valued rice, and later the highly desirable cotton, for Southern landowners. “Water-powered Gristmills of Union County, Pennsylvania” recently published by the Union County Historical Society, provides insight into this aspect of local history..

Others benefitted from the work of free blacks as iron furnace workers, miners, hostlers, barbers and farm laborers. Women served as household servants, cooks and nursemaids. Although the African American population was small in this area, they were an integral part of society, detailed in UCHS's “African Americans in Union County: Free and Slave.”

Linn's *Annals of Buffalo Valley* has a number of references to slavery. In 1780, Samuel Hunter, residing on Penns Creek, was taxed for his property: servants, a negro, horse, cow, [silver] spoons. Also in 1780, James Jenkins of Buffalo Township sold his slave 'Tom' to Colonel John Patton of Centre County. “Tom was thirty years old when the emancipation act of 1780 was passed, but was registered [incorrectly] and believed he was still a slave.

The Pennsylvania Emancipation (Gradual Abolition) Act of 1780

“Be it enacted ... That all Persons, as well Negroes, and Mulattos, as others, who shall be born within this State, from and after the Passing of this Act, shall not be deemed and considered as Servants for Life or Slaves.....That every Negroe and Mulatto Child born within this State after the passing of this Act ... who would in Case this Act had not been made, have been born a Servant for Years or life or a Slave, shall be the Servant of such person or his or her Assigns, who would in such Case have been entitled to the Service of such Child until such Child shall attain unto the Age of twenty eight Years.....That every Person who is or shall be the Owner of any Negroe or Mulatto Slave or Servant shall on or before the said first day of November next, deliver [to the clerk of the court where he/she resides], the Name and Surname and Occupation or Profession of such Owner, and the Name of the County and Township District or Ward where he or she resideth, and also the Name and Names of any such Slave and Slaves and Servant and Servants for Life.....”

The purpose of this act was to gradually remove slavery from the commonwealth. Those who were already enslaved would remain so, unless freed by their owners; children born to slaves would be freed at age 28 after working for their owners for those years. It took two generations for slavery to be “abolished” in Pennsylvania.

In 1786 Eli Holman, Samuel Hunter and John Linn are each taxed for possessing female slaves. A bill of sale indicates that John Linn purchased 'Judy' from John McBeth of Chester County. Judy lived in Union County until 1844, then moved to Ohio with the Linns, dying there in 1855, age 100-plus, having spent her life in servitude.

Samuel Dale's will, filed at his death in 1804, mentions slave "Dinah" as the property of his wife. Dinah was born a slave (to mulatto slave Jinn) in the mid 1700's at the Futhey household in Chester County. According to the 1780 law, Dinah would be a slave her entire life unless freed by her owner, Anne Futhey Dale, who did not do so. Dale's son James, who remained on the family property, held one or two slaves until the 1840s. Samuel Dale's extensive library is catalogued in his will. An analysis by James Wiley Clements, in UCHS's "Samuel Dale: A Life and Estate" shows a man interested in history, philosophy, the arts, and especially religion.

The program "George and Martha Washington and Slave Holding" on Sunday, Feb 16 at 2 PM will explore slavery and contradictions with historic figures. This free program will, fittingly, be presented at Samuel Dale's house, The Dale/Engle/Walker House, 1471 Strawbridge Road, Lewisburg.

For more information on slavery, African American history and local industries, visit the Union County Historical Society, located in the county courthouse, 103 S. Second St., Lewisburg.

EAST Buffalo Township										Free People of Color	Slaves	
	10	16	26	45	45	10	16	26	45	45		
Dale Samuel			1	1	2		1	1		1		1
Duncle Peter	1		1	1	2	2		1		1		
Demsey W.			2				1			1		
Dunlap William	2			1					1			
Dunaguy John	3						1			1		

From the 1800 census.

The Act for the gradual Abolition of Slavery.

When we contemplate our Abhorrence of that Condition to which the Arts and Industry of Great Britain were excited to reduce us, when we look back on the Vanity of Tempors to which we have been exposed, and how miraculously our Wants in many Instances have been supplied, and our Deliverances wrought, when even Hope and human Fortitude have become unequal to the Conflict, we are unavoidably led to a serious and grateful Sense of the manifold Blessings which we have unconsciously received from the hand of that Being from whom every good and perfect Gift cometh. Impressed with these Ideas we conceive that it is our duty, and we rejoice that it is our our Power, to extend a Release of that Freedom to others, which hath been extended to us, and a Release from that State of Servitude, to which we & ourselves were tyrannically doomed, and from which we have now every Prospect of being delivered. It is not for us to enquire, why in the Creation of Mankind, the Inhabitants of the several parts of the Earth, were distinguished by a difference in Feature or Complexion. It is sufficient to know that all are

Photograph of the 1780 Abolition Act.