

SULLIVAN COUNTY SLAVES

Last month's article covered the slaves of New York State in general, while this month will cover a little of the Sullivan County slaves.

It is quite apparent that little, if anything at all, was ever compiled regarding the subject, so what little there is, is taken from a clipping found here and there over the years.

One of the reasons being that the majority of this area was not settled until such a late date, would also help account for the fact that, there probably were relatively few slaves in the area.

From the records of the old Reformed Dutch Church of Bloomingburg which was formed in 1820 we find "Early membership rolls list several persons marked colored. All probably were slaves as they bear names of some persons known to own slaves. Slaves were buried outside the old cemetery as evidenced by stones along the western fence". It is also probable that the "colored" sat in pews in the balcony area.

In Liberty, Dr. Rosetta Sherwood Hall, the Korean Missionary lady, wrote in 1920 about her grandfather and his family coming to the Liberty area from Fairfield County, Connecticut. She wrote as follows:

"Early in the spring of 1808 grandfather and grandmother decided to take their growing family to the Blue Mountain Settlement."

"Grandfather sent his servant Bill, a colored man, on before him a day or two. Bill drove a yoke of oxen attached to an old fashioned yankee "butterfly cart" containing corn, etc. He also drove a hog, which he fed along the road, with corn from the cart. Grandfather and family followed in a large wagon drawn by horses, carrying with them provision, clothing and a few necessary articles of furniture. They went to Newburgh, and then came into Sullivan County by way of the Newburgh and Cohecton Turnpike which was then uncompleted. It was a long and tedious journey."

"Before Grandfather caught up with Bill he used to inquire along the road if anyone had noticed such a person passing that way. It was no trouble to indicate who he meant for the strange rig had attracted a good deal of attention along the way, and the people would answer 'Yes we saw a blackman, a black dog, a black hog, a black ox and a butterfly cart pass this way a short time ago.'"

"About 1813, Grandfather gave Bill his freedom and he went to

Kingston where he became a hostler, and by dint of faithful service, and careful savings, he became a rich man- so that he was able to buy his cloths off the same piece of broadcloth that the aristocrats of Kingston did- very much to their chagrin."

We also find that Samuel F. Jones, one of the Jones brothers that founded the Village of Monticello was a slave owner. The other brother, John, was active in the anti-slavery cause.

The following is taken from an article written in 1954 by the Monticello Sesquicentennial Committee.

"Slick, a slave owned by Jones was asked to plough a piece of land at the corner of what is now Broadway and Spring Streets. The oxen assigned to the job were old and weak and Slick was lazy. Day after day he slipped into the neighboring woods to rest in their welcome shade. After dark he would return to his home for food and sleep. Slick's exasperated owner finally got his field ploughed by use of the following strategy.

The oxen were not fed in the morning and consequently were unusually hungry. A bundle of hay was fastened to slick's back and he was harnessed in front of the oxen. Smelling food, they strained to reach it. Fear drove Slick forward and the faster he moved, the faster the oxen dragged the plough after them. The field was ploughed in record time and Jones was reported to have been proud of the expedient, though the day in which we live questions its rightness."

Finally from the March 30, 1967 Sullivan County Record - under Down the Decades - 70 years ago, (which would make the year of happening 1897)

"The last reminder of the institution of negro slavery and the last subject of that specie of bondage living in Sullivan County, died at the County Alms House March 22. Her name was Jennie Thompson and she was brought into this county early in the century by William A. Thompson, the first Judge of the County, and at that time the most prominent resident. She remained Judge Thompson's chattel until 1826, when she was freed with all other slaves by the law of the State. After she became free, she preferred to live with her old master as a hired servant. She was 87 years old and as black as coal."

SLAVERY IN NEW YORK

The Dutch West India Company established New Netherland as a trading post and in 1626 brought over the first company - imported slaves from Africa, eleven in all. They were put to work on the company farms and the construction of public buildings and military works. The Company intended to be the sole importer, but by 1648 the slave trade was opened to all.

At the time of the English conquest of New Netherland in 1664, Negro slaves constituted probably about 10% of the total population.

Following the takeover by the British, the number of slaves in the Colony increased dramatically until New York finally came to have the largest slave population among the non-plantation English Colonies in the New World. By 1723 almost 15% of the population was Negro and it remained there until at least 1756.

Until nearly the close of the Colonial period, Negroes were concentrated mostly in New York City and the surrounding Counties of Kings, Queens, and Richmond. It was not until the white population in the upper Hudson Valley increased in the 1760's and 1770's that there was a growth in the number of upstate slaves. In this upstate area, slaves were used as agricultural laborers on farms, as servants in the houses, in manufacturing, in commerce and in a variety of skilled and semi-skilled occupations.

The use of Negro slaves in New York was vastly broadened by the widespread practice of hiring out slaves to non-slave owners who needed their particular skills. Individuals could hire Negroes from their owners by the day, month or year.

Although some masters owned bands of over 30 slaves, in the closing years of the Colonial period, few individuals owned more than 10 slaves and the average master had between one and three slaves in the household.

In New York the Negroes did not usually work in large gangs at simple repetitive tasks under the eyes of hired overseers.

Either in the city or on the farm the New York Negro was likely to live in his master's household and work along side him in the

fields or at his place of business. He was of course a slave, but a personal relationship between black slave and white master existed which was not likely on a large Southern plantation.

Slaves in New York were legally considered to be property and were taxed as property, could be bequeathed and inherited, and of course bought and sold. In theory, if not in practice, slaves could not legally be married or hold or transmit property, with the single exception of land given to slaves as a reward for service during the American Revolution.

Antislavery first became a live political issue in New York in the 1760's when the Colony joined the chorus of opposition to the British regulatory acts which many felt were unfair and unjust.

At first, during the Revolutionary War, the official British position was to treat the slaves as neutrals, but in 1779 Sir Henry Clinton, then Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in America, directed that all slaves who sought asylum with the English be granted their freedom and during the 7 year occupation by the British of New York City thousands of slaves escaped or earned their freedom fighting for the Patriot side.

In the 15 years from 1771 to 1786, the white population in New York State grew by about 47 percent while the Negro population declined by about 5 percent. This made a decline in the cost of hiring free labor to the point where free workers could compete successfully with slave laborers. The economic benefits of slavery as a labor institution was removed.

An abolition bill to free the slaves was introduced in the 1785 session of the State Legislature but it was not until 1799 that the Legislature approved a gradual emancipation bill. This bill provided that all male children born to a slave woman after July 4, 1799 were to be freed at age 28, and the female children at age 25. Those slaves born before July 4, 1799 were not freed until a second emancipation act was passed in 1817. Slaves could still be brought into the State by outsiders, but after 1817 no New Yorker could own a slave.

***The above was taken from a small publication entitled
"The Black Minority in Early New York" by David Kobrin

Welcome New Members

Eric Akerley Family
 Harry Baer
 Charles Barbuti, Jr
 Vira Bernhardt
 Lawrence & Linda Bartholf
 George H. Branning
 Bruce Buckman
 Dr. Momroe Cravats

Robert Bantel & Debra Pelo
 Dorothy M. DiBello
 Charles E. Fisher
 Martian & Harriet Gottlieb
 Cris Harding
 Helen Maliga Hegman
 Virdana Lawrence
 Thomas H. Lewis

Vic & Ginger McCarthy
 John & Ann Pieplow
 Barbara Slater
 Mary M. Stone
 Karen Tolcz
 John Conrad Weisner
 Sturart & Ilene Wizer

SCS Observer, 1997

Strongtown

by Delbert VanEtten

Reprinted from a previous Observer

Adinop Strong with Anna, his wife, and their children moved from Southbury, Connecticut into Sullivan County in the year 1809 and settled in the northwest part of the present Town of Thompson. This area became Strong Settlement and eventually was known as Strongtown.

The early Strong Settlement apparently was in the area of the present Strong Road and Old Route 17. From here it just spread out until it reached the O&W Railroad on the north and the present Harris on the south.

The present Methodist Church in Harris is actually known as the Strongtown Methodist Church and the bridge over the O&W Railway was always known as the Strongtown Crossing.

Many years previous to this, a creamery operated at the site and the Strongtown farmers sent their milk to the city on the old O&W Railway. Mrs. Merle Zufall, who was Gertrude Burger before her marriage, tells me that her grandfather Christian Berger before her operated this creamery for a period of time. Mr. Burger also either owned or operated other creameries in our area. One located at White Sulphur Springs and another at Livingston Manor. There may have been more.

Perhaps a quarter of a mile south of the Strongtown Bridge was "Old Hickory Farm", the home of Nathaniel G. Gorton and his family. This was back about 1875. One of his sons, Fred S. Gorton, became in 1908, the first Rural Mail Carrier out of the Liberty Post Office.

Traveling south, probably a mile or more toward Monticello, was the Clark Gorton farm which became along with other land, the present Dewey Carr farm, which is probably the largest operating farm left in the town of Liberty (at the time this was written, Ed).

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Last slave in Sullivan County:

Correspondence of the Gazette--March 25 (no year)
 Monticello N.Y.

Death of the oldest colored woman in the County;

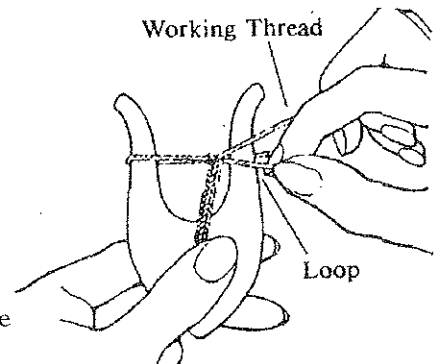
She was born a slave and refused to leave her Master when freedom was granted by the State.

Day before yesterday there died at the County Farm, Virginia Gregory, the oldest colored woman in the County and the last of the few who were held in the bonds of slavery. She was eighty seven years old and up to within a few hours of her death, she was hale and hearty, her only weakness lay in being a victim of rheumatism.

When she was five years old she was bought by Judge Wm. Thompson, the man after whom this town of Thompsonville was named and the first Judge of the Sullivan County Court of Common Pleas. When she was fourteen, slavery was abolished in the State and one of the Judge's daughters, now Mrs. Helen M. Allyn, told her she was free and could go away if she wished. "Go yourself" she retorted. "I have just as much right here as anybody." and she stayed on working for the Thompson family until her rheumatism would permit her to work no longer.

When pretty well on in years she married a Methodist preacher named "Gobe" Gregory and settled down as the Thompson Domestic, in the little house built for her by the Thompson family. She was aristocratic and

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Whatchamacallit

Highlights of the Society Board Meeting

1. Treasurer's report was read and approved.
2. Pat Burns reported heaving secured two grants,
3. A copy of each of A. Ruth Kortright's books on local history were donated to the museum by Mrs. Kortright.
4. The nominating committee was appointed.
5. Plans for future membership meetings were discussed.
6. A discussion was held on the work done, in the Museum building, by BOCES students.

..... Last Slave, cont. from page 5

never would associate with anyone whom she did not consider socially equal to the Thompson family.

A few years ago while she still lived in her little cottage at Thompsonville, she gave a little tea party to which she invited the decedents of her old Master and a few other friends. Among those present was Judge VanWagoner of St. Louis, MO.

Her burial took place today and she was buried in the old Thompsonville Cemetery at Thompsonville.

Contributed by:

William Buchman of South Fallsburgh, N. Y.

..... Strongtown, cont. from page 5

Adjoining the Carr farm, at the corner of the Queen Mountain House Road, was the Strongtown School House known as District 17 of the Town of Liberty. This was a typical one-room school house, without indoor toilets and a wood stove for heat. Some of the teachers names were: Bailey, Pearlman, Royce, Greening, Dillon, Rogler and Tripps. This school stopped at the eighth grade and the students had to go to the old Union School in Liberty in order to finish high school. It was a long drive with a horse and buggy or sleigh up through Liberty Falls (Ferndale) and into the Village of Liberty.

Just below the Carr Farm is the line between the Towns of Liberty and Thompson, thus showing that Strongtown sprawled over the two townships and apparently had no exact bounds.

On south below the Thompson line, and where the present Funfare is, was the farm of Christian Bunger, Sr. which was later purchased by his son Christian H. Bunger, Jr. There was a large farm house on the property and this was enlarged even more so that the family could take in "summer boarders." The place was originally known as the Spring Lake Farm House, but later was changed to Bunger's Farm because some other place had used the name Spring Lake.

Mrs. Zufall also stated that her people had one of the first telephones in the Strongtown area and that she could recall the neighbors coming in to call Central in times of emergency.

In later years, perhaps about 1920, and before leaving the area, the Bungers acquired another farm that was known as the Charles McDonald place. This was south below the original farm and also below the Strong

Cemetery where many of the Strongs are buried. This cemetery is shown on the Atlas of Sullivan County that was printed in 1875.

Continuing on south we come, in perhaps another mile, to the Strongtown Church at Harris. This is a second church that was built at this site, for the original church burned, Quinlan, page 633, states "The Methodist church at Mongaup Centre (Strongtown Settlement) was built in 1860 when it had 60 members." Child's Gazetteer at page 196-0 states basically the same thing.

Therefore, we know that Harris, which got its Post Office in April 1907 was once named Mongaup Center and at one time was a portion of Strongtown.

There is no doubt much more that could be added, but for the present this is about all we know so far. It is at least a little of the history of one of the nearly forgotten communities

My sincere thanks to Mrs. Merle Zufall for sending me several letters containing much information on the Strongtown area. Also sincere thanks to Mrs. Dorothy Tait for sending me genealogy on the Strong family.

..... April Members Meeting, cont. from page 10

length. The water travels by a second aqueduct under the Hudson River to the Kensico Reservoir in Westchester.

In time the Rondout was joined by the Neversink Reservoir which sends its waters to the Rondout via an 10' underground tunnel cut through solid rock. Two more reservoirs were later included in the system. The Pepacton Reservoir was filled by the waters of the East Branch of the Delaware River and the Cannonsville Dam finished in 1970 was built on the West Branch. Lengthy underground tunnels which required years of arduous construction carry the waters from these reservoirs to the Rondout.

The size of the system is indicated by the fact that the water drops 1,000 feet from its highest location to the City and that it generates electricity along the way. Many miles of tunnel, 20' in diameter, have been constructed, and some of the reservoirs reach a depth of 200' at their deepest point.

Cloonan also discussed the work of the system. It operates a complex monitoring service to determine that proper water levels are maintained in all areas affected by the rivers. It has its own police force, maintains over 100 miles of roads, provides fishing opportunities, has built and upgraded several sewage plants for communities located in the watershed, provides water for three-quarters of the communities in Westchester County, and even maintains burial grounds for people formerly buried in cemeteries now lying beneath the reservoirs.

All in all, a fascinating evening. The Society certainly appreciates the wealth of information provided by Mr. Cloonan.

ad

Answer to Whatchamacallit: The laucet is a flat, lyre-shaped tool from three to six inches long, with tow horns curve outward and tapered at the ends, and a small hole in the base. It produces a square, tightly-braided cord that is very strong and won't stretch.