Black Eldorado on the Susquehanna: The Emergence of Black Columbia, 1726-1861

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In November 1985 Lancaster Countians witnessed a truly historic event. For the first time in the County's long history a Black politician was elected mayor of one of its municipalities. As chance— or perhaps tradition— would have it that municipality is located in a quadrant of the County that is steeped in Black history. So rich is that quadrant's Black heritage that its investigation seemed not only appropriate but long overdue. The municipality in question is, of course, Columbia Borough and the following essay is intended as a brief overview of the Black presence in the Borough from the earliest years of settlement up to the Civil War.

The Civil War was chosen as the terminal point for this study because it represents the high water mark of Black hopes and aspirations in the 19th Century. Nationally, the war was an opportunity to end the ignoble servitude which had victimized Blacks for two centuries. Locally, the successful prosecution of the war held forth to Blacks the hope of a restoration of their right to vote, a right

which had been revoked by the State Constitutional Convention in 1838. Furthermore, the defeat of the slave power promised intangible benefits for Blacks in the nation's social, political, and economic arenas. Full social equality in the context of what could be termed today as "equal opportunity" was the ultimate goal and hope of Afro-Americans. The tragedy of the Reconstruction Era was the partial realization of this dream and then its indefinite deferral.

The backdrop for this study is Hempfield Township and Columbia Borough itself. Before proceeding to the heart of our topic, it is necessary first to recount some well-known facts about Columbia and relate them to the Afro-American experience. The area that now encompasses East and West Hempfield Township was part of Chester County's western frontier at the beginning of the 18th Century. Settlement along the Susquehanna was important to Pennsylvania's future development not only because of the boundary dispute with Maryland that precipitated Cresap's War (1731-36) but also because the Susquehanna was a trade route that provided direct access from Pennsylvania's hinterland to the West and to the Chesapeake, the heartland of the American colonies.

Development of Hempfield proceeded rather quickly. In 1701 William Penn had granted George Beale a patent for 3,000 acres along the Susquehanna. 500 acres of this land came to Jeremiah Langhorne in 1718. Robert Barber acquired Langhorne's tract in August 1726. The witnesses to this transaction were Samuel Blunston and John Wright, close friends of Barber who themselves in turn became property owners along the Susquehanna. Wright and his daughter Susannah purchased 250 acres of Barber's land and Blunston, although he bought a sizeable tract adjoining the Wright property, actually settled on a portion of Susannah Wright's land which he bought from her. With the arrival of Blunston, Barber, and Wright the stage was set for Columbia's development.

Blunston, Barber, and Wright took possession of and moved to their lands at various times between 1726-28, Barber was by all accounts the first to visit the site in the Spring of 1726 but he died before his family took actual possession of the land. According to a journal kept by the Wrights a group left Darby (Chester County) for Conestoga on September 12, 1726. In the group were: "John Wright, Samuel Blunston, H. Scarlet, L. Ryley, John Devel, Prince, an Indian; Negro Peter, Negro Sal."[1] Samuel Wright, a great-great-grandson of John, indicates that Scarlet, Ryley, and Devel were "mechanics" left to build shelter for the three families near Shawanah Town, the Indian settlement on the Susquehanna within the present day boundaries of Columbia.[2] Of greater interest for our purposes are

"Negro Peter" and "Sal."

Samuel Wright identifies them as slaves of Samuel Blunston and cites Blunston's will of 1745 as evidence: Blunston stipulated that his "Negro Sal" serve Susannah Wright for a year and then receive an annuity of 5 £. Blunston's will contains more than just the reference to his slave Sal. He bequeathed manumission for four Blacks, namely, Tobe, Vertulas, Sal, and Harry but far more interesting is the following statement:[3]

> [. . .] all the rest of my Negroes who are arrived at full age if they behave well I order shall be set free at ye end of seven years after the date of this and all younger Negroes and Molatto's not yet mentioned shall be free at ye ages of thirty years respectively as near as ye time can be calculated [. . .]

Blunston's slave retinue was apparently considerable.

Given the fact that he and his compatriots were Quakers, it might seem uncharacteristic that Blunston would be a slaveholder. However, it is important to recall how deeply Pennsylvania Quakers were involved in the slave trade during the Colonial Period. The Quaker leadership had permitted slavery when the colony was young and their involvement in and toleration of the slave trade did not really disappear until just before the Revolutionary War. At that time any member of the Society of Friends who engaged in slave trading or who owned a slave was punishable by expulsion.

The reason for the obvious permissiveness before 1775 was the fact that slavery was an essential feature of the colony's economic life. Initially it helped alleviate the severe labor shortage caused by the colony's inability to attract sufficient numbers of colonists. Then in the 18th Century slavery became a status symbol, an emblem of social standing that certified a level of affluence not shared by all. As such it is not surprising that slavery would be taken to the frontier by pioneers who could benefit from its dual function.

A perusal of Hempfield Township tax lists offers some interesting insights into the role slavery played in the area's early history. Unfortunately, no tax lists are available in Lancaster County for the period 1729-1753. After 1754 references to slaves are sporadic which may indicate that such enumerations for tax purposes occurred infrequently. Between 1754-1800 references to slaves are found in the tax lists for 1758, 1759, 1769, 1773, 1783, 1785, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1796, and 1798. After 1800 the category of "Negroes" or "Slaves" was not included in the lists.

According to the tax lists the number of slaves in Hempfield Township between 1758-1799 did not exceed 13. A comparison of lists from before and after the Revolutionary War can perhaps illustrate who the slaveowners were. In 1769 the following slave-

owners were identified:[4]

OWNER	NO. OF SLAVES
Barber, Nathaniel	2
Bethel, Samuel	1
London, John	3
Moore, Ephraim	1
Pedan, John	1
Scott, Alexander	1
Scott, Mary	1
Spear, Robert	3

In 1786 the following slaveholders were enumerated:[5]

OWNER	NO. OF SLAVES
Bethel, Widow	1
Jeffries, Jos.	5
Scott, Alexander	4
Spear, Robert	2
Spoore, Emanuel	1

The 1773 tax list provides information that augments the above data. In it, Nathaniel Barber, Ephraim Moore, John Pedan, Alexander Scott, and Robert Spear are identified as farmers and Samuel Bethel (husband of the late 'Widow Bethel') was a "gentleman."[6]

What conclusions can be drawn from these tax lists? First, slave owners in Hempfield were long-term owners. The names Spear and Scott appear on every tax list of this period as slave owners. The Barbers were descendants of Robert Barber, one of the Hempfield pioneers. His son Robert, who died in 1749, had among his goods and chattels—as can be gleaned from the inventory—a Negro woman worth £20 and three Negro children (ages 6, 4, and 18 months) worth £20.[7] Although most of the owners are identified as farmers it can be presumed that they were rather affluent as the possession of slaves indicated. Also it can be inferred that these slaves were employed as domestics or laborers on the farms and in the households of their owners.

There are two additional sources of information on Hempfield Township's 18th Century Black population: the returns from the Gradual Abolition Act of 1780 and the first federal census. Let us take them chronologically. The Gradual Abolition Act, as is well known, terminated slavery in Pennsylvania by subjecting slave offspring born after 1780 to twenty-eight years of indentured servitude. The Act required owners to register their slaves and the children of their slaves with county authorities. Punishment for failure to do so was immediate manumission of the slaves and children in question.

Lancaster County's returns are somewhat incomplete but an analysis of the returns made to John Hubley, Esq. reveal that between 1789-1815 eleven returns were made from Hempfield Township.[8] The names of the owners are familiar ones: Spear, Scott, and Jeffries. It is also interesting to note that, as at least one return from Manor Township and one from Hempfield document, the children of indentured servants were also made indentured servants under the Abolition Act—a fact that would seem to suggest that the benefit of relatively inexpensive labor which was apparently salvaged for at least one generation by the Abolition Act may have in fact been extended into a second generation.

The 1790 Census adds another stone to our mosaic. According to the enumeration for Hempfield Township there were 7 free Blacks and 4 slaves in residence.[9] None of these Blacks was identified as being the head of a household; indeed, all of them lived in six different households. One free Black resided with Harman Spore, a blacksmith. Another lived with Widow Bethel and two others lived with John Wright and a certain Christian Bear, respectively. Two slaves lived with Widow Moore, presumably Ephraim's widow. The remaining five Blacks, 3 freemen and 2 slaves resided with Robert Spear.

In conclusion, the Black presence in Hempfield Township before 1800 was determined by the institution of slavery. At least for the latter half of the 18th Century Hempfield's Black population was quite small. All of this population lived (ca. 1790) in white households pursuing service occupations either as indentured servants or slaves. Their owners or masters were usually members of the Township elite, that is, "first families" and affluent property owners. The advent of the 19th Century changed this picture radically.

If the institution of slavery dominated the 18th Century, the 19th Century up to the Civil War was shaped by the growth of the free Black community and its institutions. According to the 1800 Census the Township's free Black population had already begun a steep climb. In 1790 there had been 7 free Blacks and 4 slaves. Now, just 10 years later, there were 71 free Blacks and apparently no slaves—returns made in compliance with the Gradual Abolition Act, however, would seem to indicate that there were at least 3 female slaves in Hempfield around 1800. The upward trend continued and in 1810 the Township counted 111 free Blacks. What of Columbia?

Although not incorporated as a borough until 1815, Columbia existed at least since the 1780's by virtue of a land subdivision done by lottery on a tract of land bequeathed by Susannah Wright to her nephew Samuel. The name "Columbia" appears on tax lists after 1797 and in 1800 the little settlement contained 10 free Blacks.

Columbia's free Black population also increased exponentially during the new century's first decades. By 1820 that community had grown to 288—a close second to Lancaster City's 308 Blacks.

During the Antebellum Period Columbia's free Black population assumed a leadership role in the County and not just in terms of numbers. To appreciate its importance in the 19th Century it is necessary to see it and the County Black population in a more general perspective. In 1790 New York and New Jersey had the largest Black populations in the North because of their large slave populations (21,324 and 11,423 resp.) but Pennsylvania had the largest free Black population in the North (6,537). Only Virginia and Maryland had larger free Black populations (12,866 and 8,042, resp.). In Pennsylvania in 1790 Lancaster County had the third largest Black population after Philadelphia and York County. More important for the 19th Century is the fact that Lancaster County's free Black population in 1790 also ranked third in the Commonwealth after Philadelphia and York County.

Lancaster County maintained this prominent position up to the Civil War. In 1860 for example, it ranked third after Philadelphia and Chester County with 3,459—this figure represents a slight loss over 1850 (−4.3%). Columbia Borough had the largest urban free Black population during the period 1820-60 and in 1850 reached a peak of 943 which has only been exceeded in subsequent years through the growth of Lancaster City's own free Black population. What factors contributed to this growth and what were the consequences?

The growth of Columbia's free Black population was obviously tied to Columbia's own growth. Wright's Ferry was for decades the gateway to the western frontier and its potential for development in the 18th Century was so widely recognized that for a time, as is well known, some consideration was given to locating the nation's capital there. Columbia's proximity to the state capital from 1799 on most certainly had a salutary effect on its economic development as did the development of new transportation technologies in Pennsylvania between 1790-1850. The economic prosperity created by Columbia's being a nexus for canal, highway, and railroad made the Borough quite attractive to groups interested in starting a new life.

There were, however, more specific reasons for the growth of Columbia's Black population. One was most certainly the activities of the Columbia Abolition Society. This society was created in 1818 and its report to the 16th "American Convention for promoting the Abolition of Slavery and improving the condition of the African race" held in Philadelphia on October 5, 1819 illuminates the relationship between Columbia Blacks and the majority community.

Four abolition societies met in Philadelphia that day—from New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Columbia Borough. Of the four, only Columbia's society represented a specific city. Its report on activities since the last annual convention offers some explanation of this unusual circumstance.[10] The society referred to itself as an auxiliary to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. The creation of an auxiliary in Columbia is a direct indication of a high level of interest in the anti-slavery crusade. A level of interest which may, incidentally, lend some credence to the as yet unverified incident involving the rescue of Stephen Smith's mother from would-be abductors. Allegedly, Smith had been sold to Columbia's Thomas Boude as an indentured servant and his mother, a slave to the Cochrans of Paxtang (Dauphin County), escaped to Columbia to rejoin her son. Her mistress came to reclaim her in an ensuing melee, Boude's neighbors rushed to Mrs. Smith's rescue. This attempted kidnapping supposedly so infuriated some Columbians that anti-slavery activities there intensified.

Whatever the specific reason or reasons for its organization, the Columbia Abolition Society was an interesting phenomenon. Its officers in 1819 were William Wright (president), William Vickey (vice-president), William F. Huston (treasurer), and William Kirkwood and James E. Mifflin (Secretaries). Counselors for the society were Lancastrians James Hopkins, Esq. and William Jenkins, Esq. as well as Samuel Bacon, Esq. of York. William Wright, Joseph Mifflin, Jonas Preston, Charles Lukens, and Joseph Quail were sent to Philadelphia as conference delegates. Clearly, the anti-slavery crusade had touched segments of the County social elite. The involvement of Samuel Bacon is particularly indicative of this commitment.[11]

Bacon had been a graduate of Harvard College before coming to Lancaster where he headed a school housed at Judge Yeates' house. Just prior to the War of 1812 he moved to York where he practised law until he answered a call to the ministry. In that office he was responsible for the establishment of 26 Sunday schools between 1818-1819. These schools had ca. 2,000 scholars. This latter activity was directly related to the anti-slavery crusade because, as the Abolition Society report indicates, the Sabbath School Society, of which Bacon was the York County president, organized Sunday schools for Blacks where they could obtain an important prerequisite of freedom: literacy. So committed was Bacon to abolition that he participated in the effort to establish the colony of Liberia where he met an untimely death in 1820.

Education had been a long term project of the Columbia Abolition Society. Prior to 1819 it had been instrumental in establishing schools for Blacks in York and Columbia that were apparently

not totally successful. Nevertheless, the Society was determined to open a new school in Columbia either in the Fall of 1819 or the Spring of 1820.[12] Indirectly this proposed undertaking indicates a high commitment in the Black community—at least a commitment perceived by the Abolition Society—to literacy.

While outlining their plans for a school, the Columbia delegation also revealed that a sabbath school for Blacks had been opened in Columbia in January 1819.[13] This school had 85 registrants consisting of almost equal numbers of adults and children. Of these, about 40 attended regularly with what seems an almost remarkable success: from January to September 1819 twenty-six Blacks had acquired the ability to read the Bible. Clearly, the Abolition Society was confident that their proposed school would be able to attract sufficient numbers of participants to succeed—at least an indirect reliance on the Black community's enlightened self-interest.

Another portion of the Society's report presents information that is particularly germane to the question of why and how Columbia's free Black community grew so rapidly. The report alluded to an increase in attempts to abduct Blacks. To combat this problem the Society had several acting committees who apparently actively interceded to foil such kidnappings.[14] Such actions could and probably did delay the recapture of fugitives and created inducements to flee to the Columbia area where the successful escape from the slave catchers caused the Black population to increase. In turn, the growth of the Black community made escape easier since it enhanced the possibility of the escapee to blend into the anonymity provided by a large Black population. Aside from Columbia's becoming a haven for runaways, the report offers another population source: immigration.

Shortly before the Columbia delegation journied to Philadelphia a group of manumitted slaves completed a long trek to freedom in Columbia. Fifty-five former slaves of Izard Bacon of Henrico County, Virginia, had successfully obtained an act of assembly to reaffirm their right to freedom and allow them to emigrate North. Once in Columbia they were immediately placed under the care of the Columbia Abolition Society's acting committee.[15] The status of this group reported to the Philadelphia Convention in October 1819 was that there were 16 children in the group and those old enough to be separated from their parents had been bound out. Up to October no permanent place of settlement had been found for these immigrants from slavery.

Samuel Evans' account of these immigrants supplements the Abolition Society's report. According to Evans, as recorded in *Ellis and Evans*, the refugees found shelter in a stone warehouse belonging

to Samuel Bethel. They were later given land by the Wright family in the northeastern section of Columbia where they built cabins. Evans identifies several of these families by name, e.g. the Pleasants, Randolphs, Greens, and Haydens. These freedmen were soon joined by a second group of manumitted slaves from Virginia.[16]

Ca. 1821 a group of 100 former slaves appeared in Columbia. They were formerly owned by Sally Bell, a Quaker resident of Hanover County. Interestingly enough, Hanover and Henrico Counties are contiguous and some of the two parties of manumitted families may have known each other in Virginia. Like their predecessors the Hanover County Blacks found shelter and hospitality in Columbia. They were briefly housed near the Lamb Tavern on Locust Street; then, as Evans reports, they also found homes near those of the Henrico County immigrants.[17] These two groups of manumitted slaves formed an influential nucleus in Columbia's free Black community during the Antebellum Period.

The Antebellum Period is loosely defined as the decades preceding the Civil War. For our purposes we can set two events as the beginning and closing events of this period. They are the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and the bombardment of Ft. Sumter. During the decades between 1820-1860 a series of developments occurred in Columbia's Black community that indicated that it was on the verge of coalescing into a real community firmly anchored in the County's economic, political, and social mainstream.

The first development on the road to the creation of a coherent Black community was property ownership. The step from being property to owning property is a gigantic one. There were no Black property owners in Hempfield Township during the 18th Century. It was not until 1818 that Blacks appeared on Columbia's tax lists as property owners. There were only three: Tower Hill, Moses Jones, and Henry Worthing(ton).[18] Just two years later in 1820 there were eight Blacks who owned property. Among those listed was Stephen Smith. Of all the Black residents in Columbia before the Civil War, his name is most synonymous with the hopes and expectations of the entire community.

In 1820 Stephen Smith had 1½ unfinished lots worth $300 on which he paid $0.45 in taxes. Before his death in Philadelphia in 1873 Smith accumulated a fortune worth, in modern terms, more than $1,000,000. As Columbia tax lists document, Smith's climb to affluence began in the Borough. As late as 1829 his holdings included 5 houses and 5 lots valued at $2,300 and one horse valued at $40. On these possessions Smith paid a tax of $3.51, more than any other Black property holder. During the 1830's Smith's fortunes took

an upward swing.

In 1833 Smith's fortune had reached a new high. The tax list reveals that Smith owned 6 houses and 6 lots worth $3,000, 1 horse and 1 head of cattle valued at $50, Bonds and stocks worth $3,000, a pleasure carriage with a value of $100. Smith's tax was a surprising $10.72½, three times the tax paid by all the Black property owners in 1820. A phenomenal success by any measure. However, it is important to note that it was not just an individual success. Too frequently history is viewed as the record of exceptional individuals and individual achievements rather than a collective effort.

Nothing can detract from Smith's financial success but Columbia Blacks were also successful as can be easily extrapolated from the tax lists. When Smith's fortune was approaching its zenith in 1833 there were 26 other property owners who owned an aggregate of 32 houses and 29 lots with a total valuation of $8,460. The extent of Smith's wealth and potential standing in his community is visible from the fact that, of the $14,610 in property owned by Blacks in Columbia his share was $6,150 or 42%. Smith's rise to affluence paralleled that of Black Columbians in general. From 1820-1833 Smith's wealth increased from $300 to $6,150. During the same period the value of real estate held by Black Columbians also grew from $2,500 to $8,460.

Such success neither went unnoticed nor was it universally acclaimed. Nationally, the 1830's were a time of danger for Blacks. White fears were excited by the spectre of slave rebellion after Nat Turner's bloody rebellion of 1831 in which almost 60 Whites were murdered. Racial tensions were also high because of the ongoing struggle between opponents of slavery. The American Colonization Society, since its formation in 1817, had worked to end American slavery by arranging compensation for slaveholders who manumitted their slaves and simultaneously encouraged free Blacks to join with their emancipated brothers for a return to Africa. So successful were the efforts of the Colonization Society that by 1831, reportedly 1,420 Blacks had returned to Africa.[19]

Free Blacks were not totally receptive to the colonizationist scheme—at least as formulated by the American Colonization Society. In 1817 Bishop Richard Allen of the A.M.E. Church held a mass meeting at Mother Bethel Church in Philadelphia to protest the colonization plan which was seen as an attempt to deprive free Blacks of their birthright. There is no way to measure what impact Black resistance had on the success of the colonization plan, but the appearance of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* in January 1831 created a forum for Blacks and White to oppose colonization more vocally and

vehemently than before.

The abolitionists, as Garrison's supporters were called, advocated an immediate end to slavery without compensation or colonization. The sudden appearance of abolitionist propaganda led to immediate conflict. Demagogues accused the abolitionists of promulgating amalgamation or interracial mixing. In a series of urban riots that erupted in New York City, Philadelphia, Detroit, Washington, D.C., and Cincinnati, Blacks and their property were subjected to mob violence. Columbia was no exception.

William F. Worner has provided a concise and insightful account of the Columbia Race Riots of 1834 and 1835.[20] Without needlessly repeating the information contained in Worner's historic article, suffice it to say that the violence and destruction directed against Columbia's Blacks made a special target of Stephen Smith who exemplified the progressive elements that according to contemporary accounts, "excited the envy" of white Columbians. The outcome of the first riot demonstrates forcefully that, although Stephen Smith had been singled out for verbal and physical attack, the riots were not aimed specifically at him nor were they necessarily a response to overt attempts to promote racial integration in the Borough.

At a meeting of working men held in Columbia on August 23, 1834 the discussion of the recent riot centered on economic issues.[21] While deploring the riots, the working men resolved to boycott any merchant or politician who employed Blacks in jobs which Whites could do. Furthermore, these working men urged support for the Colonization Society and public censure for the "preachers of immediate abolition and amalgamation." The mood established at the working men's meeting carried over to a public meeting held on August 26.

This meeting chaired by James Given, Esq. made concrete proposals to implement the anti-Black plans of the working men. Robert Spear, Esq., Columbia's Chief Burgess, made two resolutions that were adopted by the assembled citizens. First, a committee was to be formed to conduct an economic census of Columbia's Black population. Second, this committee was to try to encourage Black property owners to sell their properties and businesses at a fair market value. Furthermore, the committee was to advise Blacks that they were not to harbor any more Black transients who came to the Borough. The purpose of these resolutions was to achieve the goal of the meeting which had been convened "to take into consideration the situation of the colored population and to devise some means to prevent the further influx of colored persons to this place." A third resolution proposed by Henry Brimner and adopted by the

citizens was to solicit the support of fellow Columbians in returning fugitive slaves to their "rightful owners."

Two committees were constituted to implement Spear's resolutions. Their membership manifests the extent to which the Black presence and especially Black competition in the Borough's economic life was deeply resented. A committee of James Collins, Peter Haldeman, Jacob F. Markley, John McMullen, and William Atkins was formed to conduct the census. A second group consisting of Robert Spear, Esq., Henry Brimner, and James H. Mifflin was to deal with the attempt to induce Blacks to sell their properties and businesses. Both groups went immediately to work. Their report was given, again to a public meeting, on September 1, 1834.

The impromptu census found 214 men, 171 women, and 264 children for a total of 649. Some obvious disappointment is discernible in the comment that accompanied this report: "It is supposed that a good number have left the place within a few days, and that a number were scattered through the town that were not seen by the committee." Apparently the committee and the assembled citizens felt there were in excess of 1,000 Blacks in Columbia as Samuel Evans himself wrote half a century after the riots.[22] There is, however, no evidence to support that claim nor the widely cited report that the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 caused Columbia's Black population to drop 50% overnight.

The other committee report was equally unsatisfactory. Thirty-seven Black property owners had been identified and all had expressed interest in selling at a fair market price. The committee was nevertheless concerned that some positive action be taken to purchase those properties or their efforts would seem to be "the work of a few excited individuals, and not the deliberate decision of peaceful citizens." The assembly concurred and a new committee consisting of Joseph Cottrell, Dominick Eagle, John Cooper, Robet Spear, and Jacob Markley was given the task of forming an association to purchase the properties in question. Coincidental with this public meeting and certainly not unrelated to it was an advertisement placed by Stephen Smith in the *Columbia Spy* on September 13 in which he announced his intention to sell his entire stock of lumber, all his houses and lots, and close his business in Columbia.

At this point Samuel Evans and W.F. Worner interject the antecdote about the threatening note sent to Smith by persons unknown with the intention of coercing him into abandoning his lucrative real estate and lumber speculations.[23] Both historians underscore the fact that without the intercession of the Wright Family, Smith would have been unable to maintain himself in Columbia.

Finally ca. 1842 Smith allegedly succumbed to the pressure and traded places with his Philadelphia partner, William Whipper—at least according to Evans and Worner. Actually there may have been another explanation.

Columbia Blacks showed resiliency and character which many white Columbians probably did not believe they possessed. Despite the overtures to the 37 property owners in 1843, apparently no sales were completed. In fact, the 1835 tax list shows that there were still 37 individual Black property owners and Stephen Smith's holdings had grown. He now owned outright 8 houses and 13 lots worth $6,000 and also had other property (cattle, bonds, notes, stocks, and carriage) valued at an additional $3,170. Furthermore, he and Joshua P.B. Eddy jointly owned a house and a lot valued at $150. An individual identified solely as "agent for Stephen Smith" owned 5 houses and 5 lots worth $1,000. Smith's total worth in Columbia had now reached $10,320.

Despite overt pressure to divest themselves, Black Columbians held fast. The number of Black property owners did not increase dramatically during the 1830's and 1840's. Instead it remained fairly constant at 38. Interestingly enough, although William Whipper is traditionally supposed to have replaced Stephen Smith in Columbia in the early 1840's, his name does not appear on the Columbia tax list until 1850 when he is listed as a partner in Smith & Whipper. The appearance of Whipper's name on the tax list seems almost a signal for growth of Black property ownership. In 1851, the year after the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act that allegedly decimated Columbia's Black population overnight, the number of Black property owners almost doubled from 32 to 61. In 1852 there were 66—hardly symptomatic of a community living in fear. As late as 1861 there were 59 individual Black property owners in Columbia and some of them owned more than one property.

We have thus far restricted our perspective to the economic sphere. Outside of this area, however, is additional evidence that Antebellum Black Columbia was an emerging community on the threshold of a new age, perhaps even a golden age. With the inclusion of the two groups of manumitted slaves from Virginia between 1819 and 1821, Columbia's Black community began to organize itself and create institutions that manifest a growing sense of community and communal cohesiveness. One such institution was the Black church.

There is no reliable history of Black churches in Columbia, or for that matter in Lancaster County, but the pioneer work accomplished by local genealogist and archivist A. Hunter Rineer before his un-

timely death in November 1985 presents significant data on the Borough's earliest Black congregations which can point the way to that eventual history.[24] The earliest denomination to establish itself was apparently the Methodists. A comparison of A. Hunter Rineer's comprehensive survey of County churches and cemeteries with grantee-grantor records and local directories reveals that as early as 1817 there was a Black congregation in Columbia.

The narrative from an indenture made to Andrew Biter in October 1842 by the Trustees of the African Methodist Zion Church contains the following reference to 1817. The trustees were granting to Biter a plot of ground on Perry Street which the indenture identified as:[25]

> [. . .] the same lot of ground which Thomas Griffith and Christiana his wife by their Indenture duly Executed bearing date the fifteenth day of December in the year of our Lord 1817 for the consideration therein mentioned did grant and confirm unto Jesse Burrell, William Callans, and Henry Jackson the then trustees (in Trust) and their successors in Office of the Affrican Methodist Zions Church or society [. . .]

Continuity between the 1817 society and the group selling the land in 1842 is established by reference in the indenture to the incorporation on May 18, 1837 of the "Methodist Episcopal Church of the Borough of Columbia." On the surface this reference seems trivial until one considers the list of incorporating trustees: Stephen Smith, George Taylor, George Snavely, Robert Patterson, and William Waters. Of these Snavely (or Snively), Waters, and Patterson were also listed as trustees of the African Methodist Zion Church in 1842.

A further link is established to another early congregation by the inclusion of the name of William Waters. His name appears in an indenture between Caspar Friedrich and the 1st Colored Wesley Methodist Church. Dated April 3, 1848[26] this indenture finalized the purchase of a lot of ground in Columbia on Fifth Street bounded by an unnamed alley. The church trustees were identified as Amos Hammon, William Waters, Peter Sims, James A. Reese, and John F. Wesley.

Hunter Rineer's survey suggests an interesting reason for this apparent overlapping of trustees which seems to approximate interlocking directories. He subsumes them under Mt. Zion AME Church and thus implies that these congregations were stages in the development of the present church. It would lead us to far afield to further explore this topic. However, it is abundantly clear that churches were being organized in Columbia between 1817-1825. The Methodist congregation was not the only church formed. Hunter Rineer found references to a "Columbia African Church" that existed roughly between 1822 and 1909. He also alludes to an "Union Church of

Africans," dates uncertain, that was a result of a split of Black members from the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church in Wilmington, Delaware ca. 1805. What is the significance of all this church activity? A new pietism?

Volumes have been written and need to be written about the significance of the church in the Black community. Without exaggeration the church has been the institution which has given Blacks a sense of community. Historically this means that the appearance of the autonomous Black church after the Revolutionary War marks the beginning of a national identity for Blacks. It is difficult to speculate what would have happened to Blacks during the Antebellum Period if they had not had the leadership provided by their churches. The situation in Columbia in the 1830's can perhaps illustrate my point.

As noted above Stephen Smith's name is closely associated with Mt. Zion AME Church. In his history of the A.M.E. Church Bishop Daniel Payne notes that Smith was ordained in Columbia in 1831.[27] His ordination almost coincides with an important event in the social and political history of Black Columbia in which Smith also played a role. A September 9, 1830 article in the *Columbia Spy* carries the synopsis of the proceedings of "a respectable meeting of the people of color—inhabitants of Columbia." Stephen Smith chaired this meeting and Robert Purvis was appointed secretary.

The purpose of this meeting was to announce the imminent departure of the Columbia delegation to a first national convention of Blacks in Philadelphia. Organized by Rev. Richard Allen, first bishop of the A.M.E. Church, the convention was intended to develop a national strategy for Blacks. Colonization was an important part of this strategy. Despite earlier Black opposition to the plans of the American Colonization Society to repatriate slave and free Blacks to Africa, the Convention of 1830 met with the stated purpose of improving the condition of free persons of color in the United States, purchasing lands, and establishing a settlement in Upper Canada.[28]

This reversal in policy was well motivated. The colonization movement had not always used persuasion to obtain its colonists. The October 1859 edition of *The Anglo-African Magazine* provides an overview of the genesis of the convention movement and cites the general excitement generated during 1829-30 by colonization.[29] Apparently some Blacks "had been driven to Liberia by the severe laws and brutal conduct of the fermenters of colonization in Virginia and Maryland."[30] This is an obvious reference to the various laws enacted in the Southern States and discussed in Pennsylvania after 1820 which were designed to force free Blacks to emigrate. For example, Georgia permitted Black mechanics to follow their trade

only if they collected no fees for it. Under such circumstances emigration was construed as coersion.

Resettlement in Canada, however, was to be totally voluntary and available to individuals and families who either were unable to maintain themselves in the United States or wished to improve their station in life by moving to a country more supportive of their development as individuals. The decision to support colonization in Canada did not signify, however, a total abandonment of the United States. Despite the stated purpose to support colonization, it is important that the primary purpose of the collective endeavors begun in Philadelphia in 1830 was the improvement of living conditions for Blacks in the United States.

The emerging national Black leadership of the 1830's developed and followed a very subtle strategy. Colonization was the stated goal which would attract the attention of most adversaries of a strong Black presence in America. While ostensibly working towards that goal, Blacks were also able to accomplish short term goals beneficial to their general welfare in America. To implement the colonization project in Canada a national organization was proposed. This parent organization bore the rather baroque title of "The American Society of Free Persons of Colour, for improving their condition in the United States, for purchasing lands, and for the establishment of a settlement in the Province of Upper Canada." It was to be supported by auxiliary societies specially created to promote the goals of the parent society on the local level and provide input by sending delegates to the annual conventions that were to commence in 1831.

To interested observers, a new national group had been created to promote colonization. Simultaneously, a structure was also put into place that could be and was used to promote and develop issues and projects important to Black survival in the United States. This "hidden agenda" surfaced in the 1831 Convention in Philadelphia when the assembled delegates appointed a committee to inquire "into the condition of the free people of colour throughout the United States."[31] The report brought back by this committee is quite enlightening and very meaningful for the development we have outlined in Columbia.

The committee first urged perseverance in the efforts to start a Canadian settlement. Then they proposed the creation of a general fund to support annual conventions and that each meeting feature a reading of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.[32] The final three recommendations dealt with vital domestic issues. In light of the repressive laws and ordinances enacted against free Blacks throughout the United States the committee recommended that on the

grass roots level free Blacks be encouraged to memorialize the proper authorities to seek redress.[33]

Further, the committee emphasized that "Education, Temperance, and Economy" were virtues that would elevate mankind and enable it to discharge the duties given it by the creator. Consequently, it was urged that steps be taken to promote those virtues "among our brethren, who have a desire to be useful."[34] Finally, the committee deplored the actions of the American Colonization Society at whose feet they laid the blame for many of "our unconstitutional, unchristian, and unheard of sufferings" and requested all Christians to oppose the Colonization Society.[35] The report was accepted and adopted unanimously.

What was the result of this convention nationally and in Columbia? One result was the resolve to create a college for the education of "young men of colour" in New Haven, Connecticut. The course of instruction was to concentrate on agriculture, mechanical arts, science, etc. This plan as rejected in a New Haven town meeting by a reported margin of 700 to 4.[36] A later attempt in 1832 by Prudence Crandall to admit Blacks to her school in Canterbury, Connecticut, led to the withdrawal of the white students, passage of a law by the state legislature forbidding the education of out-of-state Blacks without the permission of local authorities, the imprisonment of Miss Crandall, and mob violence against the school which ended in its total destruction.[37]

Despite similar setbacks in the North and the South, efforts to educate Blacks continued. Some of the enterprises were interracial and some were self-help efforts. The going was not always easy as witness the case of the famous Black educator John F. Cook, principal of the Smothers School in Washington, D.C. This school had been organized in 1822 to meet the educational needs of Blacks living in the nation's capital. In 1835 in the midst of an anti-Black riot most of the schoolhouses, including Cook's school, were either torn or burnt down. Cook was able to escape to Columbia where he operated a school until the Fall of 1836 when he was again able to return to Washington, D.C.[38]

Efforts to educate Blacks in Columbia began quite early. As noted above the Columbia Abolition Society and the Sabbath School Society operated schools for Blacks prior to 1820. There is very little documentary evidence of the efforts put forth by Columbia Blacks to obtain education for their children. For example, it is unclear where Cook operated his school in the Borough. It may have been a school connected with the above named societies or an institution begun by Blacks themselves. The advent of the common school

movement after 1838 may have induced Blacks to have their children educated in the publically-funded school form as was the case with Lancaster City's Blacks in the 1830's and 1840's. There is the documented fact that Mt. Zion AME Church made their old church building available to Columbia's Common School Board for use as a "colored school."[39] Today that structure is adjacent to the church and is used as the headquarters of the "Harvey Makle American Legion Post."

Self-help through education and social organization was an integral feature of Black life in Columbia and a sign of the emergence of a Black community. Besides the churches there were also social organizations whose activities promoted a certain degree of social cohesiveness. For example, during the 1830's Blacks were involved in a Temperance Society which sought to promulgate the high moral ideals apostrophized in the Negro Convention of 1830 and 1831; a good deal of the impetus for this temperance movement came from Moral Reform Movement of that era. One report of the Black association is found in the *National Reformer*, a Black newspaper edited in Philadelphia by William Whipper.[40]

During the 1840's to the early 1860's a Black organization known as the United Sons Beneficial Society flourished in Columbia.[41] Its trustees were the influential members of the group of manumitted slaves who came from Virginia in 1819 and founded one and possibly two churches in the Borough. The society was a beneficial association, that is, it functioned along the lines of an insurance company in that members invested money and received a return—either from investments or as a burial fund and/or widow's pension. The US Beneficial Society appeared on Borough tax lists between 1847-1862 and owned two properties on "Tow Hill." Among its trustees were the Pleasants, Greens, Haydens, and Loneys. These men (and their wives) were businessmen who combined pursuit of a trade with a personal commitment to the future of the race.

Not only did Columbia Blacks pursue their trades, they also helped each other. The Pleasant brothers were barbers. Robert Loney was a ferryman who used his skills to help fugitive slaves escape their masters by ferrying them across the Susquehanna River, probably to the house of William Whipper or another of the Underground Railroad stationmasters in Columbia. Whipper also used his considerable talents in practical, everyday matters. In one land transaction, for example, he acted as legal adviser for the United Sons Beneficial Society.[42] He also represented widow Sophia Patterson and her fiance Benjamin Whipper—a brother or perhaps nephew of William—in a rather intricate pre-nuptial agreement.[43]

Black businessmen and artisans accepted and trained Black apprentices—although not always successfully. Joshua P.B. Eddy, a later minister of the A.M.E. Church, was a barber and property-owner who lived in Columbia during the 1830's and 1840's. The *Columbia Spy* of June 23, 1831 carried an advertisement from him stating his offer of a $0.12 reward to be paid in shaving for the return of two boys, George Francis and Samuel Foreman, who had run away from their duties on May 24. Eddy's use of apprentices was not an isolated phenomenon. Lancaster's *Negro Entry Book* documents the fact that other antebellum Black communities in the County had a system, like that used by the majority community, to maintain skills.

To summarize the date which we have reviewed so far: Columbia's Black community in the decades before the Civil War was a rapidly growing and vital community. The influx of manumitted and fugitive Blacks into the Borough after 1800 underlines the fact that, to Blacks, Columbia was an Eldorado, a sort of golden paradise that promised earthly riches and a chance to begin a life of dignity and self-reliance. The social organizations and economic growth that began to appear after 1820 are evidence that Blacks were beginning to realize the dream which had led them to the banks of the Susquehanna.

Of course, there were barriers and failures. The race riots of 1834/35, the loss of the right to vote in 1838, and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 were at the very least telling blows to Black aspirations of sharing the American dream of an existence grounded in the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Despite these reversals Columbia's Black community thrived—at least economically. After the race riots which sought to nullify Blacks as economic competitors, the wealth of the Black community increased and so did its numbers. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was another matter.

The Census of 1850 showed Columbia's Black population at an all-time high: 943. As an article in the June 24, 1865 edition of the *Columbia Spy* states, this enumeration was conducted in the month of June when the transient Black population numbered some two or three hundred. The Fugitive Slave Act passed the House of Representatives in September after coming from the Senate. Reportedly just one year after the enactment of the law Columbia's Black community had declined from 943 to 378. If one disregards the transient population, this decline represents a reduction of over 40%.

Despite this massive flight from the Borough, Black property-

ownership increased dramatically during the 1850's. In 1850 there were 32 Black property-owners; in 1851 there were 61. Coercion by neighbors and the fear that slave catchers, encouraged by the Fugitive Slave Act would continue to prey upon free Blacks, had a tremendous psychological impact on Blacks. The Census of 1860 reported a Black population of 600. It would seem that Black fortunes were again on the rise. The character of the community had, however, changed subtly.

William Still's fascinating account of the adventures and daring feats of the individuals involved in the *Underground Railroad* (1872) contains a letter from William Whipper dated December 1871. Whipper's recollections of Underground Railroad operations in Columbia contain devastating insights into the state of race relations in the Borough from about 1847-1861. Whipper dates the peak activity in Columbia from the Prigg vs Pennsylvania decision of 1842 in which the Supreme Court in effect declared that the Federal and not state government had to enforce fugitive slave laws. This decision upheld Pennsylvania's 1826 personal liberty law under which Edward Prigg had been arrested and convicted for kidnapping a runaway slave living in Pennsylvania. Recognized as "free" territory Pennsylvania then began to draw even more runaways.[44]

The original escape route, according to Whipper, led from Baltimore via Havre de Grace to Philadelphia. The difficulty of this crossing from Baltimore to Havre de Grace caused the route to be moved to York, Pennsylvania—which, of course, emphasized the importance of Columbia.[45] Once in Columbia the fugitives were sent by Whipper in one of two directions: either west by boat to Pittsburgh or east in his train cars to Philadelphia. In this way, by his own account, between 1847-1859 Whipper "passed hundreds to the land of freedom, while others, induced by high wages, and the feeling that they were safe in Columbia, worked in the lumber and coalyards of that place."[46] The "land of freedom" Whipper alludes to was not the North. He states quite baldly "I always persuaded them to go to Canada, as I had no faith in their being able to elude the grasp of the slave-hunters."[47]

Whipper's pessimism was well founded as the Fugitive Slave Act demonstrated. The impact of the Act in the Borough was an increase in legal and illegal actions against fugitives and freemen suspected of being fugitives. Whipper cites incidents such as the arrest of a prominent Black and the resultant need to buy his freedom or the even more outrageous murder of a Black man named Smith who refused to surrender to the slave catcher. The latter was allowed to escape and was never brought to trial. These circumstances split the

Black community into a group that wanted to leave Columbia because they felt particularly vulnerable and a group that proposed to stay and, if necessary, die defending its freedom. At that juncture Whipper used his influence to encourage Black Columbians to be patient and leave the Borough as soon as possible.[48]

Whipper's words were soon followed by actions—his own. He apparently organized a migration to Canada which in his own words had reduced Columbia's Black population from 943 in 1850 to 487 in 1855. Whipper himself planned to emigrate to Canada in 1861 and was only detained by the outbreak of war. During the Antebellum Period Columbia had been a haven, an Eldorado that attracted free Black and fugitive slave alike. The result was the beginnings of a vibrant and vital community. Stephen Smith and William Whipper were national figures whose active public careers were deeply rooted in Columbia. It is highly significant and indicative of the decline that was to come after the seemingly final deferral of the dream, brought so close to realization by the Civil War, that Whipper, undoubtedly the most influential Black in Columbia during the latter part of the Antebellum Period, should assert in retrospect:[49]

> [. . .] it would have been fortunate for us if Columbia, being a port of entry for flying fugitives, had been also the seat of great capitalists and freedom-loving inhabitants; but such was not the case. There was but little Anti-slavery sentiment among whites, yet there were many strong and valiant friends among them who contributed freely; the colored population were too poor to render much aid, except in feeding and secreting strangers. I was doing a prosperous business at that time and felt it my duty to contribute liberally out of my earnings. Much as I loved Anti-slavery meetings I did not feel that I could afford to attend them, as my immediate duty was to the flying fugitive.

There is bitterness and resignation in these lines from 1871 but it must be remembered that despite the discrimination and hostility of the Antebellum Period and the attraction of Canada, the outbreak of war attracted Blacks to the defense of the Union. As the *Columbia Spy* noted in 1863,[50] among those rallying to defend the Union were the offspring of the manumitted slaves who had come to Columbia seeking freedom two generations before.

Notes

[1]Samuel Wright, "The Beginnings of Columbia," *Papers Read Before the Lancaster County Historical Society,* Vol. XVII, No. 8, October 3, 1913, p. 219.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 220.

[3]Book H, page 66: Probate and Proceedings of the Last Will and Testament of Samuel Blunston, 1745, Register of Wills In and for the County of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

[4]Tax lists for Hempfield Township; date as noted in the text; original and microfilm copies on deposit at the Lancaster County Historical Society (LCHS).

[5]*Ibid.*

[6]*Ibid.*

[7]Estate Inventory of Robert Barber on deposit at LCHS.

[8]Returns made in compliance with an Act of Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania entitled "An Act to Explain and Amend an Act entitled An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery" made to John Hubley, Esq., Clerk of the Peace for Lancaster County (1788-1831); typoscript copy on deposit at the LCHS.

[9]Federal Census of 1790. This and other references in the text to the various census enumerations are drawn from the microfilm copies of the census returns (1790-1910) on deposit at the LCHS.

[10]*Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race,* Philadelphia, 1819, pp. 11-14.

[11]The following biographical material on Bacon is drawn from John Gibson, *History of York County,* 1886, pp. 375-77 and Ellis & Evans, *History of Lancaster County,* 1883, p. 406.

[12]*Minutes of the American Convention, op. cit.,* p. 11f.

[13]*Ibid.,* p. 12.

[14]*Ibid.,* p. 12f.

[15]*Ibid.,* p. 13.

[16] Ellis & Evans, *op. cit.,* p. 74.

[17]*Ibid.*

[18]Tax lists for Columbia Borough; date as noted in text; original and microfilm copy on deposit at the LCHS.

[19]Peter M. Bergman, *The Chronological History of the Negro in America,* Harper & Row, 1969, "1831," p. 141.

[20]William F. Worner, "The Columbia Race Riots," Vol. XXVI, No. 8, *Papers Read Before* the Lancaster County Historical Society, 1922, pp. 175-187.

[21]This and other references and quotes from the events surrounding the Columbia Race Riots are drawn from published reports in the *Columbia Spy* for the date cited. The *Spy* is on deposit at the LCHS.

[22]Ellis & Evans, *op. cit.,* p. 574.

[23]cf. Worner, pp. 183-85 and Ellis & Evans, p. 574.

[24]unpublished manuscripts on deposit at the LCHS.

[25]Lancaster County Deeds: Book C, Vol. 14, page 455.

[26]*Ibid.,* Book T, Vol. 7, page 556.

[27]Daniel Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church,* A.M.E. Sunday-School Union; Nashville, 1891 (repr. Arno Press, 1969), p. 68.

[28]Howard Holman Bell, ed., *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions 1830-1864,* Arno Press and the N.Y. Times, 1969, not continuously paginated but divided choronologically.

[29]reprinted in Bell, *op. cit.*

[30]*Ibid.*

[31]*Ibid.,* p. 4 of the minutes of the 1831 Convention.

[32]*Ibid.*

[33]*Ibid.,* p. 5

[34]*Ibid.*

[35]*Ibid.*

[36]*Chronological History, op. cit.,* "1831", p. 143.

[37]*IBID.,* "1832," p. 145.

[38]*Ibid.,* "1835," p. 155.

[39]A Hunter Rineer's unpublished manuscript on deposit at LCHS where reference is found in the section "Columbia Borough" to a transfer to the Columbia School Board after 1848.

[40]William Whipper, ed. *National Reformer,* Vol. 1, Philadelphia, September 1838, p. 5.

[41]cf. Grantee-Grantor records for Lancaster County as well as the Columbia tax lists.

[42]Lancaster County Deeds, Book A, Vol. Misc., page 535.
[43]*Ibid.*, Book Z, Vol. 6, page 98.
[44]in William Still, *The Underground Railroad,* Philadelphia, 1872, p. 736.
[45]*Ibid.*
[46]*Ibid.*
[47]*Ibid.*
[48]*Ibid.*, p. 737.
[49]*Ibid.*, p. 739.
[50]*Columbia Spy*, March 21, 1863.