

The Kidnapping of Rachel and Elizabeth Parker

By HOWARD N. COATES

DIED. In Oxford, on February 19, 1918, at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Lucy Jones, Rachel Parker Wesley, in her 84th year. The above notice in a local paper would not attract special notice, yet there was a chapter in the story of her life quite out of the ordinary—a drama in which the writer is the only one living who played even a minor part, and he was a boy of six years.

Rather young you may say to follow history in the making, but in those strenuous times the line of the table talk, the subject of the fireside conference and the theme before the store box congress was usually some phase of the slavery question.

Chauncey M. Depew in his "Memories of Eighty Years" says these were the schools in which were developed the thought and the conviction which made possible the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860.

In the Fremont campaign of 1856 I heard a carpenter, sitting at my mother's table, say to her, "Eliza if you fail this time you need never try again." You whose boats sail on placid waters can know but little of the rankling wound such a thrust left in the heart.

This man had back of him the unbroken record of success of the slave oligarchy in national affairs.

In the formation of the constitution they were not satisfied to have their right to property in slaves as to control and recovery rest upon the rules of common law.

The U. S. Constitution says persons owing service or labor escaping from one State to another must be given up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor is due. The insistent demand of the far South that this was a question for State Control, which must be recognized by other States, opened the door for the proposition of 1784, presented by Thomas Jefferson, that all unorganized territory west of the seaboard states should be free territory.

Three years later came the famous ordinance of 1787 organizing the Northwest Territory as a land of freedom. The Carolinas and Georgia holding to their western lands for slavery.

This was the first division of territory on the issue of slavery. The next came after the Louisiana Purchase when Missouri knocked at the door of Congress for admission as a Slave State.

Slavery existed there under French rule and later as an unorganized territory, but the friends of freedom claimed that much of it lay north of the line already dedicated to freedom under the ordinance of 1787 organizing the Northwest Territory.

Out of this came the Missouri Compromise of 1820, in which the slave power got what they wanted.

The crumb to the other fellow was that hereafter all territory north of latitude 36° 30" should be free.

This restraint was in their way when they wanted to make of Kansas a slave state, so it was repealed and the fight was on in earnest. As a part of the fire works came the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. By this law all were forbidden to feed or aid a fugitive slave in any way, but must, on call from an officer, assist him as a deputy, in his efforts to arrest the fugitive. Both of

these provisions in the law were at variance with the higher concepts of Christian Citizenship which had come to be recognized as a rule of thought and action by an increasing number of persons.

As a culmination came the famous or infamous Dred Scott decision of the U. S. Court in which it was ruled that the black man had no rights that a white man was bound to respect. Then the boast of Senator Toombs "that some day he would call the roll of his slaves standing in the shadow of Bunker Hill Monument."

Almost within its shadow a man who had lived in Boston some years with a family and a home, was seized as a fugitive slave. The owner refusing all offers of a ransom, he was dragged through the streets of the city under the protection of a detail of U. S. Soldiers, put on a war vessel and taken South to a life of slavery, all done by due process of law.

From out the depths of his despair came the wail of Fred Douglass, who said in an address in Boston "The child is not living who will be the father of a child to see slavery abolished in this country." In the audience sat Sojourner Truth, a seer and prophet among the black, who rose and said, "Frederick Douglass, is God Almighty dead?" following his reply she shouted, "Then slavery will die." Within a few years her prediction, or was it a prophecy, came true.

Thaddeus Stevens, who was in Congress in the early and late 50s, had this to say of the northern dough faces, in addressing the northern members, "Sirs, for myself I should look upon any northern man, enlightened by a northern education who would directly or indirectly by omission or commission, by basely voting or cowardly skulking permit salvery to spread over one rod of God's free earth as a traitor to liberty and a recreant to his God"—. So much for R. C. Winthrop—of Webster, who also had become an apologist for slavery he said after giving due credit for his ability and services, "if any of the renowned men of the country should fail or falter in this crisis of human liberty it were better were they unknown to fame. To me if I read the signs aright, the Sun of Liberty, of Universal Liberty, is above the horizon and fast coursing to his meridian splendor when no advocate of slavery, no apologist for slavery, can look upon his face and live."

So much for the general condition, historic in character.

Now turn thy glass oh memory upon the local conditions, as they were found in the Nottingham neighborhood 75 years ago. Right on the border line, the famous Mason and Dixons survey, the escaping slave trod our by-ways in the night time, seeking food and shelter and guidance on their way to freedom. Free negroes were picked up here and there and spirited away, usually in the night time, to be sold into slavery, a condition of dread and terror to those risking life and limb to get away from.

The people of the Nottingham neighborhood were not interfering with slavery where it existed under state law. They were not workers with the Under Ground R. R., but the impulse of protection to the weak and lowly was a virtue with them.

Of the many cases which occurred to irritate and intensify the feelings of the people, I will mention one which occurred just across the line in Lancaster County.

In a colored settlement in and around Wolf Hollow, lived a woman, a fugitive slave with her husband and two children. One September morning a colored woman came running across the field to Joseph C. Taylors shouting, "They've got 'em, they've got 'em," pointing to a covered wagon with two outriders moving swiftly down the road. As soon as Mr. Taylor got the woman's story he took a horse from the team which was standing before the door, and on this, hatless and coatless and shoeless, started in pursuit. Others

joined in and soon there was six in the chase. When near Wrightsdale, Mr. Taylor was given the horse of Joseph Pierce, as his was fagging. On the level stretch of road from thence to the State Line, near Rock Spring, where they were running by sight, not by scent, it was a race indeed. Mr. Taylor passed them near the line and halting them said, Gentlemen, this is a question of law. If you have a right to these people we will not interfere. The men felt safe, the mother was their slave and under Maryland law the children went with the mother. When taken before Squire Webster, they learned that the children born in Pennsylvania were free, and that taking them in this way was kidnapping.



For many years the local magistrate could hear and decide such questions, but under the law of 1826 the Judges of the County Court alone could do so. Mr. Taylor and John P. Harlan went to their homes to prepare for a trip to Lancaster, leaving the constable in charge.

I have heard James Woodrow, one of the pursuers, tell of what followed.

The Marylanders saw that they were up against a serious charge, seven to twenty years penalty, and showed a willingness to leave the mother if they could get away. The officer and all hands were off duty—and the party was gone, much to the chagrin of Messrs. Taylor and Harlan when they returned.

Mr. Woodrow said the thought of the woman with her children, the Southerners by their own fireside, was pleasing compared to that of the men in jail, the mother in a slave gang, the children motherless, what say you?

Mr. Taylor and the horse he rode were fine specimens of their kind, and as they faced the kidnapers in the road there was more fire in their eye than there was in the old musket, which was used to emphasize the call to halt!

When I knew that horse later, a noble gray, his name was **Belzebub**, a

term applied to him by the Marylanders that day, as to them it was an agent of evil.

On December 30, 1851, at about 11 A. M., three men in a covered wagon drove up to the home of Joseph C. Miller, now owned by S. S. Boyd, near Nottingham Station, seized a colored girl named Rachel Parker, put her in their wagon and drove off. White still in sight of the Miller home they found the road blocked by a wagon where a neighbor, James Pollock and his son, Samuel, were getting a load of wood. It is now State Highway Route 12.

The demand of the driver for a quick "Allow me to pass" was a little too insistant to suit our Irish friend and when some show of force was used, Mr. Pollock seized his axe and said "Come on."

The men had little time for a parley and none for a fight, especially as Mr. Miller could be seen coming across the field so the team was turned and they went by another road to Perryville.

Samuel Pollock said in after years: Had we known Rachel was in that wagon we would have held it, and the fire in his eye showed that he meant it.

The neighborhood was stirred, hasty conferences were held and the feeling general that something should be done, pursuit was neither safe nor sure. Her name would not be on record, either in the police court or the hotel register. The people of Baltimore were angered and aggrieved over the tragedy at Christiana and the result of the trial for treason following. Mr. Gorsuch, who lost his life in the attempt in thus seeking to reclaim his slave property, was acting strictly within the law.

The Governor of Maryland was just out with a manifesto that if a citizen could not recover his slave property under the law, then secession and disunion were inevitable.

In the north Joshua R. Gedding voiced the feeling of many in justifying the fugitive slaves in thus defending their rights to life and freedom.

This feeling moved men on both sides to do and dare, danger and difficulty was simply a spur to action. After consulting some friends Hartt G. Coates accompanied by Benjamin Furniss and Abner B. Richardson, started out that evening with intent to first find the trail, and then do what appeared to be best. At the Miller home and on the road others joined and the party was as follows: Joseph C. Miller, Lewis Melrath, Jesse B. Kirk, William Morris, Samuel Pollock, Benjamin Furniss, Abner B. Richardson and Hartt G. Coates. At Perryville they were told that such a party had gone on an earlier train, and they followed.

Of the next morning's events, in Baltimore, I will give Lewis Newcomer's version. "When I went to the Post Office where I held a clerkship I was told that some gentlemen wished to see me. I found Benjamin Furniss, a cousin of my wife, others strangers."

On learning their errand I went with them to see Francis Corcoran and thence to Campbell's slave depot. Campbell said he knew nothing of such a case. On our way to the only other such depot in the city I told them I think **this man** is honest, if he denies all knowledge of the girl we will return to Campbells. On our return to Campbells we saw Tom McCreary and Rachel in a hack. The horses were seized to prevent his driving off with her.

Of the legal action I will treat in another chapter.

After getting the girl committed to jail for a hearing, Mr. Corcoran took the men to his home for supper. Soon after some one suggested that they should be going, soon after another, when Mr. Corcoran said I will tell you when I think it time. Finally he advised starting, out on the street he said to them how would it do to get a Bus? You are strangers and it is a long, crooked way to President Street station. This proposal found favor and

around the corner one was found with the driver ready for the trip. At the station H. G. Coates, who paid all expenses, went in and bought the tickets, rejoined his comrades at the bus and together they got into the car safely, following Mr. Corcoran's advice. Soon after Joseph C. Miller got up and left his comrades, going as they supposed into another car. After their experience in the crowd where more than one had been tapped on the shoulder with a quiet "A word please," they could not believe that he had gone out but at Perryville when they found that he was not on the train two of them went back to Baltimore but found no trace of him. Next day Mr. Miller's body was found hanging from the limb of a tree, near Stemmer's run, nine miles from the city. Evidently the attempt was made to show suicide but the marks of strangulation on his neck were not made by the rope which was around his neck. At the Coroner's inquest the physician was rather non-committal as to how, but gave strangulation as cause of his death. This tragedy revives the thought of Mr. Corcoran in suggesting that they ride to the station. The writer had heard Mr. Corcoran tell of that evening, evidently well pleased with results so far as his advice was followed. And on the other side their persistent efforts to learn how that bus came to be there and by whose agency it was there, goes to show that their interest in the matter was not wholly for the comfort of the weary strangers in their midst.

They were a band of marked men and the various threats heard during the day was disquieting, to put it mildly. I would not say anything to reflect on the conduct of the city officers but in a crowd inflamed by passion and prejudice intensified by recent events, what was done to Mr. Miller could have been as easily to the others if at all separated in the crowd of toughs.

This case in at least three particulars differs from any others within my knowledge.

1st. The seizure of Rachel was made in open day by parties who were known.

2nd. The quick pursuit while the game was in the open and getting legal control of the victim subject to trial in the Court of a city of the south.

3rd. The action of our State Legislature in voting that the Governor should employ counsel to conduct the trial of the case in the Baltimore Court, and directing that all costs thereof shall be paid by the State. Governor Bigler sent his Attorney General, Campbell, and Judge Bell, of West Chester.

The credit for this legislative action probably should be given mainly to Hon. Henry S. Evans, editor of the Village Record, who was a member of State Senate at the time from Chester County.

The return of our company to Campbells slave depot was a little too quick for the slave dealers. There was no evident reason for the kidnapper and victim to be in the hack together except to get her hidden after learning that her friends were on the trail. Mr. Campbell claimed that after hearing of the claim that she was a free negro he was planning to have her lodged in jail pending a decision of this question. In view of the fact that a few moments before he had denied all knowledge of the girl or of her case, and also that the chief kidnapper had her in a hack prepared to drive off, her friends took no chances. On complaint of J. A. Miller, McCreary was arrested on the charge of kidnapping and held under bail for a hearing the next week by Justice Pennington.

The claim was made in Baltimore, that in 1847, a family of slaves named Crocus, mother and two daughters, the property of a Mrs. Brinkhurst, for whom W. S. Schofield appears as agent, had left her service coming to the Nottingham neighborhood in some wagons which had gone to Baltimore loaded with machinery of the Tyson Mining Co., who operated most of the chrome mines in that vicinity.

Right here a statement by Rachel to the writer after noting the kind treatment by the landlady at the hotel at Perryville and of a man who was called Potter Haines, who I believe was Basil Haines of Rising Sun, who was at the hotel; said that in the days proceeding in Baltimore Mr. Schofield did not appear at all until after her commitment to jail when he came to her very angry, that the affair had taken such a turn, and was out of his control. This fact and the productions of the power of attorney to Officer McCreary at his trial on the charge of kidnapping, suggest the query, was Mr. Schofield's appearance in the case an after-thought entirely.

If brought there under authority from him he would most likely have been informed at once that she was in their custody and surely of the trouble, when it arose.

No such group was known here and the drivers of the wagons denied carrying any slaves. As a sort of preliminary to the hearing set by Justice Pennington, Mrs. Brinkhurst took Rachel, in charge of a jail official, to visit several homes where the Crocus girl had worked. But in no case was she identified as the same girl, as it came out in this hearing at the jail before Justice Schultz.

January 5th, 1852.

State of Maryland vs. Thomas McCreary
Charged with kidnapping before
Justice Pennington

J. McGovern, State Attorney; and Norris & Heeps, prosecution.
W. F. Preston, for defense.

The testimony of the several witnesses was repeated in substance in the Court trial so will put it in there.

Defendant produced a power of attorney from W. S. Schofield authorizing him a constable of Elkton, Md., to go to Miller's home and get this girl, Eliza Crocus alias Rachel Parker, and bring her to Baltimore. When this was admitted by the Justice the defendant was clear of all charges and the requisition papers were void, in fact had already been refused by the Governor.

The Justice said however that the Status of the girl as to freedom was not affected by this.

A plea for freedom was now entered for her by a Baltimore friend, Jane S. Townsend, I think, and the whole matter turned over for decision in Circuit Court of Baltimore city. At some point during these proceedings it came out that a sister of Rachel (Elizabeth) had been quietly picked up one night some two weeks before, and was then in New Orleans. Later she was brought back to Baltimore, and her declaration that they were Schofield's slaves, was disquieting to put it mildly.

Messrs. Morris & Heeps said that many more witnesses would be needed to support Rachel's claim, and it is possible that this need inflamed our State Legislature in a way to pay costs. A number of Friends in Baltimore interested themselves in this case and did much to add to Rachel's comfort during her year in jail awaiting trial.

Baltimore, S. S. Jan. 4, 1853.

County Circuit Court, Adjourned Session.

Opened this morning, Judge Cadwallader presiding.

The case of Rachel Parker's plea for freedom was taken up and will probably take some time.

Judge Campbell, Atty. Gen. of Penna.

Judge T. S. Bell of West Chester, Penna.; and W. H. Norris, Esq., of Baltimore, will appear for petitioner.

Hon. Otho Scott of Harford Co., Md.; Wm. Schley and W. F. Preston appear for claimant, U. S. Schofield.

Jurors

Wm. Jones	John Yates
Sam. Pemberton	Thos. Craddock
Wm. Spaulding	John Whiler
John Bacon	Geo. Fisher
Nathaniel Parson	Don Cameron
J. S. Biddison	John Colby (?)

W. H. Norris, Esq., in opening the case stated that in Apr., 1847, a Mrs. Brinkhurst had lost a negro woman with two children. Under power of attorney from Luther S. Schofield, as agent for Mrs. Brinkhurst, Officer McCreary obtained this girl at the home of Mr. J. C. Miller in Chester Co., Pa.

Persons from Penna. followed to Baltimore and found her at Campbells slave depot, and they had McCreary arrested on the charge of kidnapping.

Failing in this a petition for freedom was filed in the Superior Court of Baltimore for her freedom.

Later the petition was remanded to the Circuit Court of Baltimore. They proposed to prove that the girl had always lived in Pa. and was not the Crocus girl. Simply a case of mistaken identity. This was putting it mildly but it served our purpose.

A brother and two nephews of Officer McCreary appeared as witnesses on the case. And he was well known in the community so this power of attorney may have been an after thought. If a statement made by one of the kidnapping party is accepted it undoubtedly was.

Following the legislative action Gov. Bigler named as counsel representing the State his Attorney General Campbell and Judge T. S. Bell of West Chester.

They evidently gave thought to a proper presentation of their case. I remember very distinctly of their being in attendance at a called meeting of the witnesses at Pine Grovè School House, in West Nottingham township.

This one time is fixed on my mind because a sister who was present was being censored by our mother for some lack of respect toward Judge Campbell; her answer was "Oh he is a democrat." Such care with facts as a foundation made our case a good one.

In court John Taylor said that in 1828 he had hauled little Beck in an oxcart from Nathan Milner's to Wm. Browns. Nathan Milner and his father, Cyrus Milner, a man of 75 years, both testified in support of this. Levi K. Brown went to school with Ned and little Beck. Jesse Coulson, Esq., who married Ned and Beck, parents of Rachel. Rachel Kimble, who acted as mid-wife, and at the mother's request, named the child Rachel. Wm. Mullin said little Beck came to work for my mother carrying a child a month or so old, named Rachel. This is the same girl who has been in this neighborhood ever since. Mrs. J. C. Miller said this is the girl who came to live with me in 1844. Sophia Kirk, her mother; her sister, Rachel; her brother, Jacob Kirk, Jane Miller, the mother of J. C. Miller, Hannah Melrath, his sister; with her husband, Lewis Mulrath, in their testimony all supported Mrs. Miller in this claim. Dr. D. W. Hutchinson, of Oxford, said that in 1844 he was called in to dress a cut foot of the child Rachel. The scar was shown to Court and jury.

Samuel Dowland went to school with Rachel, this is the same girl. James Mullin, Esq.—Rachel attended Sabbath School at "Houses" when I was Supt.

Ellwood Chambers was sent to Millers with an order for some oats by Hannah Melrath, first saw Rachel then, an order shown dated Feb. 17, 1845.

John J. McCreary, a nephew of Officer McCreary, said to the writer some

40 years afterward—"When we were asked on the stand to pick out the girl in with a number of others, when we glanced over them her recognition of us was quick and sure.

Partial list of remaining witnesses who testified:

Geo. W. Campbell	Wm. B. Morris
Wm. C. Chalfant	Geo. Grason
Samuel Chambers	Samuel W. Scott
Jas. F. Pollock	Samuel Butler
John H. Wright	Alexander Melrath
Wm. Campbell	Rebecca Morrison
Thos. Keitly	Mary Wilkenson
Robert Hughes	Wm. McCreary

Hannah Irwin

At the opening of the court on January 14, Hon. Otho Scott said in addressing the Court that his appearance with the Counsel was to announce the withdrawal of their claim and by direction of the Court, the jury gave a verdict sustaining the plea for freedom.

Court and Counsel at once exchanged pleasantries over their mutual fairness and courtesy shown and the ability with which the case was handled and the happy termination.

To Rachel's many friends who had given in her behalf of their time and thought and substance—this move came as a joyous surprise. The decision of a jury is always uncertain and this was sure. In the eight days of trial 49 witnesses had been heard and some 25 more were ready for call. Is it any wonder that Judge Cadwallader should say that few even of the white girls could get a whole neighborhood to come into Court in their behalf.

The costs will appear later.

Day by day the trial had gone on much to the inconvenience and discomfort of many of the witnesses, especially the old women; to whom the fire alarm and racing fire engines in response spelt "We must go home in the morning."

When John Taylor's name was called as a witness, the name appeared to recall the case already noted where in Jos. C. Taylor overhauled a party of kidnappers some years before and my mother noticed a murmur sweep through the crowd, "Is this the same man?" then as a sense of relief "It is not."

After the said Rachel returned to the Miller home and a few weeks later came to live with my mother, where she lived up to her marriage 12 years afterwards. Her married life of 8 years was mostly spent on the farm. When she and her husband separated, Rachel, with two of her children, returned to my mother's home, where she remained up to my mother's death in 1889, and for some years after with my brother, Granville. When no longer able to do her part in the work she went to live with her daughter, Mrs. Lucy Jones, in Oxford.

In all these forty years she lived the trusted, faithful servant after the manner of the colored "Mammy" of the South. And to attest the appreciation of my mother, she directed that a small annuity should be paid to her yearly during her life. At her funeral a loving tribute was offered, and by request a brief story of her life was given by the writer. He was glad to do this as she had helped care for him as a boy of seven and lived in the family to play "Mammy" to all his children, over forty-five years from start to finish.

The kidnapping of these girls does not differ in a material way from that of the many other similar cases on record on the files of the abolitionists records in Philadelphia. But the quick and efficient pursuit and the successful management of their case places it above all the others leaving, out a consideration, the contest over the question of human slavery. The success of the kidnappers in the past in getting away, probably made them more reck-

less about their work in the seizing of Rachel; and on the other hand this very success led to the awakening of the aroused public sentiment which led to more community action on behalf of these victims. The memoirs of Joseph C. Miller drew vivid attention to this case, also.

Resolution No. 7 of the Session of 1852

“Whereas, The Legislature of Pennsylvania has been informed that Rachel Parker, a girl of color, was forcibly and without legal process abducted from the County of Chester, in this Commonwealth, and is now confined as an alleged slave in the jail of Baltimore County in the State of Maryland:

And whereas, The entire community from which she was taken, and in which she has always lived, is firmly of the belief that she is a free born native of this commonwealth:

And whereas, The said Rachel has petitioned for her freedom, in accordance with the laws of Maryland, and as suit for the same has been instituted in the Court of Baltimore County; therefore,

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in General Assembly met, That the Governor is hereby requested to employ counsel to appear on the part of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in behalf of said petitioner, and to prosecute such suit unto completion.

Approved—March 1, 1852.

Wm. Bigler.

Resolution No. 14, of the Sessions of 1852

Be it also resolved, That the Governor be authorized to draw his warrant on the Treasurer of the State for all necessary expenses incurred in the suit of Rachel Parker for her freedom now pending in the Courts of Baltimore County in the State of Maryland, in the event that the expenses thereof shall not be awarded to be paid by the County or State aforesaid: Provided, That such expenses shall be limited to the travel and attendance of witnesses: And provided, That the counsel for the Commonwealth shall tax the bill for the same and make affidavit that the number of witnesses taxed in said bill were necessary and in attendance and that said bill is just and correct.

Approved—Apr. 13, 1852.

Wm. Bigler.

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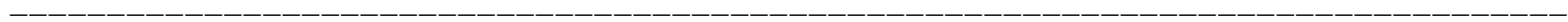
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