

# Free African-Americans in Maryland: The Underground Railroad in Sandy Spring, Montgomery County: 1800-1860.

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## ***Abstract***

This paper has focused upon activities of Free African-American communities in Montgomery County to provide assistance to fugitive slaves via the "Underground Railroad". Cooperating with abolitionists in Maryland and Pennsylvania, the most promising is in the Sandy Spring Quaker Community – the home of at least two established free black neighborhoods.

## **A. Introduction**

"The Underground Railroad was perhaps the most dramatic protest against slavery in United States history. The operations of clandestine escape networks began in the 1600s, and was later connected with organized Abolitionist activity of the 1800s. Neither an "underground" or a "railroad", this informal system arose as a loosely constructed network of escape routes that originated in the South, intertwined throughout the North, and eventually ended in Canada. Escape routes were not just restricted to the North, but also extended into western territories, Mexico and the Caribbean. From 1830 to 1865, the Underground Railroad reached a peak as abolitionists...aided large numbers of bondsmen to freedom... Although the Underground Railroad is linked with Abolitionism...it stands out primarily for its amorphous nature and mysterious character. Unlike other organized activities of the Abolition movement...The Underground Railroad secretly resisted slavery by abetting runaways to freedom. It confronted human bondage without any direct demands or intended violence; yet its efforts played a prominent role in the destruction of...slavery. The work...was so effective that its action intimidated slaveowners. Most

regarded the Underground as ‘organized theft’ and a threat to their livelihood.”<sup>1</sup>

There are three areas in Montgomery County that could have been “stations”. The most likely is the Sandy Spring Quaker community. The museum at Sandy Spring (see Photos A and B) has family documents, information about several “safe houses” (“stations” on the Underground Railroad) in the neighborhood, as well as extensive material concerning the local Free African-American communities.



**[Photo A: Sandy Spring Museum]**



**[Photo B: Sandy Spring Museum]**

The second location has been rumored but not proved. This is Glenview Mansion (now the Rockville Civic Center) occupied in the antebellum period by Judge Bowie, a unionist who had some slaves. Did his slaves establish connections with Free communities in Montgomery County?

A third site is the Free African-American community in Rockville known as “Haiti” located around Martin’s Lane and the Beall-Dawson House. Who was “Martin” and what were the community connections, if any, with the Underground Railroad? The Montgomery County Historical Society and Anthony Cohen (currently publishing a book on the Underground Railway in Maryland) have information on this subject.

My research has suggested that there may have been links between Sandy Spring and Pennsylvania, an early center of the Underground Railroad. The Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area had several stations on the railroad. On March 22, 1998, Dr. Nilgen Andoroukar of Temple University gave an in-depth survey (including slides of tunnels, passages, Inns, and private homes on the routes to freedom) at the Anthracite Heritage Museum in Scranton, PA.

From, April 23-25, 1998 the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference of Black History in Pennsylvania was held at Millersville University in Lancaster, PA. Two topics were intriguing: “The Christiana Resistance” of September 11, 1851, and “The Underground Railroad in Lancaster County.”

The Christiana Resistance or “riot” as it was identified in 1851 was a turning-point in community-led resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Local residents led by an escaped Maryland slave, William Parker, defended four

fugitive slaves (also from Maryland) against the officials attempting to re-enslave them. In the ensuing conflict, the plantation owner, Edward Gorsuch of Baltimore County, was killed. The significance of this resistance was commemorated by the establishment of a state historical marker on Saturday afternoon April 25, 1998. Lectures, panel discussions, and accompanying literature provided the following facts.

## **B. The Christiana Resistance**

According to Professor Thomas Slaughter of Rutgers University, in his presentation at the April 24th meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association Black History Conference, the events which erupted September 11, 1851, in Christiana, PA, represent a crucial turning point in American history.

“...no single event before John Brown’s raid contributed more to the decline of confidence in the nation’s ability to resolve the controversy over slavery without wholesale resort to arms. Were we to search for parallels between the events leading up to the American Revolution, this nation’s first civil war, the Christiana riot corresponds ... to the Stamp Act crisis in the same way that John Brown’s raid does to the Boston Tea Party.”<sup>2</sup>

And yet, Dr. Slaughter continued, the events have been passed over by historians of the Civil War, regarded “more as a footnote than as a prologue to war.”<sup>3</sup>

We do not find it even in the most “updated” textbooks designed for use in high school and college American history courses. The immense significance of these events can no longer be ignored:

1. This was a “political crime.” Federal prosecutors charged 38 men on 117 separate counts of ‘levying war’ against the government ... making this the largest mass indictment for treason in the history of our nation.”<sup>4</sup>
2. Abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates were polarized. Battle lines were drawn and the era of compromise was over.
3. Both sides realized it was a defeat for law and order, a “tragedy” for moderates, and the failure of a peaceful resolution of slavery issues.

4. This was also a tragedy for Free Black residents of PA and MD, for fugitive slaves risking everything to find freedom, and for those who had to leave friends and family and flee to Canada to avoid prosecution for participating either directly or indirectly in the resistance. White neighbors, regardless of their sentiments about slavery, became suspicious, even resentful at the disruption of the status quo.
5. The retelling of the Christiana story gives an insight into the slavery controversy as it impacted the lives of ordinary people, acting “under the stresses of an extraordinary event.”<sup>5</sup>
6. Finally, this history helps us “confront our national myths “with truth in order to build the “kinder, gentler nation that we all wish we had.”<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Ella Forbes of Temple University gave the keynote lecture on the African-American presence at the Christiana event. Her comprehensive study, But We Have No Country, defines the Christiana Resistance as “redemptive violence” by the African-American participants. The blacks were outside the law because they were not citizens; they had only one right, the “natural” right of self-defense. In this spirit, William Parker, a fugitive slave, from Anne Arundel County, MD, founded a “defense league” in 1841. The rationale behind the resistance dispels the stereotype of the helpless slaves being led to freedom by White Abolitionists. I would like to pursue the record of William Parker and his possible ties with the Maryland underground railroad. Dr. Forbes’ book is an invaluable resource, providing an extensive bibliography as well as a complete Edition of William Parker’s alleged account of the Christiana Resistance as it appeared in the Atlantic Monthly for February, 1866.<sup>7</sup>

### **C. The Underground Railroad in Lancaster County**

A meeting was held Saturday, April 25th, at the Bethel AME Church in Lancaster and hosted by Reverend Edward Bailey (Pastor). Presentations and discussions were led by Dennis Downey and Leroy Hopkins of Millersville University and by Paul Culbreth, a Lancaster businessman.

The Free Black communities date back to 1726. They were continually providing aid to fugitives as well as freedmen. Many of them were former indentured servants who had served out their contracts. Some were freed slaves who had purchased freedom or had been rewarded by their master for “good behavior.”

Three paths led from Maryland to Pennsylvania with outlets in Columbia, Peach Bottom, and Christiana.

The first entry point was at Columbia, with agent William Wright using his home as a station and his ferry to bring fugitives across the Susquehanna River. They were sent on to safe houses in Strasburg, Bird-in-Hand, Bart, and Christiana. A second route came from Baltimore. Fugitives were met at Peach Bottom by Free African-Americans who rowed them across the river and sent them to safe houses. This path is known to locals as "Pilgrim's Pathway." The third route was the most direct to Christiana. It was further south than the other two, following the Susquehanna to the mouth of the Octorara Creek. One of the first stations was the home of William Brown near the Maryland State line. This was known as the "North Star" route to freedom.<sup>8</sup>

Columbia had the largest Free Black community with some property-holders and a majority of tenant farmers. The wealthier African-Americans would purchase enslaved relatives and set them free. Churches provided support for fugitives, particularly the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Family histories and church records are the best sources. One should also seek letters, diaries, and contemporary newspaper articles.<sup>9</sup>

Obviously, fugitives from Maryland could have connected with these links in Pennsylvania, and Sandy Springs would be a logical choice for "stations."

The voluminous materials at the Sandy Spring Library (see Photo C) concerning African-Americans in the Montgomery County community since the American Revolution. These include family records, census reports, titles to land, church records, files concerning historic houses in the community, records of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Sandy Spring, and a wealth of oral history. The most suggestive material relates to the alleged "Safe Houses" - "Bloomfield" and "Mt. Airy" and the census of 1850 which lists all the African Americans by household - including age, gender, occupation, real estate holdings and color (Black or Mulatto). Most important, they are designated as "Free."



**[Photo C: Library at Sandy Spring Museum—Jean Snyder, Curator]**

This historian's challenging task has been to separate the folklore from the statistical data without losing touch with the people who made the history.

#### **D. Quaker Attitudes Toward Slavery**

Traditional histories of America's colonial period presented slavery as an insignificant factor in Quaker Societies. Modern research tools are being asked to analyze death, burial, baptism, shipping, tax records, and the results have been surprising. According to social historian Gary B. Wash, Quakers were involved in the lucrative African slave trade. Slave artisans and craftsmen were essential to the urban economy of Philadelphia. In fact, it was only the increasing abundance of "cheap white servants" which led Quakers to abandon slavery in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>10</sup>

Another historian Darold D. Wax discovered that “more than 1200 slaves entered the Delaware River Valley between 1759 and 1765, about 75 percent directly from Africa. By the American Revolution, slavery was well established in eastern Pennsylvania...”<sup>11</sup>

Recent studies also emphasize occupational diversity among slaves. Slaves were employed in manufacturing, shipping, agriculture, the charcoal iron industry, and as domestic servants. One historian commented that in Berks County, Pennsylvania, “quite a few slaves became skilled workers, mastered several languages and held responsible positions.”<sup>12</sup> As in the colonial South, slaves served “as advertisements of their owners’ high economic and social status.”<sup>13</sup>

The economic practices in the Quaker community of Sandy Spring, Maryland, were similar to Pennsylvania’s, except for an emphasis upon agricultural labor. Indeed, respected leaders of the Sandy Spring Society were prosperous slave owners during the Colonial period. Names like James Brooke, John Thomas (100 slaves), and Evan Thomas (200 “Negroes”) were noted in the records because they began to free their slaves and even gave them plots of land.<sup>14</sup> The will of Richard Thomas, recorded on December 15, 1806, freed between 60 and 70 slaves.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to note that these manumissions took place after 1790 when the religious leadership began to exert pressure. It began in 1730 at the Philadelphia yearly meeting. Quakers were advised not to buy or sell slaves. In 1758, John Woolman, a persistent Abolitionist, convinced the Philadelphia Society of Friends to exclude members who bought or sold slaves from meeting and refuse their contributions as “tainted money.” At the urging of Woolman, a committee was appointed to visit slave owners and “convey the message that slave ownership, although not yet cause for disownment, was no longer consistent with the Quaker view of just relations among the brotherhood of man.” John Woolman personally implored prominent Philadelphia slaveholders “to look into their hearts to ascertain whether their ownership of slaves did not reveal an immoral lust for gain.”

At every yearly and quarterly meeting after 1730 until the eve of the American Revolution, the Quaker leadership urged members to free their slaves. Yet in 1762 the Philadelphia yearly meeting regretfully reported “and increase of slaves among the members of our religious society” to the yearly meeting in London.”<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately many of the Philadelphia Quakers were willing to forgo religious principles for their best economic interests. It was not until slave labor and the Atlantic Slave Trade became less lucrative that the Quaker leaders were successful in convincing members to free their slaves and stop participating in the



trade. That finally happened as the Second Continental Congress was convening in Philadelphia.<sup>17</sup>

The situation was even more difficult for Quaker leaders in Maryland, especially where tobacco was being cultivated profitably. In the 1770s, after admonitions from Philadelphia, the yearly meeting of Friends in Baltimore “ ‘recommended to the subordinate quarterly meetings’ to keep under the weight of a concern which has arisen in the society sometime ago, in regard to members holding slaves.” A committee reported that ‘some appear concerned to discharge their slaves; divers are convinced of the injustice of the practice, while too many make excuses...great tenderness, patience, and deliberation marked every step taken by our society in this weighty matter. Time was afforded to all to examine the subject for themselves. No outside pressure was employed. Appeal was made only to the sense of right in the minds of those immediately concerned.’”<sup>18</sup>

Then, in 1790, the Philadelphia Society of Friends took action. They visited slave-owning Quakers in Montgomery and Anne Arundel counties made it clear - the Society of Friends no longer tolerated slavery. After 1781, members of the Sandy Spring community who failed to free their slaves were disowned.<sup>19</sup> Some were persuaded to repent and returned to the fold.<sup>20</sup>

Oral tradition confirms that Quaker slave owners often had to subvert their economic interests to live up to their convictions. For example, Samuel Thomas was worried about providing a secure estate for his wife and children. Finally, overcome with “slave sickness”, he followed his conscience and manumitted his elderly slaves.<sup>21</sup> Another voiced concern that his elderly slaves would be unable to provide for themselves.<sup>22</sup> Generally, the issue of slavery produced many “troubled hearts and minds” within the community before it was resolved.<sup>23</sup>

Peace of mind in their own community did not help the Quakers of Sandy Spring with their neighbors in Montgomery County:

“The settlement here had, from the beginning been differentiated from those round about by difference of religious faith and practice, but when free labor became the rule in Sandy Spring, and abolition sentiment grew strong, the separation became a veritable chasm across which we were regarded with horror...”<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Sandy Spring became an “Island of Staunch Unionists” in the midst of confederate sympathizers.<sup>25</sup> It is easy to understand why Montgomery County slaveholders suspected the Quaker community of

participating in Underground Railroad activities despite the fact that there is little “hard evidence.”

The file “Underground Railroad” in the library of the Sandy Spring Museum lists six houses, which have been linked with the Underground Railroad through oral tradition (see Map D). They are:

“Bloomfield” on Bentley Road

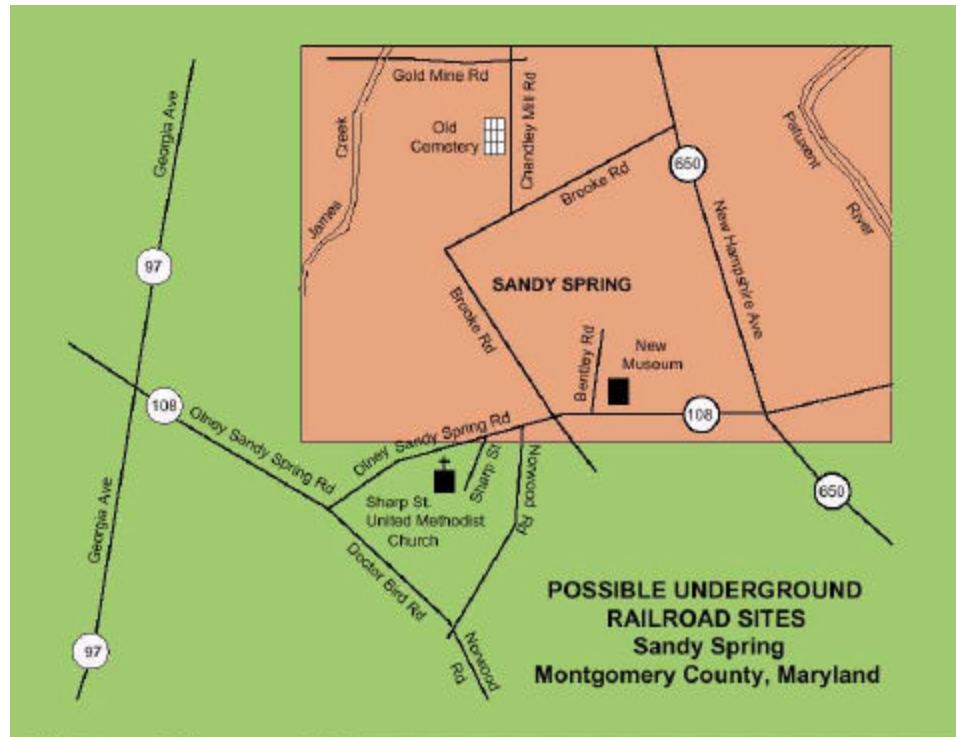
“Walnut Hill” (Rivermist Kennels).on New Hampshire Avenue, North of Ashton.

“Brooke Meadow” on Goldmine Road.

“Sharon” on Marden Lane.

Mount Airy, North of Ashton on New Hampshire Avenue.

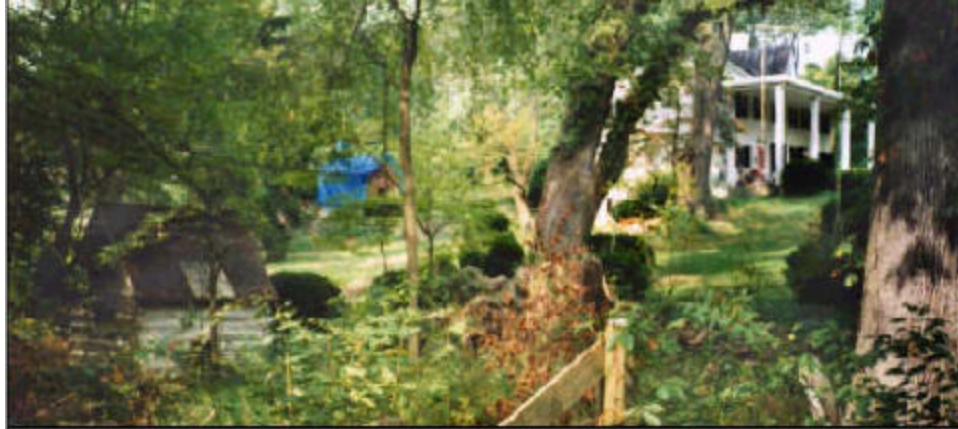
Fulford on Marden Lane.



**[Map D: Sandy Spring vicinity map]**

Oral history designates “Bloomfield” as a possible center of the Underground Railroad (see Photo E). The house at 18000 Bentley Road, was purchased by Caleb Bentley, a Pennsylvania clockmaker and a Quaker, in 1795. “Bloomingdale” as it was called at that time, was built before 1789, by Richard

Thomas for his overseer. Both families were reputed to be opponents of slavery. For example, it was said that when Richard Thomas freed slaves named Hill in 1806 it was “the first instance of a black having a name other than the name of the family owner.”



[  
**Photo E: “Bloomfield”]**

This is important because it indicates the continuity of a family predating emancipation. For a family to maintain an independent name meant that the family identified itself as a continuous group separate from slave identification.<sup>26</sup>

Several letters sent by Thomas J. Lea to his cousin Mrs. Edward W. Bentley suggest that a spirit of self reliance and initiative was developing among the Free African Americans by 1850 as well as a distaste for and defiance of the slave system by their white neighbors.

In one, dated September 9, 1929, he noted that “either before or after the sale of Bernard Gilpin’s land on the east side of the road for \$10.51 per acre, Remus Q. Hill bought four acres at \$25.00 per acre on the northwest corner adjoining the Edward Lea farm.”<sup>27</sup>

A second letter of June 28, 1936 related the following family anecdotes:

Grandfather (Joshua Peirce) and William Brown...went to a sale of personal property of the late Richard Holmes near Howard’s corner, they bought a large portion of cattle, went to the house to settle just as the cellar door was opened to put a slave on the Stone House block west of the house he was stripped to the waist. The dealers looked him over, especially his teeth. This

sight was too much for the cattle buyers. They went home without settling for the cattle, went back the next day.

Obviously “grandfather” and his friend were offended by the sight of a slave being inspected for sale, however, they are not reported as issuing any protests, and they seem to have returned the next day to buy their cattle.

Perhaps the following action, taken by a young woman was more emphatic:

Richard Holmes had been for a long time an anxious suitor for Sally Gilpin, daughter of Bernard Gilpin of Mt. Airy...The slaves were the trouble. She would not surrender while he had slaves; he would not give them up. She later (1840) was the second wife of Robert Brooke, of Brooke Grove.<sup>28</sup>

Many stories circulated about the Bentley family’s aversion to slavery as well as the use of their house, “Bloomfield” at a station on the Underground Railroad. In “Legends and Traditions” Rebecca T. Miller wrote: that during the days before the Civil War, though it was never mentioned, there is reason to suppose that there was a station of the ‘Underground Railroad; here. A lady told me that one day a colored woman, whose daughter was a slave, came to her to get a letter written. It consisted of the words: ‘the bundle you expect will arrive on Saturday,’ with a Baltimore address. Before Saturday the daughter had disappeared. On another occasion a bonnet and a shawl were borrowed from one of the friends before a party of fugitive slaves started on a successful trip to Canada....Richard T. Bentley sat reading late one night when he heard a strange noise and saw a black face peering in at the window near him. Going to the door, a colored man whom he recognized, said, ‘Mr. Bentley, can you please point me out the North Star?; that was the guide to freedom under the British Flag to many a fugitive in those days!’<sup>29</sup>

More recently, an article by Florence Lehman in the County Courier for November 1, 1978, quoted the following excerpt from a letter (dated February 21, 1974):

...a very old foundation under the east end (of Bloomfield) was believed by the Bentley tradition to be the base of a small cottage. There are traces of two rooms and a well. One of the Patterson boys found a penny there dated 1793. There are tales that the house was once a station for the underground slave railway.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, information about specific locations of the Underground Railroad is speculative rather than precise. Paradoxically, logical arguments can be developed for both sides. Clearly, the Quakers of Sandy Spring were the “most cohesive anti-slavery group in Montgomery County.”<sup>31</sup> They emancipated their slaves, facilitated the purchase of land for farming to help them become self-sufficient. A school was opened, and steps were taken by several white landowners in 1822 to provide land for a church - now known as Sharp Street United Methodist Church (1310 Olney - Sandy Spring, MD). Services were held in a little log cabin called the “Independent Methodist Church of Colored People of Sandy Spring.” It is the oldest African-American Church in Montgomery County. This was followed in 1854 by a grant of one acre of land called “Charley Forest” from Thomas Brooke and his wife “to be used by local people of color...as a place for interment of the dead. Located on the great road leading from Baltimore to Rockville, the deed stipulated that the land could be used only as a cemetery, a church, or a school. If it was ever used as “a mart for merchandise, spirituous liquor, or any manufacturing establishment” the land would revert to the Brooke Family heirs and assignees. The deed was held by the white trustees until March 6, 1886, when it was transferred to Remus Q. Hill, S. E. Powell and Levi Hall, trustees of the church. A frame building replaced the log cabin in 1887.<sup>32</sup>

The first trustees were African-American landowners in Sandy Spring. Such prominent family names as W. Bowen, T. Mitchell, J. E. Wetherald, H. Plummer, Sara Owens, T. Marriot, N. Powell, A. Waters, S. Pumphrey, Samuel Cole, and E. Elcorn were listed on the 1865 Martinet map of Montgomery County as black landowners. The Hopkins map of 1879 listed Caleb Dorsey, Samuel Budd, Richard D. Hill (197 Acres), J. T. Budd (2 acres), Caleb Pumphrey, teacher (12 acres), Samuel Bond, and Remus Q. Hill (125 acres).<sup>33</sup> These men were the leading citizens of the African-American community and made The Sharp Street Church into the major social, educational, and cultural, as well as religious institution for the community.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, some descendents of these original leaders can still be found living in Sandy Spring.<sup>35</sup>

Was the Sharp Street Church a “station” on the Underground Railroad? Its location and particularly the location of the old cemetery suggest the possibility.

While little or no “hard” evidence has been found, indirect evidence and common sense suggest the possibility. It seems more likely that actual sites would be found in the Free African-American neighborhoods, particularly after the passage of a strengthened Fugitive Slave Law as part of the Compromise of 1850. Aside from the strategic location of these enclaves<sup>36</sup>, obviously a fugitive could be

concealed more effectively by fellow African-Americans than by Quaker white landholders who already were suspected of being soft on Abolitionism.

Even before the turbulent decade preceding the Civil War, Montgomery County became polarized on issues concerning slavery. Sandy Spring white landowners were clearly in the minority. In January 1842, a state slaveholder's convention was held at Annapolis. While the delegates defeated legislation forbidding all emancipation, they did agree to restrict manumission. The proposals included measures prohibiting manumission "except on condition of transportation to some place outside the United States" and preventing "Free Blacks from returning to Maryland for any cause once they left the state.

(the delegates)...agreed to petition for laws to forbid Free Blacks from coming into or even traveling through the state and to increase the penalty for assisting runaway slaves. They also requested guards to watch for runaways at railroad stations and steamboat docks in Baltimore. The convention further proposed an annual renewal of certificates of freedom; all Free Blacks would be required to secure their good behavior or be bound out at the discretion of the sheriff.<sup>37</sup>

Despite these aggressive actions, Sandy Spring Quakers refused to embrace political abolitionism. The activism of such outspoken abolitionists as James G. Birney or William Lloyd Garrison contradicted "Quaker principles of nonviolence and persuasion by the Holy Spirit."<sup>38</sup>

Even a respected Quaker lady, Lucretia Mott, appears to have received a mixed reception when she spoke on abolition and women's rights in Sandy Spring, Brookeville, and Baltimore in 1842. Here are two very different reports:

(Thomas P. Stabler) listened to a very pointed discourse, delivered in most beautiful language...taken as a whole...it was decidedly calculated to draw the minds of her hearers directly from the course indicated by her text which was 'God will teach his people himself...She was at our meeting yesterday, preached 2 hours, and in Brookville in the evening. The latter was attended by only 2 or 3 friends that I have heard of. Some dissatisfaction at both places, but no disorder.

(Brooke Stabler noted that) Lucretia has been here preaching abolition...but I guess she barked up the wrong tree. She went to New Market today and intended having a meeting in Frederick

tonight. Some are apprehensive that she will cause a disturbance there, as that immediate vicinity has been a good deal excited owing to the running away of so many of the negroes.<sup>39</sup>

The white citizens of Sandy Spring must have struggled with a three-way conflict-between conscience, the basic doctrines of their religious society, and survival in an increasingly hostile environment. While it seems doubtful that a Sandy Spring Quaker would have turned fugitives over to authorities, or even refused them sanctuary, it also seems unlikely that they were part of a network of Underground Railroad Stations in Montgomery County.

What was known as the “Free Negro Settlements,” located on Brooke and Chandlee Mill Roads, provides intriguing information about possible sites to conceal fugitive slaves. Oral history certainly supports this. According to Anthony Cohen in his comprehensive *The Underground Railroad in Montgomery County, Maryland*.

The most revealing clue to the UGRR (Underground Railroad) lies within the black Community of Sandy Spring. His mistress manumitted Enoch George Howard, a slave of Sarah Griffith who resided in the vicinity of Sandy Spring in 1851. Howard settled on a farm off of Brooke Road where he built a log cabin. It was this site that the Howard family says that the slave Dred Scott visited in 1857 when...the Supreme Court was hearing (his) case. County resident and attorney Montgomery Blair represented Scott. Blair was friendly with many Sandy Spring families and would likely have chosen the safety of its Free colored community for his client.<sup>40</sup>

Anthony Cohen also recounts oral history narratives about three other fugitives who escaped to Canada via Sandy Spring: Two brothers-William Henson Holland and Thomas John Holland, and James Wesley Hill, popularly referred to as “Canada Jim.”<sup>41</sup>

Tunnels and underground ice houses are all part of the exciting adventure stories surrounding the Underground Railroad but “hard” evidence is more evasive.

The census of 1850 listed 309 Free people of color for the “Cracklin District.” As a group, they were young - in their twenties or younger - and about evenly divided between men and women. Most of the men (age 18 and older) were listed as “laborer”; women were not listed with any vocation. About half were described as “mulatto” the others were “black.” Many were listed as living “in the household” of Farmers, for example Henry Gaither or Thomas P. Stabler. Although no racial identity was given to these “Farmers” it is assumed that they

were white. At least 1/6 of the individuals held real estate, valued anywhere from \$30.00 to \$250.00. They probably maintained their own households. The names of these early landowners appear continuously in the History of Sandy Spring right into the 20th century. For example, Bowen, Budd, Bright, Cole, Davis, Hill, Powell, etc. Most were farmers - however two men were listed as “shoemakers, one blacksmith, and one “post and railer” (fence builder). The first Free Black settlements were in the vicinity of Brooke Road, Chandlee Mill Road, and Goldmine Road on the one hand, and Norwood Road and Dr. Bird Road, on the other. In an article which appeared in the Montgomery Journal for November 15, 1988, it was stated:

Fieldhands tended to settle in the Brooke Road, Chandlee Mill section and a group of household slaves founded the enclave on Norwood Road.<sup>42</sup>

No other specific reference to social or economic divisions within the African-American community of Sandy Spring has been found, however the Northeastern Montgomery County Black Oral History Study offered the following information:

Another ‘colored settlement’ area developed South of the Olney-Sandy Spring Road (Route 108) in the area of the Sharp Street Church. This neighborhood is also bounded by Dr. Bird Road on the West and Norwood Road (Route 182) on the East and Southeast. However, the enclave grew more slowly since it seems that the plots were more expensive, and/or the owners were more discriminating as to whom they sold the ground.<sup>43</sup>

An examination of the map supports the hypothesis that the most active Underground Railroad sites in Sandy Spring would have been located in the area two miles Northwest of Sandy Spring Village, on Brooke, Chandlee Mill and Goldmine Roads.<sup>44</sup> Fugitives could have followed a number of creeks to the Patuxent River (Today Brighton Dam and Triadelphia Reservoir) continued up the river toward Mount Airy. Along the way they would have passed countless mills which could have provided assistance if they supported the abolitionist cause.<sup>45</sup>

From Mount Airy, Sam’s Creek could have led them to Pennsylvania and freedom. Pennsylvania offered several possibilities. Harrisburg, to the North, was listed in the Federal Census of 1850 as having 886 African-Americans.<sup>46</sup> Thirty black property holders were listed, three of whom were women. Real estate holdings totaled \$20,100. The wealthiest included a barber (\$1,800.), a waiter (\$1,500), a servant and a hairdresser (\$1,200 each) and a waiter, a doctor



and a laborer (\$1,000. each).<sup>47</sup> Opportunities existed in Harrisburg, but not without white attitudes of superiority.

Local newspapers that did not simply ignore them, alternately mimicked, ridiculed, patronized, and insulted blacks. In contrast to a later era the tone was indulgent rather than bitter and terms such as ‘nigger’ appeared infrequently.<sup>48</sup>

Fugitives might have headed East to Lancaster County. Columbia and Christiana were noted for activist Free Black communities as well as “stations” on the Underground Railroad. Even there, African-Americans were not welcomed with open arms and had to watch their step. William Whipper was a prominent African-American leader - an “intellectual, civil rights and temperance advocate, and successful entrepreneur” lived in Columbia from 1830 until after the Civil War. Some years later he recalled:

It would have been fortunate for us if Columbia, being port of entry for the 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.

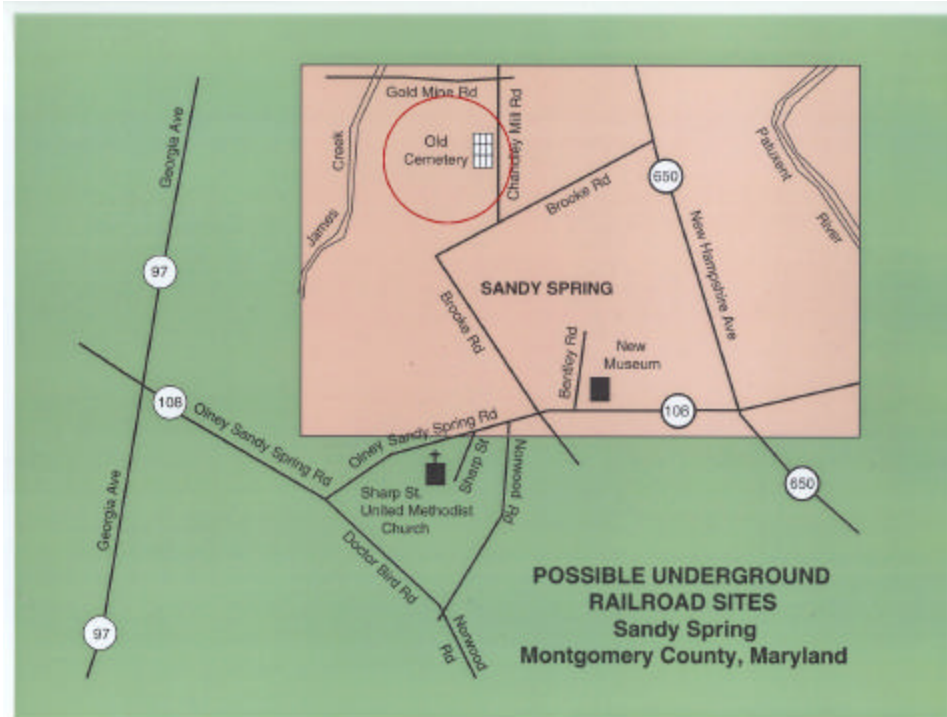
As Leroy T. Hopkins pointed out in Chapter 7 of Trotter & Smith, “No Balm in Gilead: Lancaster’s African-American Population and the Civil War Era,” the decade between 1850 and 1860 was especially trying for African-Americans in Lancaster County. In the 1830s and 1840s, oppression was primarily economic, it became political in 1838 when a new Pennsylvania State Constitution limited suffrage to free white men. Tension heightened with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. Fugitives and Free Blacks were both threatened by local slave catchers like the “Gap Gang” making daily life precarious for all African-Americans.<sup>49</sup>

In this situation, it is not surprising to find increasing numbers of African-Americans fleeing to Canada. The most devastating blow came on March 6, 1857, with the Dred Scott decision. Chief Justice Taney declared that Dred Scott’s case could never be heard in American courts because “blacks were not and had never been intended to be citizens by the Framers of the Constitution.”<sup>50</sup>

Although today it is recognized that the decision was constitutionally as well as historically unfounded.<sup>51</sup> This did not ease the tension for fugitive and Free African-Americans. One suspects that the most desperate fugitives attempted to reach Canada while others attempted to blend into Free communities where they existed. Such might have been the case in Sandy Spring since most African-

Americans had been free since the 1790s, and the black communities were firmly established and protected by their white neighbors. The reference to Dred Scott's visit to Sandy Spring in 1857 and to the friendship of Scott's attorney Montgomery Blair with Sandy Spring families supports this possibility.<sup>52</sup>

After the war, Sandy Spring attracted newly freed African-Americans because of its traditions. By 1869 many of Montgomery County's black landowners were established in Sandy Spring.<sup>53</sup> Thus, oral history, traditional values of self respect and independence within the African-American community, geographical location and some documentation point of the presence of the Underground Railroad, primarily in the Free Black neighborhoods around Chandlee Mill, Brook, and Goldmine Roads (see Map F).



[Map F: Old cemetery—location]

Every historian knows that intuition, logic, and even common sense are not enough. Extensive investigation by trained archeologists is necessary before final conclusions can be reached. Two studies made in the 1980s provide fundamental guidelines for such an endeavor. Everett and LaBarbara Wigfall Fly prepared a detailed study of Black Oral History in Northeastern Montgomery County.<sup>54</sup> Not only did they include an historical overview of the “Sandy Spring Colored

Settlement” in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Photographs, maps and statistical charts listing tax map data, physical condition, date, built, and historical status of 78 properties also accompany the text. Some of the entries supplied property holders’ names and use of the site, for example “residence,” “agricultural,” etc. Finally, they offered a detailed Bibliography, citing local histories county land and tax records and many personal interviews with African-American residents.

A Maryland Historical Trust inventory made in 1985 is also useful. The inventory contains a list of 13 buildings dating from the early 20th century “of interest as historic resources” on Brooke Road, a map showing their location, and a survey of approximately 46 properties on Brooke and Chandlee Mill Roads with their acreage the current and owner’s name and address and the property address, if different.<sup>55</sup>

African-American genealogy is another area which should be researched for family ties with Pennsylvania or points North and West. Pursuing families whose names appeared in The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory of 1985 as well as the census of 1850 should be traced. Budd, Elcorn, Hill, Hopkins, Snowden, Thomas and Webster are several examples. The Free family of Bowen is particularly intriguing. The descendents of the family all described an African Chief who came to America from Europe in the 18th century. His three wives were white and either Irish, British, or French. He was said to have married white women so his children would not be slaves. Montgomery County records of 1810 list Syrus Bowen as head of a household with 6 Free Blacks and 1 white female.<sup>56</sup> According to Montgomery County Records, Syrus bought 42 acres of land from John Magruder in 1801. He paid 40 British pounds, the equivalent of \$192 at that time. Three years later he purchased “a mare, a pig, a skillet, a Dutch oven, and a farming tools...six leather bottom chairs and six white oak bottom chairs,” all for about \$100.80 from James Currin.<sup>57</sup> William Bowen (1801-1878) was probably Syrus’ son. The census of 1860 lists his trade as a “post and railer” or fence builder. He must have been skilled because he earned enough to purchase land from Caleb Bentley in 1838 and from Charles G. Porter in 1851. This gave him a total of 10 acres, all part of the tract, “Addition to Charley Forest.”<sup>58</sup>

William Bowen was also listed as a Methodist Minister. He served on the first Board of Trustees of the Sharp Street church in Sandy Spring<sup>59</sup> and willed 1 ¼ acres of his land to establish Ebenezer A.M.E. Church on Route 108 in Ashton.<sup>60</sup> There is no doubt that the Bowen family were outstanding leaders of the African-American community. Their economic status and the location of their land would put them in a position to assist fugitive slaves. Did their lands provide stations on the Underground Railroad? More research needs to be done.

Other landowners who were active in the Sharp Street Church include names like Budd, Hill, Elcorn, Pumphrey, and Dorsey, some of whose descendents are still leading citizens of Sandy Spring's African-American community.<sup>61</sup> Could these families provide a link between the Sharp Street Church and the Underground Railroad? One would like to believe that the influential and well-to-do Free African-Americans were active leaders in the efforts to bring slaves to freedom. (see photos G-M).



**[Photo G: Old cemetery--free Black family plots: Budd (Census of 1850)]**



**[Photo H: Old cemetery--free Black family plots]**





**[Photo I: Old cemetery--free Black family plots]**



**[Photo J: Old cemetery--free Black family plots]**



**[Photo K: Old cemetery--free Black family plots: Cook (Census of 1850)]**





**[Photo L: Old cemetery--free Black family plots: Powell (Census of 1850)]**



**[Photo M: Old cemetery—adjacent to woods and creek]**

However, it is important to avoid romanticizing history. The years between 1851 and 1861 were unsettled and often violent. Free Black communities and White Abolitionists as well as fugitive slaves threatened by pro-slavery voices. Even before the most vicious Fugitive Slave Law of 1851, experiences like that of Solomon Northrup, a Free African-American who was drugged by white “Friends” in Washington, DC in 1841, robbed, and sold into slavery where he remained until 1853, were becoming all too familiar.<sup>62</sup>

Free Blacks and White Abolitionists suspected or apprehended aiding fugitive slaves were ostracized, fined, and even thrown into jail. One could risk losing everything he had worked for as well as jeopardized the safety of his family and neighbors. It must have taken a lot of courage to conduct fugitive slaves to freedom or provide them with shelter for even one day. Under these circumstances it seems unlikely that Underground Railroad Stations were specifically designated sites within the Sandy Spring Free Black community. It would be more logical to view the neighborhood as sharing the responsibilities of assistance to fugitives. Homeowners could have taken turns serving as “safe houses” with the understanding that if there were trouble the entire community



would work as a team. This was the procedure followed by William Parker and his black self-defense organization in the decade, which reached its climax in the Christiana Resistance of September 11, 1851. According to a journal kept by the Pownall family, White Quakers who were William Parker's landlords: "the colored people concluding that as the law did not protect them—they would do as the patriots of the Revolution did when subjected to the tyranny of Great Britain, protect themselves."<sup>63</sup>

One can only conclude that, contrary to traditional white views of slavery in America, --African-Americans took action in their own liberation, establishing a noble precedent for the 20th Century Civil Rights Movement which cracked the shackles of racism.

## **E. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The "mother" meetings at Philadelphia and Baltimore had condemned slavery by 1790 and began to put pressure on the Society of Friends at Sandy Spring. By the 1820's, most slaveholders at Sandy Spring had freed their slaves and some had been given small plots of land to establish independent farms.

Early on, members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) were unconditionally opposed to slavery. However, they were equally opposed to the use of violence to abolish slavery. They were also hesitant to break, or evade the law. They believed in turning the slaveholders conscience through prayer and persuasion. This became more difficult as the fugitive slave laws were tightened up. The "Compromise of 1850" and the harsh fugitive slave law was a turning point for abolitionists. Now there was no choice. If one helped slaves to freedom, one broke the law. The Dred Scott Decision of 1857 (itself a violation of the constitution) surely was the last straw for Abolitionists. This presented a terrible dilemma to faithful Sandy Spring Quakers - A dilemma which couldn't have been helped by two visits of Lucretia Mott, an outspoken Abolitionist who eventually resigned from the Philadelphia Society of Friends. In view of these facts and the position of Sandy Spring as an isolated enclave of freedom in Montgomery County, it seems unlikely that major "Stations" of the Underground Railroad were located in the white community, despite distaste for slavery.

Where then?

The geographic location (close to water and wooded areas) as well as the pattern followed in Pennsylvania and in Western Maryland (Frederick) suggest the free black community in Sandy Spring. The census report lists approximately 231-235

free African-Americans, five individuals are listed as possessing real estate anywhere from \$30.00 to \$250.00. In addition, many of these same families remained in the area, became community leaders, and even appear in Sandy Springs file of prominent black citizens after World War II. Another possibility is the Sharpe Street Methodist Church which obtained a deed for its land in 1826. In 1854, the church received one acre of land for use as a “cemetery, house of worship, or school.” The “old” cemetery is also a possible site - again because of location, as well as practices followed at other sites. While oral history, map locations, and reports from other “station” in the Underground Railroad can offer strong implications, no absolute “proof” can be demonstrated until material culture is discovered - basically from archeological digs.

There also are at least five white homesteads which have been associated with the Underground Railroad in oral tradition. Of these, the most credible is “Bloomfield” (see photo E). While the traditions associated with these homes is intriguing, intuition suggests that fugitive slaves depended more on the African-American community for shelter and sustenance.

Finally, some evidence suggests linkage with the Underground Railroad stations in free black communities in Frederick, Maryland, and in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. More research is also needed here to make definitive conclusions.

Finally, some evidence suggests linkage with the Underground Railroad stations in free black communities of Frederick, Maryland, and in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

One can only conclude that, contrary to traditional white views of slavery in America, --African-Americans took action in their own liberation, establishing a noble precedent for the 20th Century Civil Rights Movement which cracked the shackles of racism.

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#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Underground Railroad: Special Resource Study, September, 1995, National Park Service.
- <sup>2</sup> Slaughter, Thomas P., Bloody Dawn, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991, (1994PB), p. xi
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. xii
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. x.
- <sup>5</sup> Slaughter, op.cit., p. xiii
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. xiv
- <sup>7</sup> Ella Forbes, But We Have No Country, Africana Homestead Publishers, 1998  
Appendix, p. 273-318: Parker, William, "The Freedman's Story", Atlantic Monthly,  
February, 1866: p. 152-166
- <sup>8</sup> This information is taken from a brochure titled "The Underground Railroad Restaurant,"  
which is owned and operated by Paul Culbreth in Lancaster, PA.
- <sup>9</sup> Lecture by Leroy Hopkins, Millersville University
- <sup>10</sup> Trotter and Smith, eds., African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical  
Perspectives, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and Pennsylvania State  
University Press, 1997, p. 10.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 11
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> E. Stabler, Sandy Spring and the Friends Meeting from its Early History to 1853. (1967),  
p. 10.
- <sup>15</sup> W. T. Thom, "The Negroes of Sandy Spring, Maryland, a Social Study," Bulletin of  
Department of Labor, January, 1901, p. 50.
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- <sup>18</sup> W. T. Thom, "The Negroes of Sandy Spring, Maryland, a Social Study in 'Bulletin of  
the Department of Labor, January, 1901, p.50.
- <sup>19</sup> Sandy Spring: A Piece of History, A State of Mind, May 1, 1998 (University of  
Maryland) p. 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Stabler, op.cit., p. 10.
- <sup>21</sup> Sesquicentennial Sandy Spring Friends Meeting House, 1817-1967., October 14, 1967:  
Program and Celebration, p. 29.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 32.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 25.
- <sup>24</sup> Rebecca T. Miller, "Legends and Traditions," Centennial of Sandy Spring Meeting  
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- <sup>25</sup> Sandy Spring: A Piece of History, A State of Mind, May 1, 1998, p. 2.
- <sup>26</sup> Sandy Spring Friends School, Letter dated February 26, 1985 ("to Mary Lil")

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- <sup>27</sup> File on African-American History, Sandy Spring Museum Library, Letters of Thomas J. Lea, p. 12.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Rebecca T. Miller, op.cit.
- <sup>30</sup> Florence Lehman, County Courier, 1 November, 1978 (Letter from Carol Patterson to Mrs. George Riggs)
- <sup>31</sup> Ray E. Hiebert and Richard K. MacMaster, A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, MD, 1976, p. 158.
- <sup>32</sup> Clarke, Nina H., History of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington, DC, 1983, p. 174.
- <sup>33</sup> Clarke, Ibid., p. 175.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 176.
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- <sup>36</sup> See map and Everett L. Fly and La Barbara Wigfall-Fly, Northeastern Montgomery County Black Oral History Study, 1983, p. 117 ff.
- <sup>37</sup> Hiebert and MacMaster, op.cit., p. 158.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 159
- <sup>39</sup> Hiebert and MacMaster, op.cit.
- <sup>40</sup> Anthony Cohen, The Underground Railroad in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1997, p. 26.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 27.
- <sup>42</sup> Montgomery Journal, November 15, 1988, p. A-9. (Author Pamela Porter)
- <sup>43</sup> Everett L. Fly and LaBarbara Fly, op.cit., p. 117-119.
- <sup>44</sup> See maps: A. Maryland Department of Transportation, State Highway Administration, Baltimore, 1993. B. Maryland and Delaware Atlas and Gazetteer: DeLorme Mapping, detailed topographic maps, 1993. Joe Vera, Graphics, Information Technology, Montgomery College, Rockville, 1999.
- <sup>45</sup> Jean Snyder, Historian at Sandy Spring Museum.
- <sup>46</sup> Trotter and Smith, op.cit., p. 225.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 226.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 180
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> The Constitution made no statement about citizenship of blacks. During the colonial and revolutionary period (before the Constitution) Free Blacks were citizens in several states and retained that status after the Constitution was ratified.
- <sup>52</sup> See above, p. 18.
- <sup>53</sup> Fly, op.cit., p. 117.
- <sup>54</sup> See citations above and Bibliography.
- <sup>55</sup> Snyderman, Lois, Maryland Historical Trust: State Historic Sites Inventory Form, p. 1-4.
- <sup>56</sup> Callum, Agnes, Flower of the Forest, (Black Genealogical Journal, 1984), p. 84
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 85.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 86 (“Addition to Charley Forest” was a large tract of land extending from Route 108 to New Hampshire Ave. Thus it would have included black communities around Brook, Chandlee Mill, and Goldmine Roads)
- <sup>59</sup> Nina Clark, History of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Black Churches...p. 175.
- <sup>60</sup> Callum, op.cit., p. 86.

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<sup>61</sup> Clark, op.cit.

<sup>62</sup> Washington Post, March 7, 1999, "Solomon's Wisdom" by Michelle Genz, F1,4.

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