

---

**Abandoned Tracks: The Underground Railroad in Washington County, Pennsylvania****W. Thomas Mainwaring****Publication Date**

30-04-2018

**License**

This work is made available under a Copyright Controlled by External Host license and should only be used in accordance with that license.

**Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)**

Mainwaring, W. T. (2018). *Abandoned Tracks: The Underground Railroad in Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Version 1). University of Notre Dame. <https://doi.org/10.7274/24859584.v1>

This work was downloaded from CurateND, the University of Notre Dame's institutional repository.

For more information about this work, to report or an issue, or to preserve and share your original work, please contact the CurateND team for assistance at [curate@nd.edu](mailto:curate@nd.edu).

**ABANDONED**

**TRACKS**



**THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN  
WASHINGTON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

**W. THOMAS MAINWARING**

## ABANDONED TRACKS



# **ABANDONED TRACKS**

---

The Underground Railroad  
in Washington County, Pennsylvania

**W. THOMAS MAINWARING**

University of Notre Dame Press  
Notre Dame, Indiana

University of Notre Dame Press  
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556  
undpress.nd.edu

Copyright © 2018 by the University of Notre Dame

All Rights Reserved

Published in the United States of America

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Mainwaring, W. Thomas, 1952- author.

Title: Abandoned tracks : the Underground Railroad in Washington County,  
Pennsylvania / W. Thomas Mainwaring.

Description: Notre Dame, Indiana : University of Notre Dame Press, [2018] |  
Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2018011944 (print) | LCCN 2018012417 (ebook) | ISBN  
9780268103590 (pdf) | ISBN 9780268103606 (epub) | ISBN 9780268103576  
(hardcover : alk. paper) | ISBN 0268103577 (hardcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Underground railroad—Pennsylvania—Washington County. |  
Antislavery movements—Pennsylvania—Washington County—History. |  
Fugitive slaves—Pennsylvania—Washington County—History. |  
Abolitionists—Pennsylvania—Washington County—Biography. | Washington  
County (Pa.)—History—19th century.

Classification: LCC E450 (ebook) | LCC E450 .M25 2018 (print) | DDC  
326/.80974882—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018011944>

∞ *This paper meets the requirements of*  
*ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).*

This e-Book was converted from the original source file by a third-party  
vendor. Readers who notice any formatting, textual, or readability issues are  
encouraged to contact the publisher at [ebooks@nd.edu](mailto:ebooks@nd.edu)

# CONTENTS

---

List of Tables and Figures   vii

List of Maps   ix

Acknowledgments   xi

Introduction   1

CHAPTER ONE. The Twilight of Slavery   19

CHAPTER TWO. Radical Abolitionism and  
the Arrival of the Underground Railroad   45

CHAPTER THREE. The Legendary Underground Railroad  
in Washington County   97

CHAPTER FOUR. The Underground Railroad Network  
in Washington County   139

CONCLUSION. The End of the Line   179

APPENDIX. Underground Railroad Sites  
in Washington County   187

Notes   243

Bibliography   267

Index   277



## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

---

### TABLES

**Table 1.** Slavery and Freedom in Washington County (Current Boundaries) 27

**Table 2.** Fugitive Slaves and Slave Populations, 1850 and 1860 108

**Table 3.** Fugitive Slaves from Virginia and Maryland Counties Contiguous to Southwestern Pennsylvania 109

### PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Fallen grave marker in Little Zion AME Church graveyard, Centerville, PA 42

2. The LeMoyne House, Washington, PA 66

3. Masthead of the *Washington Patriot*, LeMoyne's abolitionist newspaper. The Learned T. Bulman '48 Historic Archives Museum, Washington & Jefferson College. 87

4. Grave marker of Kenneth McCoy, West Alexander, PA 150

5. Home of Samuel McKeehan, West Alexander, PA. Photo courtesy of Deborah Mainwaring. 151

6. Home of Thomas McKeever, West Middletown, PA. Photo courtesy of Deborah Mainwaring. 155

7. Home of James McNary, North Strabane Township 162

8. Home of William McNary, Chartiers Township 162

9. Home of John Berry, North Strabane Township 224



## LIST OF MAPS

---

*All maps prepared by Mark D. Swift, except map 12, prepared by Tim Brown.*

**Map 1.** Washington County in 1781 Showing Territorial Dispute between Pennsylvania and Virginia   **21**

**Map 2.** Slavery by Township in Washington County, 1781   **22**

**Map 3.** African Methodist Episcopal Churches in Washington County, ca. 1850   **41**

**Map 4.** The National Road, ca. 1830   **49**

**Map 5.** Centers of Abolitionism in Washington County, ca. 1840   **75**

**Map 6.** Fugitive Slaves from Virginia and Maryland Counties Contiguous to Southwestern Pennsylvania   **110**

**Map 7.** The Escape of the Clarksburg Nine, 1856   **121**

**Map 8.** Underground Railroad Network. Washington and Greene Counties, ca. 1860   **142**

**Map 9.** Underground Railroad Sites. Greene County, ca. 1860   **146**

**Map 10.** Underground Railroad Sites. West Alexander Area, ca. 1860   **148**

**Map 11.** Underground Railroad Sites. West Middletown Area, ca. 1860   **153**

**Map 12.** 1855 Doran Map of Washington Borough. Underground Railroad and Related Sites   **158–159**

**Map 13.** Underground Railroad Sites. Canonsburg Area, ca. 1860   **165**

**Map 14.** Underground Railroad Sites. Centerville Area, ca. 1860   **167**

**Map 15.** Underground Railroad Sites. Monongahela Area, ca. 1860   **170**



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

Many people have provided advice, assistance, and encouragement during the long time that it has taken to write this book. Thanks first of all to Joan Ruzika, who believed in this project when it was just a germ of an idea when we were board members at the Washington County Historical Society. Her support has been crucial during the fruition of the book.

I owe a huge debt to Mark Swift, a colleague in the Department of Music at Washington & Jefferson College, who volunteered to produce the maps for *Abandoned Tracks*. Mark spent countless hours discussing the concepts for maps, producing sample copies, and then going through numerous iterations to achieve high-quality maps. Mark's expertise in geographical information systems has been invaluable, and his patience has been extraordinary. I can't thank him enough.

Several other colleagues at Washington & Jefferson College played crucial roles in seeing this book through to publication. Robert Dodge, emeritus professor of history, offered encouraging words of advice from the inception of this project. He read numerous drafts of *Abandoned Tracks* and greatly improved its readability. Jennifer Harding in the Department of English also read the manuscript and raised penetrating questions. Her enthusiasm for the project was infectious and timely.

I owe a special thanks to Patrick Trimble, who spent many hours with me traipsing around the eastern part of the county in search of Underground Railroad sites. I knew I was in for an adventure any time he called or dropped by my office. His familiarity with the network of Underground Railroad agents in eastern Washington County saved me untold amounts of time. He also pointed me to a number of important documents in the Washington County Courthouse. Patricia Stavovy, who was then working in the Law Library at the courthouse, was unfailingly helpful in locating materials for me.

Jim Craig was an excellent companion in exploring Underground Railroad sites in the West Alexander area. He also alerted me to the existence of

the *Claysville Recorder*, which offered valuable information about the Liberty Line that was otherwise unknown. He also helped me to nail down the locations of several people who had proven previously elusive.

The staff of the Washington County Historical Society was very helpful in locating materials and in assisting me in general. Thanks especially to Executive Director Clay Kilgore and Chuck Edgar, who were always willing to lend a hand. The Washington County Historical Society graciously allowed me to use the Doran Map of Washington Borough as it existed in 1855.

Anna Mae Moore did a splendid job of finding archival materials in the Washington & Jefferson library. I am happy to be able to tell her that this book will finally appear. Thanks also to Amy Welch for her assistance in locating and digitizing maps. Ronalee Ciocco, the college's head librarian, helped track down some elusive references, and for that I am very thankful.

A number of former students also helped this project along. Natalie Rocchio at the Library of Congress spared me many trips to Washington, DC. Her willingness to track down and scan antislavery petitions from Washington County added substantially to my understanding of local abolitionism and opened avenues of understanding that I had not anticipated. Joe Smydo shared his work on the relationship between local colonizationists and abolitionists in several graduate seminar papers and in his excellent master's thesis. His perspective raised important questions and helped me think through this relationship. Jason Haley did some very good work on the involvement of Presbyterian churches in the Underground Railroad. His honors thesis, "Washington County Presbyterians: Abolitionism in a Divided Denomination" (2002), proved very helpful.

My students in the Underground Railroad course I taught during the January 2005 Intersession unearthed some valuable information about local sites. Thanks especially to Megan McGee and Michael Batalo.

Several of my friends provided very helpful advice and encouragement during the preparation of this book. John Mark Scott Jr., my longtime colleague at Washington & Jefferson, went on several expeditions to help find sites along the backcountry roads of the county. Tom Hatley provided perspective and cheer when we talked about this project. Tim Brown read several versions of this manuscript and provided levity when the occasion demanded. His skill with Photoshop is much in evidence here. My brother Scott Mainwaring was also unfailingly helpful and provided crucial support for this project.

Stephen Little and Eli Bortz at the University of Notre Dame Press did a great job of guiding *Abandoned Tracks* through to completion. Thanks especially to Eli, who picked up this project in midstream and ushered its way to publication. Matthew Dowd, managing editor of the press, skillfully guided the final steps of the process.

Washington & Jefferson College provided vital support in allowing me to spend several sabbaticals working on this project. I would like to thank the college for this time, which offered me the opportunity to research, reflect, and write. A Kenneth M. Mason, Sr., Summer Grant for Faculty Research from the college also allowed me to explore and document numerous sites throughout the county.

My final thanks go to my wife, Debbie, who has patiently endured my obsession with all manner of railroads for many years. For this and other reasons too numerous to mention, this book is dedicated to her.

Washington, PA  
June 2017



## Introduction

The Underground Railroad has become a hot topic over the last several decades. New books on the subject appear regularly, reenactors portray the escape of famous fugitive slaves such as Henry “Box” Brown (so called because he mailed himself to freedom in a box), and dozens of local historical societies have focused their attention on stations and conductors in their vicinity. This renewed interest in the “Liberty Line” has occurred at both the popular and scholarly levels, and reflects the “discovery” of the vital role that African Americans played in the Underground Railroad. Once depicted largely as passive passengers or bystanders, African Americans have only recently been recognized as the biggest risk takers on the “railroad,” whether they dared to flee slavery or to aid fugitive slaves.<sup>1</sup> Works ranging from Faith Ringgold’s juvenile novel *Aunt Harriet’s Underground Railroad in the Sky* to Fergus M. Bordewich’s monograph *Bound for Canaan* portray this new understanding of the Underground Railroad. The establishment of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom under the auspices of the National Park Service in the late 1990s likewise attests to this surge of popularity. Perhaps the opening in 2004 of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati best illustrates contemporary interest in the Underground Railroad. When Oprah Winfrey not only helps to sponsor the center but also introduces its video, you know that the Underground Railroad has achieved contemporary fame. Colson Whitehead’s 2016 Pulitzer

Prize-winning novel, *The Underground Railroad*, which topped several best-seller lists, attests to the continuing popularity of this venerable institution.<sup>2</sup>

The Underground Railroad strikes a deep chord with most Americans. Virtually everywhere I have spoken on the topic of the local Underground Railroad in southwestern Pennsylvania, people have asked if I am aware of such-and-such house, where they have seen a secret hiding place or heard about a tunnel leading to the exterior. At least north of the Mason-Dixon Line, even people who do not watch the History Channel find something about the Underground Railroad fascinating and compelling.

I have gone on quite a few wild goose chases in response to tips from enthusiastic audience members. Although southwestern Pennsylvania has a documented Underground Railroad history, the purported stations I was shown have turned out on inspection to have been built after the Civil War or to have had no connection that can be documented to abolitionists and the Freedom Train. I vividly recall a former student whom I encountered working at a local office supply store some years ago. When I told this student that I was not teaching that semester but instead was on sabbatical researching the local Underground Railroad, his face immediately lit up. He asked if I was aware that his fraternity at Washington & Jefferson College had once been a stop, volunteering that he had even been shown the basement room where fugitive slaves had been hidden. Intrigued, I said that I was not aware of this and asked what fraternity he belonged to. He replied that he was a Fiji—a Phi Gamma Delta. Wanting to be certain that I had the location of the Fiji house right, I asked him if the Fiji house was adjacent to Mellon Hall, a dorm that is the architectural twin of his fraternity. He indicated that it was.<sup>3</sup> I told him that I saw one major objection to the notion that he had been shown a genuine Underground Railroad hiding place—namely, that the cornerstone for Mellon Hall bears the date of 1948. His fraternity house must have been built within a year or two of Mellon. Perhaps his fraternity did in fact once help fugitive slaves (its charter dates prior to the Civil War), but clearly no fugitive slaves found shelter in a building constructed after World War II. As this example illustrates, the Underground Railroad has a rich imagined history.

Even in cases where there is a well-documented connection to the Underground Railroad, legend and myth have often overshadowed what I will call the “real” history of the Underground Railroad. Dr. F. Julius LeMoyne is the only truly national figure to emerge from Washington County’s Underground Railroad history. A physician in Washington, Pennsylvania,

some twenty-five miles southwest of Pittsburgh, he conducted an extensive correspondence with such well-known abolitionists as Arthur Tappan and John Greenleaf Whittier and was once nominated to be the vice-presidential candidate for the abolitionist Liberty Party. The National Park Service has recognized his Greek Revival house on East Maiden Street as one among a select company of several dozen national Underground Railroad sites. Solid evidence links LeMoyne to the Underground Railroad.

Visitors to his house, however, are regaled with a story rather than the history of his actual involvement in the Underground Railroad. The story that docents tell goes like this: On one occasion, probably in the 1850s, six runaway slaves made it to LeMoyne's substantial stone house. Before arrangements could be made to pass the fugitives along to the next "station" on the railroad, a soldier appeared at the door, armed with a search warrant. In the absence of Dr. LeMoyne, who was apparently out making a house call, Mrs. LeMoyne told the slaves to hide under her bed on the second floor. Meanwhile, she hurriedly donned a nightcap, climbed into bed, and instructed one of her children to close the door. The soldier searched the entire house before coming back to the closed bedroom door. Feigning illness, Mrs. LeMoyne begged him not to disturb her rest and pleaded that no lady should be seen in bed by a stranger. The soldier, apparently touched by this appeal to gentility and feminine modesty, ultimately ceased his entreaties to open the door and left the LeMoyne house without his quarry. Quick thinking had saved the day. The six fugitives left soon thereafter and made their way safely to Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Generations of visitors to the LeMoyne house have apparently been told and accepted this story, but to me it is a problematic one that raises profound questions about how the history of the Underground Railroad is conveyed. Although it is a charming, lovely story, full of drama, courage, and resourcefulness, I am highly skeptical of it. For starters, there is no written historical evidence to support it. Of course, the lack of written evidence does not always mean that a story is suspect. Students of the Underground Railroad have often had to rely on oral history more extensively than students of other aspects of American history. With the notable exception of William Still in Philadelphia, few stationmasters kept detailed records of their activities, and even fewer passengers recorded their journeys on the Underground Railroad.

In LeMoyne's case, however, the lack of written evidence to support the story of the slaves under the bed is surprising. Late in her life, the youngest

of the LeMoyne daughters, Madeleine LeMoyne Reed, who lived to be one hundred, told two historians of her family's involvement in the Underground Railroad. On separate occasions, Mrs. Reed recollected to Earle Forrest and Margaret McCulloch an incident in which the LeMoynes had hidden twenty-five slaves in the upstairs of the house. This was *the* incident that most clearly stood out in her mind about her family's house as a stop on the Underground Railroad. If the much more dramatic story of the slaves under the bed were true, one suspects that Mrs. Reed would have passed it along as the family lore about the Underground Railroad.<sup>5</sup> Although concealing twenty-five slaves was undoubtedly more of a feat than that of concealing six, there is no unexpected knock of a soldier at the door or other high drama in McCulloch's or Forrest's rendering of this family tradition. (The inclusion of a soldier in this story is also an improbable detail, since the military was not typically responsible for enforcing the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. U.S. Commissioners, who authorized the recapture of fugitives by slave catchers, bore the main responsibility. Only in cases where a crowd threatened to rescue a captured fugitive—several notable cases of which occurred in Boston—did the military become involved.)<sup>6</sup> The story of the slaves under the bed does not seem to have come from the LeMoyne family. I suspect that it is a more recent invention that serves to dramatize the LeMoyne family's Underground Railroad activities.

The stories told about the LeMoyne house and the Fiji house neatly encapsulate the popular view of the Underground Railroad, what I will call the legend of the Underground Railroad. This legend goes far beyond the boundaries of Washington County and is national in scope. As Bordewich has commented, "Few aspects of the American past have inspired more colorful mythology than the Underground Railroad."<sup>7</sup> By far the most prominent element of this mythology is that the Underground Railroad typically involved dramatic escapes from the clutches of foulmouthed, whiskey-swilling slave catchers. The heroic counterparts to these villains were white abolitionists such as Julius LeMoyne, although they are usually depicted as kindly Quakers. The legend appeals to Americans' love of secrecy and clandestine places, locating the hiding places of fugitive slaves in secret compartments or in subterranean tunnels. The Underground Railroad is quite literally conceived of as an operation whose activities took place underground. Finally, the legend of the Underground Railroad feeds on a sense that important history transpired locally. It is an important event that happened here, in this place. Only one place can claim the historic legacy of Valley Forge or

Gettysburg, but countless localities throughout the northern United States can claim to be associated with the Underground Railroad. Local historians in virtually every Northern city, town, village, and crossroads have been eager to claim a piece of the Underground Railroad as their own. It is the rare northern locality that does not at least claim to have hosted a depot. Just as in many other places, local historians in Washington, Pennsylvania, have accepted and passed on the stories about the glorious days of the Underground Railroad not out of any desire to dupe their audience, but because they have undoubtedly been convinced that these legends were history. The repetition of these rumors and stories—some exaggerated, some distorted, and some completely imaginary—that have been passed down orally from generation to generation and from “experts” to visitors has made them into established fact in localities across the North.<sup>8</sup>

Although there are many reasons for the persistence of these local traditions, historical scholarship is not one of them. The verdict of modern historians about the nature of the Underground Railroad stands in sharp contrast to the local traditions shared by many northern communities. Historians have long recognized the legendary character of much of what has passed for the history of the Underground Railroad. Larry Gara’s path-breaking book *The Liberty Line*, published in 1961, exposed many myths and legends about existing conceptions of the Underground Railroad. “Although the underground railroad was a reality,” he conceded, “much of the material relating to it belongs in the realm of folklore rather than history.”<sup>9</sup>

Gara contended that the existing scholarly and popular literature on the Underground Railroad was flawed on two counts. First, this literature greatly exaggerated and romanticized the role of white abolitionists in the Underground Railroad. This literature treated white abolitionists as the heroes of the Underground Railroad, whereas the fugitive slaves who took enormous risks to gain their freedom were treated as passive passengers. Gara also believed that the folklore had created the false impression that the Underground Railroad operated on a national level and was as efficiently organized as a railroad corporation that delivered large numbers of fugitives to the North. Like its metaphorical namesake, the Underground Railroad had its president, stationmasters, and conductors who transported fugitive slaves over well-orchestrated and well-maintained routes. In reality, Gara argues, it was a much more haphazard operation that helped a relatively small number of slaves. Furthermore, although the legendary Underground Railroad supposedly operated under a shroud of deep secrecy,

relying on hidden tunnels and secret passageways, Gara pointed out that abolitionists publicly bragged about their complicity in helping fugitive slaves escape in the 1840s and 1850s while the Liberty Line was operating.<sup>10</sup>

The legend of the Underground Railroad, Gara argues, originated in the reminiscences of aging white abolitionists (typically Quakers) and their descendants that local historians recorded in the 1880s and 1890s. These reminiscences became the “history” of the Underground Railroad. Wilbur H. Siebert, a historian at Ohio State University, lent scholarly weight to this history when he published a profoundly influential book, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*, in 1898.<sup>11</sup> Although Siebert’s work contained extensive factual information about the Underground Railroad, he also unwittingly included much material that had little historical basis. As historian David W. Blight put it, Siebert gathered “much truth” but also many “tall tales.”<sup>12</sup> Even some of the former abolitionists whom Siebert contacted for their reminiscences expressed wariness about the tales of the Underground Railroad that were surfacing decades after the Civil War. As one said, “I am convinced that the number [of fugitives] passing over this line has been greatly magnified in the long period of time since this road ceased to run its irregular trains.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Siebert crystallized the mood of the white Northern public in the Gilded Age as it looked back to the daring escapes and rescues that had taken place before the Civil War and captured the romance of the Underground Railroad for succeeding generations. Although Siebert may not have created the legend of the Underground Railroad, he validated it and gave it widespread circulation.<sup>14</sup>

The second major flaw that Gara identified in the legend of the Underground Railroad is closely related to the first. If the legend magnified the role of white abolitionists, it minimized that played by the fugitive slaves and black abolitionists. It ignored the most dangerous part of a fugitive’s journey through the slave states and instead focused on the dangers faced by white abolitionists. Although the legend occasionally acknowledged the role played by the free black community in the North, it always did so in a secondary way. Of the more than 3,200 Underground operatives identified by Siebert, only 140 were black. The legend also conveniently overlooked the fact that many fugitives made their way to freedom in the North or to Canada without any organized assistance. Racism heavily tinted the legendary Underground Railroad, which depicted blacks as hopeless inferiors. It is probably no accident that Gara’s book highlighting the active role

African Americans played in acquiring their own freedom appeared in the middle of the Civil Rights movement.<sup>15</sup>

Gara's debunking of the Underground Railroad legend won almost immediate acceptance among historians. His insistence that fugitive slaves were the primary authors of their own escapes and made the most dangerous part of their journey to the free states with minimal assistance made eminent sense. As Blight observes, "Most often, fugitive slaves fled on their own volition, with their destiny at the mercy of fate and the limits of their own courage."<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Gara's skepticism about the importance of white abolitionists in the Underground Railroad has won widespread acceptance. "Popular accounts often depict fugitives hiding in secret passageways under the homes of white abolitionists," Matthew Pinsker has written, "but anyone who stops to consider the issue will understand immediately why it made more sense for most runaways to stay within black neighborhoods." Historians of the Underground Railroad ever since Gara have approached their field with a critical eye.<sup>17</sup>

Gara also shaped the direction of subsequent scholarship on the Underground Railroad. The most notable trend since his work appeared has been the inclusion of African Americans as the authors of their own escapes and as agents on the Liberty Line in the free states. Charles L. Blockson broke new ground here with his July 1984 article in *National Geographic*, which introduced a popular audience to a new version of the Underground Railroad that featured African Americans as the prime movers in the institution. Blockson followed this article with several books on the Liberty Line nationally and in Pennsylvania.<sup>18</sup> The recovery of the black Underground Railroad continues to this day. Eric Foner's 2015 book *Gateway to Freedom* relates the discovery of new evidence detailing the activities of black activists in New York City in the 1850s.<sup>19</sup>

Ironically, however, Gara's work seems to have inhibited academic scholarship on the Underground Railroad for decades. (After his initial appearance in *National Geographic*, Blockson's works were published by relatively obscure, nonacademic publishers.) Gara's scathing critique of the legendary aspects of the Underground Railroad was such a tour de force that the topic seemed to be exhausted. The result was a long period of scholarly neglect of the Underground Railroad. For example, the leading scholars of fugitive slaves, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, mention the Underground Railroad only twice in their comprehensive 1999 study

*Runaway Slaves*. They contend that the vast majority of plantation rebels hid out for several weeks in the vicinity of their home to avoid beatings or to negotiate better treatment. (Slave owners anxious to bring in a valuable harvest were willing to overlook past violations of plantation discipline to obtain needed workers.) Only a tiny minority of these rebels ever sought to escape slavery permanently. As Franklin and Schweninger observed, the one or two thousand slaves who did escape each year represented a “mere trickle” out of the millions of slaves who remained in bondage. In large measure because of Gara, Underground Railroad scholarship seemed to have hit a dead end until the twenty-first century. Only in the last fifteen years have scholars shown renewed interest in the topic.<sup>20</sup>

Despite widespread agreement among scholars about the legendary character of the Underground Railroad, scholars have had comparatively little influence on popular conceptions of the Liberty Line. Popular audiences still fixate on the hidden tunnels and secret passageways conjured up by the metaphor “the Underground Railroad.” Tours of the LeMoyne House continue to feature the story of the six slaves hidden under the bed. Perhaps this should be expected. Most Americans are consumers of history and seldom consult historians about the current status of historical issues. Films such as *Gone with the Wind* have reached audiences in the tens of millions and shaped their perceptions of slavery and the Civil War, whereas even best-selling historians such as James McPherson can only hope for sales in the hundreds of thousands—and that on very rare occasions.<sup>21</sup> Still, a huge gap exists between how historians understand the Underground Railroad and how the public at large sees it. This chasm between historians and the public may be one of the largest in American history. Why has historical scholarship had so little impact?

One reason, as noted above, stems from the very success of Gara’s interpretation of the Liberty Line in the world of scholarship. Gara so thoroughly debunked the legend of the Underground Railroad that historians subsequently saw little reason to pursue inquiries in the field. The widespread acceptance of Gara’s interpretation led to a long period of scholarly neglect, and scholars consequently had little to say about the Underground Railroad when it resurfaced as a popular topic in the early 1990s. Thus popular lore about the Underground Railroad circulated pretty much unaffected by Gara’s 1961 critique and even by the republication of his book in 1996.

Beyond the long silence of professional historians, a second factor may also help to explain the ongoing discrepancy between historical and popular

understandings of the Underground Railroad. The core of this explanation is that the Underground Railroad has become part of our national mythology or even part of the “American psyche,” in Gara’s words, that is “accepted on faith as a part of America’s heritage.”<sup>22</sup> As Blight has observed, “The Underground Railroad is one of the most enduring and popular threads in the fabric of America’s national historical memory.”<sup>23</sup> It has helped to define who we are as a people and who we want to be. Like many national myths, it has acquired great symbolic power. In a country founded upon the ideal of liberty, the Underground Railroad has become one of the fundamental symbols of freedom for many Americans. As Blight explains, the Underground Railroad embodies Americans’ desire to hear a story about “a journey of risk and success that lifts our spirits and makes us proud.”<sup>24</sup>

The basic outlines of that story owe much to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s phenomenal best-seller *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), which outsold every book but the Bible in nineteenth-century America and enjoyed theatrical success well into the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Eliza’s escape with her young son from her Kentucky plantation, across the ice-packed Ohio River and then through Ohio (aided by a network of kindly Quakers) to the ultimate safety of Canada, became the escape with which virtually all nineteenth-century Americans were familiar. Thus Stowe’s *fictional* story provided the archetype for *historical* accounts featuring villainous slave catchers, heroic fugitives, and saintly conductors. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* established the Underground Railroad as the subject of a uniquely American morality play in which the forces of good and evil confront each other.

The Underground Railroad legend appeals to Americans’ imaginations for a darker reason as well. The legend offers whites feel-good stories of racial harmony and cooperation that suggest that the Underground Railroad mitigated, even if it did not solve, America’s racial problems. The legend absolves them of guilt. Narratives of fugitive slave escapes emphasize the freedom gained without raising questions about the prejudice and difficulties that faced those who escaped. These narratives also ignore the millions of slaves who were left behind. Just as the Underground Railroad solved the problem of freedom for those who escaped, the legend implicitly claims that the Thirteenth Amendment solved America’s racial problems once and for all. The story of the Underground Railroad is at bottom a story about race relations in America.<sup>26</sup>

The Underground Railroad thus might well be regarded as one of America’s foundation myths along with the First Thanksgiving and Valley

Forge. Foundation myths are based on the need to believe in “an ennobling past,” as Blight puts it. They identify heroes and villains, good and evil, and reveal core values and beliefs. They sometimes bear only a tenuous connection to history. They are anchored in belief and memory, not historical scholarship. Such myths, once they have taken root, display great resilience and are not easily modified.<sup>27</sup>

However, myths and symbols do change, sometimes in dramatic fashion. The Confederate battle flag is a case in point. Although protests have been waged for decades against flying the Confederate flag at Southern state capitols, they had been only marginally successful. The protests were met invariably with the claim that the flag represented “heritage, not hate.” This picture changed very rapidly after a white supremacist murdered the pastor and eight parishioners of a historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina, in June 2015. The South Carolina legislature voted to remove the Confederate flag from the state capitol less than a month later. For more than fifty years this staunch symbol of the Confederacy, white Southernness, and resistance to desegregation had flown in Columbia, South Carolina, but it was taken down in a remarkably short period of time.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, historians have affected how the public perceives selective aspects of the Underground Railroad. The primary example here concerns quilts as secret signs for travelers on the Underground Railroad. Initially published to great acclaim in 1999, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, by Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, purported to show that fugitive slaves had used quilts to display hidden messages to aid them on their journey.<sup>29</sup> An anonymous reviewer for Amazon.com touted the book as a “unique piece of scholarship, oral history, and cultural exploration that reveals slaves as deliberate agents in their own quest for freedom.”<sup>30</sup> Early readers were equally enthusiastic in their reviews of the book. “A MUST for every quilt history and black history library,” reads the caption from one response. Another wrote that it was “a fascinating, inspiring book.”<sup>31</sup> When historians began to delve into *Hidden in Plain View*, however, they found that it was riddled with historical errors both large and small. Quilt historians such as Leigh Fellner pointed out that the quilts described in the book did not exist until after the Civil War. Giles R. Wright noted that the only evidence cited in the book was the oral testimony of a quilt maker named Ozella Williams, from whom Tobin had purchased a quilt. The small number of slaves who did escape from Charleston, Wright observed, probably made their escape by

boat instead of trekking through the Appalachian Mountains. Historians of slavery and the Underground Railroad weighed in, observing that the escape route from Charleston to Cleveland depicted in the book defied logic. Perhaps most devastating of all, Fellner pointed out that no African American who claims the “quilt code” as part of a family oral history legacy can identify an ancestor who escaped via the Underground Railroad.<sup>32</sup>

This historical criticism has been telling on readers’ responses posted on Amazon.com. Reviews are now often headed by warnings such as “Questionable,” “Not History,” “Caveat Emptor—An Interesting Fiction,” and “Book Creates a new American Myth.” As one reader commented, “I recommend this book only if the reader understands it is complete fiction, being peddled as fact.” A number of reviewers explicitly cited historians to buttress their views. As this book goes to publication, while 45 percent of readers continue to rate *Hidden in Plain View* highly on Amazon.com, 23 percent give it the lowest possible rating. Well-informed readers have been amply warned by historians that this book is a highly fallible guide to the Underground Railroad. Historical criticism has arrested a myth in the making.

*Abandoned Tracks* has two aims and, ideally, two audiences. The first aim is to bring the light of historical scholarship to bear on the Underground Railroad in one locality for a popular audience. Just as historians have collectively made a difference in exposing the Underground Railroad quilt myth, I hope that *Abandoned Tracks* will join other recent historical works in distinguishing the difference between legitimate history and the myths, legends, and collective memories that enshroud popular perceptions of the Underground Railroad. The broad aim is to bridge the gap between historical scholarship and a popular audience. Although the arguments laid out by Larry Gara and David Blight are well known to historians, they have received little recognition beyond scholarly circles. I will beg historians’ indulgence for highlighting the legends that circulate in Washington County and many other localities about the Underground Railroad.

This book thus seeks to rescue the real history of the local Underground Railroad—to separate the history from the legend, to distinguish between the actual and the imagined. It constitutes an extended analysis of the evidence and questions about that evidence. What is the evidence? How reliable is it? What are the sources? Are there multiple sources that independently confirm a site’s authenticity? My examination reveals that Washington County has some sixty claimed Underground Railroad sites that range from the extremely well documented to the highly probable, the

likely, and highly unlikely, and the spurious. (The appendix lists all of the sites I have unearthed for Washington County and evaluates the evidence for each site.) To date, very few studies have offered a critical analysis of Underground Railroad sites and a typology for those sites.<sup>33</sup> In a field where legends often have been spun out of thin air, it is important to ground this history on the known facts. I hope that a “real” story and understanding will emerge from my explorations and be as compelling as the legends.

The second aim of *Abandoned Tracks* is to contribute to and clarify the ongoing scholarly debate about the extent, effectiveness, and nature of the Underground Railroad. As Pinsker has observed, “any study of the Underground Railroad must begin by coming to terms with elusive judgments about its fundamental nature and scope of operations.”<sup>34</sup> At the heart of this debate is the question of whether the Underground Railroad should be considered mostly as a legend and myth or whether it should be regarded as a highly organized venture whose network had an impressive reach, even if it did not stretch across the free states. This debate is far more subtle than the debate that Gara opened with Siebert fifty years ago; it is a debate about nuances and emphases. But one pole of this debate is still defined by scholars who follow Gara and are inclined to be skeptical of claims made about the Underground Railroad. David Blight and Peter Hinks are examples of scholars who define this end of the spectrum. They do not doubt the existence of the Underground Railroad, but they think the claims made about it have often been influenced by wishful thinking. In his musings about the Underground Railroad, Blight repeatedly reminds readers of the tensions between legitimate history and the temptation to believe the long-held myths about the Freedom Train. The burden of his message is to be on guard against falling for the myths. We should celebrate the Underground Railroad, but, as he puts it, “we should do so with a cautious understanding of the relationship between legitimate history and the enduring collective memory and abiding mythology surrounding the Underground Railroad.”<sup>35</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum are scholars who are well aware of the legendary aspect of the Liberty Line but think that too much attention has been given to criticizing myths and legends. Foner, for example, thinks Gara’s sweeping revisionism went too far in questioning the legitimacy of the Underground Railroad.<sup>36</sup> Such revisionism has deflected attention away from the real people who escaped from slavery and the real people who assisted them on their road. Acknowledging that the symbolism of the Underground Railroad has often become detached from its moorings in

reality, Pinsker points out in his survey of Pennsylvania that the state witnessed almost two thousand documented cases of escape. The Underground Railroad was a reality in the Keystone State. David G. Smith, in his study of fugitive slaves in south central Pennsylvania, likewise believes that scholars have exaggerated the mythological elements of the Underground Railroad and ignored evidence of real escapes. Historians such as Keith Griffler, who studied the operations of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley, and J. Blaine Hudson, who examined Kentucky, have concluded that these regions saw considerable traffic. Cheryl LaRoche likewise argues for significant traffic in African American communities in the North. Stanley Harrold has written an illuminating study of fugitive slaves in the Washington, DC, area. Bordewich's popular history *Bound for Canaan* also suggests that the Underground Railroad was highly organized and assisted a large number of fugitive slaves.<sup>37</sup>

One way to resolve or at least make better sense of this debate is through the use of local studies. As Griffler has commented, few local and regional studies of the historical context for the Underground Railroad existed until the turn of the twenty-first century. Until recently, most local histories focused instead on dramatic rescues, colorful personalities, and escape routes, with little regard for context or chronological development.<sup>38</sup> Renewed scholarly interest in the Underground Railroad in the twenty-first century has resulted in a growing number of historical examinations of the institution in a microcosm. By examining abolitionism and vigilance committees at the local level, historians have become better positioned to perceive subtleties and distinctions that previous grand interpretations have overlooked. The local studies that have appeared since 2000 suggest, I would argue, that the Underground Railroad varied significantly from region to region, thereby accounting for some of the discrepancies in historical literature about the national institution. The antebellum North was not a monolithic region. It is readily apparent, for example, that southwestern Pennsylvania had far fewer potential fugitive slaves than the tobacco-growing regions of Virginia around Washington, DC, that Harrold has studied. The mountainous regions of western Virginia (what is now West Virginia) had significantly fewer slaves than the area around Washington, DC. Support for abolitionism also varied greatly even within Pennsylvania, ranging from high levels in the Philadelphia region to low-to-moderate levels in the rest of the state.<sup>39</sup>

David Smith's study of the fugitive slave issue in south central Pennsylvania is of particular importance in providing a context for this study of

Washington County in southwestern Pennsylvania. Like Washington County, Adams, Cumberland, and Franklin Counties were largely rural and lay just north of the Mason-Dixon Line. They constituted a middle ground between Dixie and the “Yankee” North (New England and the Upper Midwest) in which attitudes about slavery, abolitionism, and fugitive slaves were highly contested. Both south central and southwestern Pennsylvania experienced the transition from slavery to freedom after the American Revolution subsequent to Pennsylvania’s passage of a gradual abolition law. Both regions had been reluctant converts to abolitionism, evading the law into the 1820s by keeping even the grandchildren of slaves in bound labor. Both had growing free black populations that tended to congregate in small towns such as Gettysburg and Washington. Both saw a growing number of fugitives fleeing to their borders beginning in the 1830s.<sup>40</sup>

Important differences also separated these two rural regions in Pennsylvania. The size of nearby slave populations had important implications for local traffic on the Underground Railroad. South central Pennsylvania lay to the north of Maryland counties that had a large slave and free black population. It was a major escape route for all slaves east of the Appalachians. Although Washington County was also a border county, the slave population of nearby western Virginia was significantly smaller. The western border of the county was shared with counties in Virginia’s northern panhandle, while the Mason-Dixon Line lay less than thirty miles to the south. Although slavery was a marginal presence in these Virginia counties (typically no more than 5 percent of their population), slaves did take advantage of their proximity to a free state to run away. Ethnic and religious backgrounds also played a significant role in attitudes about abolitionism and fugitive slaves. South central Pennsylvania had a large German population that proved largely indifferent to abolitionism but also a sizable Quaker minority that was sympathetic to it. The predominant Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who settled Washington County proved far more receptive to abolitionism. Washington County became the first in western Pennsylvania to organize an antislavery society, one that remained active until the Civil War. Despite the presence of Quakers, the south central Pennsylvania counties were unable to sustain an organized abolition movement. Thus, ironically, counties that were lukewarm in their support for abolition witnessed substantial traffic by fugitive slaves while Washington County’s comparatively well-organized abolitionists helped substantially fewer.<sup>41</sup>

By drawing comparisons with Smith's study and other recent local studies, *Abandoned Tracks* seeks to add to the historical understanding of the Underground Railroad in a regional setting. Southwestern Pennsylvania and Washington County in particular have received little scholarly attention. Although R. J. M. Blackett has written an article about the Underground Railroad in Pittsburgh and devoted considerable space to it in his 2013 book *Making Freedom*, there has been no book-length study of the institution in Pittsburgh. Nor have there been any extensive studies of other southwestern Pennsylvania localities. *Abandoned Tracks* seeks to begin to fill that void.<sup>42</sup>

As will be readily apparent, *Abandoned Tracks* is highly sympathetic to the point of view of skeptics of the Underground Railroad such as Gara, Hinks, and Blight. It offers numerous examples of how local historians and collective memory have distorted or magnified historical incidents into something that they were not. There is a real history to the Underground Railroad in Washington County, but as in so many other places, it has been covered up by a heavy layer of romantic lore and greatly exaggerated. My hope is that *Abandoned Tracks* may serve as a useful guide for others investigating the legacy and meaning of the Underground Railroad.

Washington County, Pennsylvania, offers an excellent case study of the tensions between the legends and history of the Underground Railroad. Unlike many other localities in western Pennsylvania, which have only yellowed newspaper clippings from the twentieth century to document their Underground Railroad heritage, Washington County has a wealth of primary documents. These include the extensive correspondence between Julius LeMoyne and his abolitionist counterparts ranging from Lewis Tappan, the wealthy New York merchant who became a major figure in the American Anti-Slavery Society, to Lewis Woodson, an African American who became one of Pittsburgh's leading abolitionists. They include the register in which slave owners were required to record the birth of children born to slaves, which documents the evolution of slavery and freedom in the county. Several surviving autobiographical accounts from Underground Railroad agents offer personal perspectives on abolitionist activities. Washington County is also notable for having several well-documented African American Underground Railroad operatives. One of these, Howard Wallace, wrote an autobiographical pamphlet that traces the network of safe houses used in the eastern part of the county to convey fugitive slaves to freedom.

The local newspaper for the county seat also has relatively complete files that date back to the early 1800s. Several other short-lived newspapers, such as the *Washington (PA) Patriot*, an abolitionist paper, help provide a context for the local Underground Railroad. In addition, several abolitionist petitions from county residents to Congress requesting the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia remain extant.

Washington County also witnessed events of national significance with regard to the Underground Railroad. An incident in the county involving a kidnapped slave ultimately resulted in the passage of the nation's first fugitive slave law in 1793. It was the scene of at least one capture of a fugitive slave and several attempted recaptures. As noted previously, the county also was home to one individual who achieved national prominence as an abolitionist: Julius LeMoine. Washington County became the first west of the Appalachians to organize an abolition society. And although it is not clear if John Brown of Harper's Ferry fame was stealing slaves out of nearby Virginia in his visits to the county in the 1840s, his discussions with abolitionists in the western part of the county are well documented. Theodore Dwight Weld, one of the most famous abolitionist lecturers, spent several weeks in the county delivering a series of speeches. Weld's lectures, LeMoine's leadership, and an active free black population made Washington County the vanguard of abolitionism in the western part of the state.

*Abandoned Tracks* sets the story of the Underground Railroad's origins, development, and scope in a local and national context. The first chapter begins with the settlement of Washington County in late colonial times, when Pennsylvanians and Virginians began pouring over the Appalachians, sometimes with their slaves. It then examines the slow death of slavery in the aftermath of Pennsylvania's passage of the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in 1780 and the growth of free black communities. Knowledge of the slow and painful transition from a place where virtually every black person was enslaved to one where the free black population constituted a sizable minority is vital to understanding the development of the Underground Railroad. Chapter 2 examines the development of local abolitionism in the 1820s and 1830s as part of the background of the Underground Railroad. It also traces the evolution of the local black and white Underground Railroads and examines the connections between them. Chapter 3 is devoted to an analysis of the realities and legends of the Liberty Line in the county. Although evidence supports the idea that the county had a loosely organized Underground Railroad, this chapter points out that

this evidence has often been misinterpreted or misread. The concluding chapter discusses the “routes” so authoritatively described in local histories. It argues that the local Underground Railroad was a much more haphazard affair than these histories would indicate. Finally, the appendix lists some sixty sites in Washington County, evaluates the evidence for each of them, and categorizes each site based on that evidence. The categories range from sites that are indisputably authentic to those that are probably spurious.



## CHAPTER ONE

---

# The Twilight of Slavery

### SLAVERY AND THE SETTLEMENT OF SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

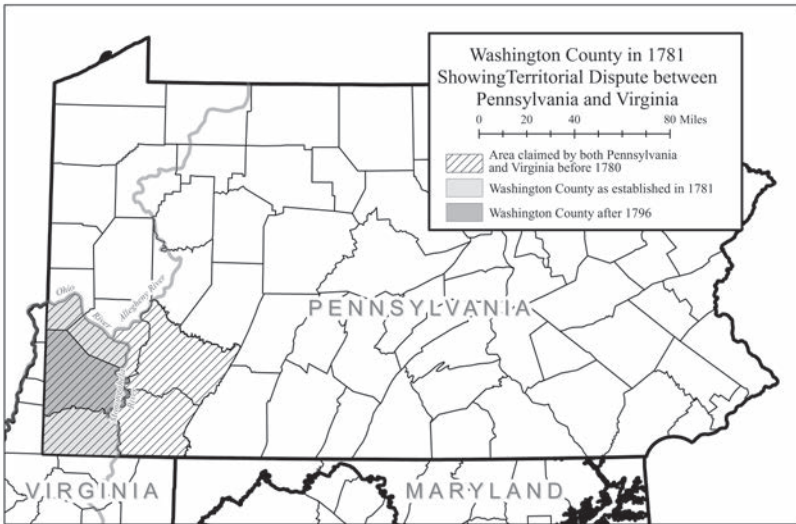
The earliest indications of Underground Railroad activity nationally appeared in the 1780s in Philadelphia, where a large Quaker population opposed slavery, a substantial free black community could assist runaway slaves, and influential spokesmen such as Benjamin Franklin headed an antislavery organization. Washington County, on the frontier some three hundred miles to the west, could claim a few Quakers in the 1780s, but the tiny minority of blacks in the county were all enslaved, and the local elite was far more likely to own slaves than to argue that all men were created equal. It would take four decades before conditions were ripe in Washington County for the gestation of the Liberty Line. This chapter analyzes how the roadbed was laid for the Underground Railroad there.

The development of the Underground Railroad in Washington County was profoundly influenced by the early settlement of the region in the decade before the American Revolution. Of primary importance was the fact that a significant number of the county's first white settlers were slaveholders. No Underground Railroad could operate effectively as long as slavery was an accepted institution locally and the vast majority of blacks in the county was held in bondage. Eventually acute tensions would arise there between the owners of human chattel and the proponents of human freedom who claimed that the American Revolution invalidated the institution of slavery.<sup>1</sup>

The Ohio Country, as southwestern Pennsylvania was first known, was initially contested by the French and British during the 1750s. The first blacks to arrive in the area accompanied the disastrous Braddock expedition of 1755 and the successful Forbes expedition of 1758, which drove the French out of the area. The vast majority of these black participants were slaves who served as teamsters, drovers, and servants, but at least one, Tom Hyde, was a free soldier.<sup>2</sup>

The French and Indian War did not end the contest for the Ohio Country. Both Pennsylvania and Virginia claimed the upper Ohio Valley as their own on the basis of their colonial charters. As settlers began streaming into southwestern Pennsylvania in the late 1760s and early 1770s, it was not at all clear which colony's claims would hold up. Virginia's claim was particularly strong in the area west of the Alleghenies and south of the Ohio. This dispute was not settled until 1780, when the two states agreed to establish the western boundary of Pennsylvania by extending the Mason-Dixon Line to five degrees west of the Delaware River. Once the western boundary had been settled, Pennsylvania created Washington County in 1781. The county initially included all of current-day Greene County and parts of Allegheny and Beaver Counties.<sup>3</sup> (See Map 1.)

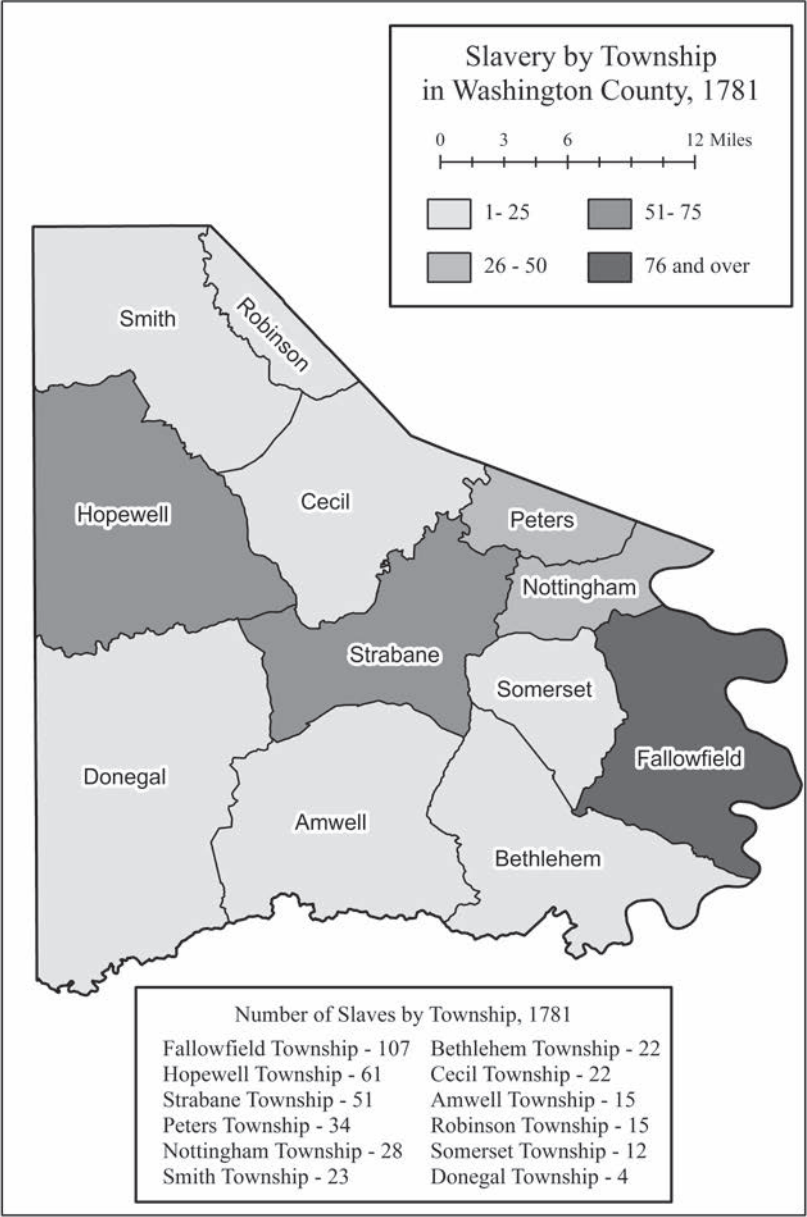
Virginians, however, comprised the majority of the county's early inhabitants. These Virginians had brought slaves with them to what they had called Yohogania County, Virginia.<sup>4</sup> Along with a smaller number of slave owners from Maryland and Pennsylvania, they gave what was to be Washington County a high concentration of slaves relative to Pennsylvania. Although no one was apt to confuse Washington County with Virginia's Tidewater region because of its slaves, about 6 percent of white families in the county owned slaves in 1782, when the first registration of slaves took place. The county's white population at the time is estimated to have been about 16,000 people, so the 417 slaves in Washington County constituted about 2.5 percent of its population.<sup>5</sup> In Pennsylvania as a whole, slaves accounted in 1780 for slightly more than 2 percent of the population—far less than the neighboring states of Delaware (19 percent), New Jersey (7.2 percent), and New York (10 percent).<sup>6</sup> The 146 slave-owning families in Washington County in 1782 held an average of about three slaves per family. Slaveholders such as Herbert Wallace of Fallowfield Township, who owned twenty slaves, were quite exceptional. Only six other individuals owned ten or more slaves. Fallowfield Township residents Francis Wallace, John Hopkins, and James Innis owned eleven, ten, and eleven slaves, respectively.



Map 1

William McMahon and John Tinnell, both from Hopewell Township, owned thirteen slaves and eleven slaves, respectively, while John and George Wilson from Strabane Township owned eleven. Nearly half of the county's slave owners—sixty-three of them—possessed only one slave.<sup>7</sup>

Slaveholding in the county was initially concentrated in several townships. (See Map 2.) Half of the county's slaves lived in the eastern townships along the Monongahela River.<sup>8</sup> One of those townships, Fallowfield, featured the most slaveholders (28) as well as the slave owners who owned the largest number of slaves in the county. The residents of this township collectively owned 109 slaves—26 percent of all the slaves in the county. Hopewell Township in the western part of the county was home to 21 owners of a total of 62 slaves. Strabane Township, in the center of the county, was another early stronghold of slavery. There, 19 owners held 52 people in bondage. The town of Washington, which was carved out of Strabane in 1788 and became the county seat, held the vast majority of these slaves. Many of the prominent men of the early town, such as William Hoge and Absalom Baird, owned slaves. Hoge and his brother John permanently influenced racial patterns in Washington by giving their slaves lots in the area of East Walnut Street and North College Street, a neighborhood that



Map 2

remains predominantly black today. Architectural historians believe that one of the cabins built by the former Hoge slaves is still standing today.<sup>9</sup>

Despite their relatively small numbers, slave owners exercised disproportionate power and influence in Washington County. The mere fact of owning slaves marked one as a person of some means. In 1775, for example, a slave cost between fifty and seventy-five pounds sterling, the equivalent of a year's earnings for many artisans.<sup>10</sup> More than two-thirds of slave owners were ranked among the wealthiest 10 percent of Washington County's population.<sup>11</sup>

The first county elections in 1781 gave Virginians a substantial majority of the county offices, and slaveholders continued in positions of leadership well into the 1790s. For example, David Bradford, of Whiskey Rebellion fame, purchased slaves upon his arrival in the county from Maryland. His nemesis, John Neville, the federal collector of revenue for western Pennsylvania, was a Virginian who owned more than a thousand acres of land and eighteen slaves in 1790. James McFarlane, a Revolutionary War veteran and casualty of the Whiskey Rebellion, also owned bondsmen. Not all of these slaveholders were Southerners. Thomas Scott, the first congressman from the region elected under the Constitution, was a native of Pennsylvania and owned slaves. His fellow Pennsylvanian, Colonel George Morgan, was also reputed to be a slave owner; an Indian agent and Revolutionary War soldier, he owned what is said to have been the largest private estate west of the mountains, Morganza. County historian Earle Forrest appears to have erred, however, in contending that Morgan owned many slaves after he moved to Washington County in 1796 from New Jersey. The 1800 and 1810 censuses do not show Morgan owning any slaves, though the 1810 census does indicate that Morgan had nine free persons unrelated to his family living on his estate. These may well have been African Americans who were working for Morgan as indentured servants or "twenty-eight-year servants"—servants who were bound to work until they reached the age of twenty-eight. If so, it may explain why Forrest believes that there was a slave burial ground on Morgan's property. Morgan clearly made use of black labor at Morganza, as he advertised the sale of an indentured African American man who had seven years to serve on his indenture in 1814.<sup>12</sup>

Slavery in Washington County resembled slavery in much of the rest of the northern states where the institution was of marginal importance. Slave labor clearly did not rest on the cultivation of staple crops such as tobacco as it did in the Chesapeake. At least through the end of the American

Revolution, settlers in western Pennsylvania struggled for subsistence, and slaves were likely to have been put to work clearing land, planting crops, building houses and barns, and helping to provide other necessities of life. As R. Eugene Harper has observed, the rapid settlement and economic development of western Pennsylvania between 1783 and 1800 meant that agriculture ceased to be the only economic activity, although it remained an important one. The appearance of towns such as Washington, Canonsburg, and Parkinson's Ferry (later Monongahela) made for a much more diverse occupational structure in which artisans, laborers, millers, lawyers, and other professionals had a niche. Slavery continued to exist in Washington County not because labor was needed to cultivate large plantations, but rather to provide domestic or farm help. As Harper has commented, the ownership of slaves also conferred status on the owner.<sup>13</sup>

Slaves in Washington County were sold as property at least through the eighteenth century. Only a few of these transactions were recorded, so it is difficult to arrive at an estimate of the volume of this traffic. Only three slave sales appear in the deed books of the county; there were undoubtedly others that were not recorded. In the first transaction, Alexander McCandless sold a female slave for sixty pounds in 1781. In the second, dated 1784, Samuel Bealer sold "Hen and a Negro child born of said wench named George" to Seshbezzar Bentley for 100 pounds and twenty gallons of "mercantable whiskey." In the last sale recorded in the deed books, Reason Pumphrey obtained seventy to one hundred pounds apiece for three slaves in 1795.<sup>14</sup>

Slaves were also bequeathed to wives and other inheritors of property. The inventory of Edward Griffith's estate, dated May 19, 1778, reads in part as follows:

A Negro Woman named Sall	88 pounds
A Negro Garl named Esther	64 pounds
A Negro Garl named Siddis	54 pounds
A Negro Boy named Harry	54 pounds

The presumption of white Washington County in the late 1700s was that any black person was in fact a slave. It was probably for this reason that a "Negro man named Yara" went to the county court to have a paper issued certifying that he was "free and as such may be employed by any person."<sup>15</sup>

## THE GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

Two developments changed the prospects of slave owners in Washington County. The first was the agreement signed in 1780 by Pennsylvania and Virginia designating the boundaries between the two states. Although this line was not run until 1785, it soon became clear that Yohogania County, Virginia, would disappear, and that most of the land initially claimed by Virginia north of the Mason-Dixon Line would become a part of Pennsylvania. (In the end, only the panhandle between the Ohio River and the western border of Pennsylvania remained part of Virginia.) In 1781 Washington County effectively supplanted Yohogania County.<sup>16</sup>

The second development was Pennsylvania's passage of the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in 1780. Secured primarily through the efforts of the Quakers, the act—the first of its kind in the United States—technically did not free a single slave. A compromise between humanitarians who wanted to end slavery and slave owners who wanted to keep their property, the abolition law specified that the children born to enslaved mothers after 1780 were to gain their freedom at the age of twenty-eight. (This was the origin of the term *twenty-eight-year servants*.) Every representative of adjacent Westmoreland County, which at the time included Washington County, voted against the 1780 act. Since Washington County was created after the 1780 act establishing the Pennsylvania–Virginia boundary, a special law had to be passed in 1782 extending the provisions of the abolition act to the county. A subsequent law, passed in 1788, required that slave owners register the children born to slave mothers to ensure that these children were ultimately freed.<sup>17</sup>

These laws amounted to a death sentence for slavery in the state—but, as Gary Nash has written, it was a death sentence with a “two-generation grace period.” Under the 1780 act, it was entirely conceivable that a slave born before 1780 could have lived a long life and still been a slave in 1847, when Pennsylvania finally abolished slavery outright. Children born to slaves after 1780 could expect to spend the majority of their lives as the servants of a white master. In Washington County, a child born as late as 1817 to a slave for life would not have become a free person until 1845. The 1780 act did, however, have a telling effect on slavery in the state and in the county. After reaching a peak of about 6,855 slaves in 1780, the number of slaves in Pennsylvania fell sharply. In 1790 the state had 3,760 slaves; in

1800, it had 1,706 slaves; and by 1810, there were only 795 slaves left. The number of slaves fell much more rapidly than the operation of the 1780 act alone would have suggested. The act called the legitimacy of the institution into question by openly condemning slavery for depriving blacks of the “common blessings that they by nature were entitled to” and thereby encouraged slaveholders to free their slaves.<sup>18</sup> The act also prompted slaves of less-sensitive owners who showed no inclination to manumission to run away. Fugitive slaves amounted to three-fourths of the number of manumitted slaves in Philadelphia in the 1780s.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the 1780 act discouraged slaveholders from settling in the state because it prohibited the entry of slaves into the state on a permanent basis. Any slave who was brought into the state and resided there for more than six months became a free person under the provisions of the law. Conversely, the 1780 act caused owners committed to the institution of slavery to leave the state. After its passage, some of the “best families” of the area reportedly left for Kentucky and other territories where slavery remained unchallenged.<sup>20</sup>

These acts gradually undermined slavery in what had been one of the state’s largest slaveholding counties. In 1782, when the first registration of slaves was mandated in Washington County, 417 slaves were held there. Of these, 376 resided within the final boundaries of the county. (Parts of the original county were hived off to form all of Greene County and portions of Allegheny and Beaver Counties.) The number of slaves declined to 217 in 1790 and to 76 in 1800. Part of this decline, particularly between 1782 and 1790, reflected the migration of slave owners unhappy with the Gradual Abolition Act to Kentucky. Another dramatic drop-off occurred between 1814 and 1820. An 1814 census of the county listed thirty-five slaves, but by 1820 only five slaves remained. The rapid decline between 1814 and 1820 likely reflects many deaths in an aging slave population whose life expectancy was about forty years. Of the thirty-five slaves listed in 1814, fourteen were forty or older. The year 1820 witnessed the second-to-last entry in the county’s slave registry, recording the birth of a child of a Washington County slave or twenty-eight-year servant. By 1830, only one slave remained in Washington County. The 1840 census reported that the number of slaves in the county had actually increased to two.<sup>21</sup> And in 1845, James Henderson of Morris Township made the last entry in the Washington County Slave Record—a child born to a Kentucky slave—before the end of slavery in Pennsylvania in 1847.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 1.** Slavery and Freedom in Washington County (Current Boundaries)<sup>1</sup>

Year	Total Population of County	Slaves	Percent Slaves	Free Blacks	Percent Free Blacks
1782	16,300 (1784 est.)	376	2.307	0?	0?
1790	23,982	217	.904	9	.04
1800	28,298	76	.269	340	1.20
1810	36,289	36	.099	570	1.57
1814		35			
1820	40,038	5	.012	742	1.85
1830	42,784	1	.002	885	2.07
1840	41,279	2	.005	1,113	2.70
1850	44,939	0	0	1,559	3.47
1860	46,805	0	0	1,726	3.69

<sup>1</sup> R. Bell, "Black Persons in Early Washington County," 1–4, 8; Ewing, "Washington County Slave Record"; Harper, *Transformation of Western Pennsylvania*, 8, 12–13; Forstall, *Population of States and Counties*, 139.

Washington County's response to the questions raised by the Gradual Abolition Act was a mixed one. Like other Pennsylvania counties that shared a border with slaveholding Virginia or Maryland, it held onto slavery longer than the rest of Pennsylvania. (Delegates from neighboring Westmoreland County to the east had vehemently opposed the 1780 act.) The predominance of early settlers from Virginia and Maryland likewise gave slavery a legitimacy that it lacked elsewhere in the state. A begrudging acquiescence toward the 1780 abolition act seems to have characterized the attitude of most slave owners who stayed in the county. But a hardcore minority ignored and even attempted to subvert the law. Slave running across the ill-defined border between Pennsylvania and Virginia continued for years after the passage of the act.<sup>23</sup>

Some slave owners did come to question the morality of slavery and freed their slaves. Charles Stuart was the first one known to have acted on his misgivings about slavery. In May of 1788, he set Edward Huggins, his "mulatto man indented unto me during life," free from his service and had Huggins's legal freedom recorded in the county deed books.<sup>24</sup> Four years later, Neal Gillespie became the second resident of the county to manumit a slave, his "Negro man Slave named Harry." James Edgar, a judge of the county

court, provides additional evidence on this issue. Edgar had registered a five-year-old slave named Hannah in 1782. In 1796, Edgar freed Hannah from her status as a lifelong slave, declaring, “I am under the serious conviction that involuntary servitude beyond a just compensation for maintenance and education is incompatible with a sense of duty to God and my fellow creatures.” It was Edgar, however, who defined the terms of “just compensation.” He declared that Hannah would be freed when she attained her twenty-seventh birthday, approximately in 1805.<sup>25</sup>

The transition from slavery to freedom was neither neat nor clear cut, as the experience of the slaves of Dr. Charles Wheeler illustrates. Wheeler arrived in Washington County in 1774 after serving as a surgeon in Lord Dunmore’s War and purchased a 345-acre farm in what eventually became West Pike Run Township in the eastern part of the county. In 1782, in compliance with the Gradual Abolition Act, he registered four slaves with the county court: Nero, age thirty-four, Daniel, age nineteen, Rachell, age sixteen, and Rose, age nineteen. Wheeler’s slaveholdings gradually decreased, but there is no evidence available to explain why. In the 1800 census he is listed as owning two slaves and having four “other free persons” (i.e., free blacks) living in his household. By the 1810 census, Wheeler held only one slave but had ten free blacks living on his farm. The presence of these “other free persons” living in Wheeler’s household suggests that the end of slavery brought not outright freedom but instead a quasi-dependence on the former owner.<sup>26</sup>

Wheeler probably freed at least one of his slaves. He stipulated in his will, executed in 1808, that twenty-five pounds be given to “black Rachel” and fifty pounds be given to “black Daniel”—presumably two of the slaves he had registered in 1782. Wheeler also gave fifty-pound bequests to four other free blacks living on his farm. Wheeler considered himself a benign owner. In explaining these bequests, he commented, “The above black people was raised under my roof. I therefore hope they will consider the intent of the small bounties bestowed them by an indulgent master and to apply the same discreetly to their interests.” Wheeler did not, however, bestow emancipation on his remaining slave in this will. This slave is likely to have been Rachel McGude, who appears on the 1814 county tax list as a fifty-year-old slave living in Pike Run Township. The “Rachell” whom Wheeler registered in 1782 would have been about forty-eight in 1814—close enough to fifty, given the uncertainty of slave birth dates. What became of Rachel after Wheeler’s death in 1813 is unclear. Wheeler’s wife, Elizabeth, who

outlived him by some twenty-five years, does not appear in the 1820 census, so it is not clear if Rachel became Elizabeth's property.<sup>27</sup>

Black people who remained slaves grew increasingly restive with their status. Surviving local newspapers from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are full of advertisements for slaves who had absconded from their owners. Advertisements for runaway slaves began appearing in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* as soon as it began publishing in 1786.<sup>28</sup> The first known instance of an attempt to run away from slavery in Washington County occurred in 1795, as the following newspaper advertisement attests:

#### TWENTY DOLLARS REWARD

RUNAWAY from the house of James SEATON, living on Little Whitely in Washington County, on the Night of Sunday the 6th of December last,  
A NEGRO WENCH

About two or three and twenty years of age, named CATE, very black, short, well made, and very active. The wench is the property of JENNETE PRATHER. Whoever takes up the said Wench, and delivers her to CHARLES PRATHER, at the mouth of the Buffaloe, shall receive the above award.

Washington, January 4th, 1796<sup>29</sup>

Another advertisement from Canonsburg, dated October 5, 1803, offered an eight-dollar reward for the return of Priss, described "as a likely negro wench . . . aged 15, about 5 feet, 6 inches high, slim-made, with a handsome face, a proud walk, and haughty appearance." The advertiser presumed that Priss would try to make it to nearby Raccoon Creek, where her sister lived.<sup>30</sup> Female runaways seem to have been particularly troublesome. On January 17, 1814, John Cooper of Fallowfield Township cautioned readers of the *Washington (PA) Reporter* "against harboring my negro girl ANNE as her negro man, THOS. FARIS, has made a practice of taking and stealing her. I am determined to put the law in force against him, or any person who will harbor her without a pass from me. She has a child about 5 months old." Most commonly, advertisers offered rewards for the return or apprehension of their property. Thomas H. Baird of Washington promised to give ten dollars to anyone who caught James Ross, a "runaway negro fellow" whom Baird characterized as "a thief and liar." The preceding advertisements would suggest that these fugitives were hiding out locally and not seeking freedom in distant places. In short, we are not looking at the genesis of the Underground

Railroad here. The advertisement that Zephaniah Nook placed in November 1815 may be an exception. He offered a reward for eight slaves who had run away while staying at Workman's Tavern about a mile east of Washington. It is not clear if these slaves resided in Washington County, nor is it clear if any of these advertisements ever brought about their intended results.<sup>31</sup>

The white population of Washington County became bitterly divided over the question of abolishing slavery in the 1780s and 1790s. The Washington Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Held in Bondage, formed in 1789, illustrates just how touchy the subject was in Washington County. It was an offshoot of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage (PAS), initially founded in 1775 and reorganized after the Revolutionary War in 1787. The nation's first abolition society, the PAS attempted to use legal means to whittle away at the institution of slavery. The Quaker elite and other well-to-do founders of the PAS, including Benjamin Franklin, challenged slave ownership by filing lawsuits based upon violations of Pennsylvania's abolition law; they did not advocate direct action against slavery, as their more radical successors did in the 1830s. The Washington Society proved to be even more conservative than its parent body, dropping all reference to abolition in its name. This name change suggests that members were more concerned about the kidnapping of free blacks than with the weightier issue of abolishing slavery. At least two members, David Bradford and Thomas Scott, were slaveholders or the owners of twenty-eight-year servants.<sup>32</sup>

The local society formed in response to the plight of a slave named John Davis. Davis's owner had brought him from Maryland to Washington County before the passage of the 1780 Gradual Abolition Act. The owner, however, had not registered Davis as a slave by the end of 1782 as was required under the new law. Under its terms, Davis should have become a free man. Davis's owner apparently disposed of this legal nicety when he moved to Virginia in 1788 and took Davis with him. There he rented Davis's services out to a Mr. Miller, probably for a year. Davis's friends in Washington County decided to take matters into their own hands. They went to Virginia and rescued Davis from slavery. Fearful that he would have to pay Davis's owner for his lost property, Miller hired three men to abduct Davis; they kidnapped Davis from Washington County in 1788 and carried him back to Virginia as a slave.<sup>33</sup>

The men who organized the Washington Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Held in Bondage regarded the abduction of someone they regarded as a free man as an outrage. Led by Alexander Addison and David Reddick, both attorneys, the society pressed for Davis's legal rights. It successfully argued before a Washington County court that the kidnappers, who were identified as Francis McGuire, Baldwin Parsons, and Absalom Wells, should be indicted, but they had fled to Virginia, which refused to give them up. The society then enlisted the aid of Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Mifflin. In a memorial in May 1791 to Mifflin, the society stated that "a crime of deeper dye is not to be found in the criminal code of this state, than that of taking a Freeman and carrying off with intent to sell him, and actually selling him as a slave." Despite Mifflin's pleas that Davis and his abductors should be returned to Pennsylvania, the Virginia governor refused to yield either party. He claimed that Davis was nothing more than a fugitive slave and that no federal statute covered extradition proceedings.<sup>34</sup>

The Davis case ultimately had national significance for resolving legal disputes between states in the newly formed Union and led to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. Although the recently adopted Constitution specified that neither people charged with a crime nor persons "held to service or labor" could escape justice or bound servitude by fleeing to another state, Congress had not passed any enabling legislation as of the date of Mifflin's request. Thus the Davis case had relevance for the return of fugitive slaves and the extradition of criminals. Governor Mifflin appealed to President George Washington for help in resolving the extradition issue; Washington in turn directed the matter to Congress's attention. Congress responded by passing the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. As its title suggests, the law dealt primarily with this issue of runaway slaves and only secondarily with the issue of extraditing the kidnappers of free blacks. Thus, ironically, the 1793 law made it difficult to bring accused criminals across state lines, but offered very little protection to blacks whose captors accused them of being fugitive slaves. States below the Mason-Dixon Line got most of what they wanted from the new law. It did not protect Davis, who remained a slave. It did protect his kidnappers, who remained free in Virginia.<sup>35</sup>

The efforts of the Washington Society to bring Davis's kidnappers to justice thus backfired and actually encouraged the practice of stealing free blacks. Under the 1793 law, slave owners or their representatives did not need a warrant to seize an alleged runaway. They had only to convince a local judge that the person in custody was a slave. The law did not require

jury trials and did not permit the supposed runaway to call witnesses in his defense. It also established a hefty fine of five hundred dollars for anyone who was convicted of aiding a runaway slave. In Pennsylvania and in the Ohio Valley, free blacks had few rights and often became the victims of kidnappings.<sup>36</sup>

The Washington Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Held in Bondage fell into disfavor locally for reasons that are not clear. Perhaps the society's intervention in Davis's case caused a backlash. More likely, its successful use of the 1780 act to free several Washington County blacks who had been held in bondage illegally provoked the enmity of local slave owners. In any case, the society's actions in the local courts proved deeply unpopular. Public pressure forced a number of the eleven original members to resign. As one of the remaining members wrote to James Pemberton, the president of the PAS, "We have the prejudice of the people, the Disapprobation of the magistrates fals [*sic*] records and corrupt officers to contend with." Helping blacks who should have been freed because their owners violated the 1780 act was apparently too much antislavery activity for many Washington County residents.<sup>37</sup>

Even the small successes of the Washington Society caused its members regrets. Alexander Addison, a lawyer who had pressed Davis's case and been instrumental in founding the local society, complained that the few slaves whom the society had succeeded in freeing because of violations of the 1780 act seemed incapable of making good use of their liberty. He lamented, "With the best intentions, we seem to produce only practical mischief. Removing the fear of a master, the only restraint of which their debased and untutored minds were conscious, without being able to fix upon them the check of honour, the Laws or Religion; we loose them to unprincipled licentiousness, idleness and every concomitant vice. We seem to deliver them up to the controul of Satan and their own lusts, and make them more the children of Hell, than before they were of misery." These comments, it is helpful to remember, came from someone who ostensibly was a friend of African Americans. Addison's remarks help to illuminate why the combination of public pressure and futility caused the Washington Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Held in Bondage to fold by 1794.<sup>38</sup>

Some former members of the society, however, continued their commitment to the legal rights of local blacks. Joseph Pentecost took on the case of Lucy, "a negro woman" who filed suit against her owner, "Reazin Pumphrey," as his name appears in court documents, in 1799. Pumphrey had

arrived in Washington County from Anne Arundel County, Maryland, in 1772, bringing with him four slaves. He registered six slaves in 1782 to comply with the slave registration act, but Lucy was not among those he registered. Lucy sued Pumphrey for five hundred dollars for unlawful detention. She claimed that she had been Pumphrey's slave in 1782 and had been living in Washington County, but that Pumphrey had failed to register her. Therefore Lucy should be set free and was entitled to damages. The jury awarded Lucy one dollar in damages for the seventeen years she had spent as Pumphrey's slave while she was entitled to her freedom.<sup>39</sup>

David Reddick, an attorney who has been identified as "the head of the Washington County movement," also continued to champion the cause of local African Americans who had been illegally held in bondage. Reddick helped file a suit funded by the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society on behalf of two women, Lydia and Cassandra, who had been brought as slaves into Washington County from Maryland by their owner, Samuel Blackmore, in 1782. Blackmore had not registered his slaves within the six months required by Pennsylvania's Gradual Abolition Act. When the case went to trial, Blackmore claimed that he thought he had moved to Virginia, not Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court did not buy his explanation and ruled in 1797 that Lydia and Cassandra were free women.<sup>40</sup>

Pentecost and Reddick, however, represented a distinct minority. Evasions of Pennsylvania's abolition laws continued in Washington County into the 1820s. Slaveholders in the county kept the grandchildren—not just the children—of slaves as servants until the age of twenty-eight. The Washington County Negro Register contains numerous instances in which the children of twenty-eight-year servants were registered so that they could be forced to work until they too attained the age of twenty-eight. A typical entry reads as follows: "Thomas Ward of Somerset Township enters of record, a female negro child named Susannah, born the tenth day of Septemr. 1805 of Rachel a negro woman entered by Frederic Cooper in march 1789—a slave until she arrives at the age of twenty eight years."<sup>41</sup> Not until 1826 did the Pennsylvania Supreme Court rule that this practice was unconstitutional. These grandchildren would probably have been listed in the census not as "slaves" but as "servants," even if they were slaves in fact. Other evasions of the 1780 Gradual Abolition Act continued into at least the early 1830s. A state senate committee in 1833 found that some whites in the southwestern counties were buying slaves in Virginia and emancipating them—and then forcing them to work as indentured servants for seven

years. Local courts sometimes required black children who were bought as slaves in another state to serve their new owners until they reached the age of twenty-eight. Whites were thereby able to take advantage of the cheap labor of people in quasi-slavery who had very few legal rights.<sup>42</sup>

The case of Mary, who is simply described in court documents as “a Negro woman,” illustrates this subterfuge of granting an out-of-state slave freedom, only to deny it by indenturing that person for seven years in Pennsylvania. Her owner, John Cooke, had freed Mary in Berkeley County, Virginia. She apparently accompanied him when he moved to Washington County about 1800, and in February of that year Cooke used the power of the local courts to force her to become his indentured servant for nearly seven years. Supposedly Mary entered into this agreement “with my own free and voluntary will and accord without any persuasion or compulsion,” but it is difficult to believe that no compulsion lay behind Mary’s action. Her reason for signing her mark to this document, she stated, was that “John Cooke has not had service from me sufficient to compensate him for the trouble and expenses he has had with me and I am desirous to make the said John Cooke full compensation.” Mary promised henceforth to make amends and to be a true and faithful servant. The court document hints at the kinds of troubles that Mary had previously caused Cooke. Mary vowed that she would not “absent myself from my said masters service day or night during said term, or play at cards, or any other unlawful game, and will not give away or destroy my said masters goods and chattels.” Mary, however, continued to be a vexatious servant for Cooke. On August 16, 1802, he sold the balance of Mary’s term as an indentured servant to Joseph Pentecost on the stipulation that “she shall not come on John Cooke for her maintenance for the future.” Probably this was the same Joseph Pentecost who had supported Lucy’s case for freedom.<sup>43</sup>

The motivation behind maintaining indentured servitude for the county’s African Americans can be understood quite easily: indentured labor was cheap. One Irish immigrant to Pennsylvania estimated that an indentured servant cost one-eighth that of a free laborer. The supply of white indentured servants, however, dried up in the nineteenth century as European immigrants took advantage of cheaper transatlantic fares to purchase their own passage and to arrive in America as free people. White farmers and rural artisans in Washington County who were able to purchase the indentured labor of blacks therefore benefitted from the breakdown of slavery. Although many of them could not have afforded to purchase a slave, they could afford

to hire an indentured black servant. Furthermore, they continued to treat their bound black labor much as owners had treated their slaves and indentured servants before the American Revolution.<sup>44</sup>

Slavery's presence thus lingered a long time in a supposedly "free" county north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Although the children born to slaves after 1780 were technically servants, they were being sold as if they were slaves. The pervasive assumption in newspaper advertisements for the sale of "twenty-eight-year slaves" was that they were property. The following advertisement appeared in the *Reporter* on February 25, 1811:

FOR SALE

A FRAME HOUSE, two stories high, with a kitchen and three excellent lots, in the town of West-Boston, Washington County, Pa.

Also, a stout healthy negro wench, fourteen years of age, a servant till 28. For terms enquire of

ISAIAH STEEN

Such servants were advertised for sale in the pages of the *Reporter* as late as 1825:

PUBLICK SALE Will be sold at the house of John Fleming in Washington on Wednesday next [March 30, 1825] at two o'clock in the afternoon the unexpired time of a mullatto woman named Margaret (born 15 Nov. 1803) and her Lucinda (born 24 Apr. 1824), also a mullatto, late the property of John Hoge, Esqr. dec'd. (The said Margaret and Lucinda will not be separated.)<sup>45</sup>

Margaret and Lucinda were sold to John Dagg for eighty dollars. An 1823 advertisement similarly offered an eighteen-year-old "young woman of colour" for sale for the remainder of her servitude. Of the 232 children born to slaves who were registered between 1788 and 1825, 104 were born after 1800. Even though Washington County had only five slaves in 1820, a substantial number of the county's black population was still bound labor subject to being sold well after that date.<sup>46</sup>

While slavery lingered in Washington County into the 1820s, it is clear that by the 1830s it was a dying institution there, just as it had all but disappeared in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.<sup>47</sup> Only one slave was listed in the county's census report for 1830. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court had put an end to the practice of indenturing the grandchildren of slaves

four years earlier, and by 1830 advertisements for the sale of slaves and indentured black servants had ceased to appear in local newspapers. The end of such advertisements reflects the fact that there were fewer servants for sale and perhaps hints that the moral climate of the county was changing. Similarly, advertisements for fugitive slaves had disappeared from the newspapers of south central Pennsylvania by the late 1820s. David Smith attributes this absence to changing local sentiment and the fact that slavery had virtually disappeared in Adams, Cumberland, and Franklin Counties.<sup>48</sup>

An affidavit made to Gabriel Bleakeney's will reflects the changing temper of the times in Washington County. In his 1824 will, Bleakeney, a Revolutionary War veteran and a farmer in Amwell Township, had bequeathed his slave Betsy to the wife of his good friend John Hoge, one of the founders of Washington. On his deathbed, however, Bleakeney changed his mind and freed Betsy because of her kindness toward him.<sup>49</sup>

It should not be blithely assumed that the lot of freed slaves was a happy one. The case of Dido Munts serves as a cautionary tale. Munts had been the slave of the Reverend John Clark and his wife Margaret. When Clark died, he freed Munts and willed a substantial sum to Jefferson College in Canonsburg with the stipulation that part of this sum be used to maintain her in her old age. In March 1838, John Holmes, who apparently lodged her, presented a claim to the trustees of the college for her support. The committee handling this claim acknowledged the college's obligation to "pay a competent sum for the support of the above named Dido Munts." It paid Holmes \$110 for her room and board. The following year, however, the college decided that her upkeep was too expensive and authorized her removal to "the Poor House as soon as practicable."<sup>50</sup>

### THE GROWTH OF FREE BLACK COMMUNITIES

The gradual emergence of free black communities in Washington County after 1790 paralleled the slow demise of slavery. These communities grew because of the gradual emancipation of slaves locally and the migration of manumitted slaves from the South, primarily Virginia. (Although the law was applied unevenly, manumitted slaves were required to leave Virginia, typically within a year of being freed, or risk re-enslavement.<sup>51</sup>) The federal censuses give the major outlines of this story. In 1790, 217 slaves resided in Washington County but only nine free blacks. Significantly, all nine of these free blacks lived with white families. By 1800, a major transformation had

taken place. The slave population had dropped to 76 and the free black population had risen to 340. Of the free blacks, 251 were living with black families and apart from the direct supervision of whites. In short, the earliest free black communities took shape in Washington County around 1800 and grew substantially thereafter. As the number of slaves dwindled to insignificance by 1830, the number of free blacks continued to grow. In 1810, there were 570 free blacks; in 1820, 742; in 1830, 885; in 1840, 1,113; and in 1850 there were 1,559 free blacks in the county. On the eve of the Civil War this population had grown to 1,726, or 3.7 percent of the county's population.<sup>52</sup>

Free blacks initially stayed close to the farms where they had been slaves or indentured servants, but over time they tended to congregate in villages and towns. Thus townships along the Monongahela River, where slavery had initially been concentrated, continued to have a relatively large black population. In 1830, Pike Run Township had 92 black residents and Fallowfield Township 74. The southern and western townships had just a sprinkling of black residents. Washington, the county seat, proved to be the biggest magnet for free blacks. Five black families totaling 41 people were living in Washington in 1800. This number nearly doubled, to 82, between 1810 and 1820 and rose by 1830 to 122. By 1850 Washington had 235 blacks among its population of 2,662, or about 9 percent of its population. Nearly two-thirds of the borough's African Americans had been born in Pennsylvania, but more than a quarter had been born in a slave state, 41 of them in Virginia.<sup>53</sup>

Maria Cooper was one of those Virginians. Born into slavery, probably about 1816, she lived near Front Royal in Warren County. She and her children were freed in 1851. Cooper's owner, Ruhannah M. Buck, had apparently established a close relationship with Cooper and took particular care to ensure that Cooper was not only freed upon her death, but also given sufficient money to establish herself in a free state. (An 1806 Virginia law stipulated that emancipated slaves had to leave the state within a year or face the prospect of re-enslavement.) Upon Buck's death, her executors immediately gave Cooper, her six children, and one grandchild their freedom papers. They bought a new wagon, two horses to pull that wagon, and various equipment for the horses and wagon. They also advanced \$300 of the \$800 Buck had willed to Cooper so that she could buy a house when she had left the state of Virginia.<sup>54</sup>

Cooper's motives for moving to Washington, Pennsylvania, remain unknown, although she apparently chose this destination before she left Warren County. When she passed through Uniontown and Brownsville, Pennsylvania, residents encouraged Cooper and her family to settle in these

towns, but she continued along the National Road to Washington, probably in the fall of 1852. So far as is known, no blacks from Warren County had preceded Cooper to Washington. Perhaps the town's reputation as a place that was congenial for blacks drew her there. Washington's substantial black population may also have been an inducement.<sup>55</sup>

At least initially, Cooper found life in Washington to her liking. Her family met with a warm reception, and her two elder daughters found ready employment as domestic help at wages of \$1.50 per week. Trained by her former mistress to read and write, Cooper reported back to the executors of the estate that she could easily have found positions for her youngest daughters as well but wanted them to be able to take advantage of free public schooling. She rented a three-room house at a decent price and found food quite affordable. She was able to make some money by taking in laundry. Cooper's initial optimism soon soured, however, when the horses purchased for her proved to be virtually worthless for hauling coal and other materials and a drain on her meager financial assets. She eventually had to purchase a new horse by borrowing money. Even more significantly, the executors of the Buck estate proved recalcitrant in forwarding the \$500 balance that had been willed to her. Burdened financially by illnesses that led to the deaths of two members of her family, and pressed by her creditors for money, Cooper pleaded in letter after letter to be given the \$500 that was due her. Not until 1859 did the executors finally desist from excuses and pay the money that was owed to Cooper—no doubt in part because a young white attorney, David S. Wilson, became her advocate. She promptly bought a house (probably the one she had been renting) in Washington's small black neighborhood for \$575. Cooper had made friends and put down roots in Washington, which offered a small but supportive black community, white friends sympathetic to injustices, free public education, and steady employment.<sup>56</sup>

The Skinner family offers another example of a black family in Virginia that relocated to Washington, Pennsylvania, after being forced to leave Virginia. Harriet Skinner was born free in Loudoun County and lived about five miles from Harper's Ferry. She married a slave and had ten children by him. She purchased his freedom in 1849, so the family was required to leave the state within a year. Interestingly, her husband was required to assume her last name on the certificate of freedom issued to him. The family took ten days to travel by wagon over the National Road to Washington in 1850. Armstead Skinner, the youngest of the children who came to Pennsylvania when he was nine, could offer no reason, in a late nineteenth-

century newspaper interview, for why his family decided to come to this city in southwestern Pennsylvania.<sup>57</sup>

As was true across the North, greater economic and social opportunities in urban areas led Washington County's black population to leave the countryside for the city.<sup>58</sup> Lacking the capital to buy land, rural blacks faced the prospect of working under the close supervision of whites and of social isolation. As Nash has commented, "For newly freed blacks, moving to the city was a logical way to obtain work, to find friends and sociability, to begin or perpetuate a family—in short, to build for the future."<sup>59</sup>

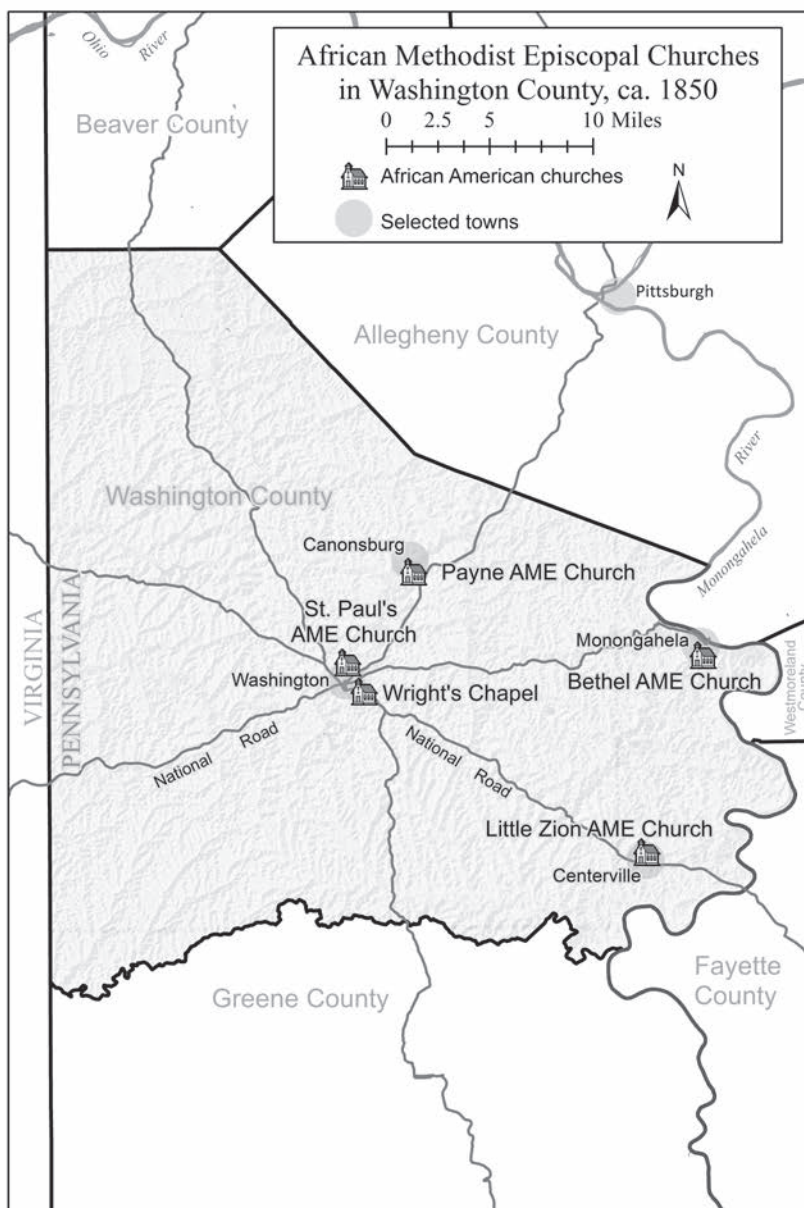
While the economic opportunities may not have been great, there were opportunities. Of the forty-two black men whose occupations were listed in the 1850 census for the borough of Washington, more than three-fourths appear as day laborers who probably performed menial jobs. The remaining nine individuals had learned a skill or trade such as carpentry, barbering, or coopering. One owned a grocery store. About one-quarter of the borough's black population had succeeded in acquiring their own homes by 1850. By contrast, only about 8 percent of black households in Philadelphia owned property in 1837. A similar occupational pattern emerges from Monongahela City, which had an African American population of 75 persons out of a total of 977. Ten of the seventeen black adult male heads of households are listed as laborers, but Monongahela also supported two farmers, two wagoners, a schoolteacher, and several tradesmen. Rural townships showed much less occupational diversity. In Fallowfield Township, for example, five of the six black heads of household are listed as laborers; only one apparently owned the land needed to be designated a farmer. Hopewell Township in the western part of the county offered more opportunities for land ownership, as five African Americans had succeeded in acquiring land. Still, 76 percent of its black heads of household were laborers. The only other occupation listed for an African American in Hopewell Township was that of a boatman—probably one who made his living on the nearby Ohio River.<sup>60</sup>

The small towns of Washington County also offered institutions that could seldom be found in the countryside. Churches are the primary example. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church became the core of the black community in Washington County. Methodism attracted black congregants for several reasons. First, its founder, John Wesley, held well-known antislavery views. Second, Methodists disdained well-crafted sermons in favor of church services that were full of spontaneity and emotion. They also imposed a discipline that influenced the private lives of

struggling but aspiring whites and blacks far more than rival denominations. For Richard Allen and other African American leaders of early Methodism, Wesley's church "seemed a perfect system for lifting up an oppressed people and healing the suffering experienced by slavery." When white Philadelphia Methodists refused to accord equal status to black congregants, Allen, a former slave himself, decided in 1794 to build a church that would minister exclusively to his people. Although Allen remained officially within the fold of the Methodist Episcopal Church until 1816, when he organized the AME Church, the seeds of separation had been sown long before.<sup>61</sup>

In the town of Washington, the St. Paul AME Church was founded in 1818, just two years after the formation of the AME Church nationally. The impetus for the organization of the local church came from George Boler (some accounts say Bolden), a black barber who was the exhorter in the local Methodist Church. African Americans had been attending this church since it was built in 1801 but were relegated to the balcony. By 1810 there were enough black members to form a class. Such classes met during the week at the home of a member and were intended to aid in the quest for salvation. A second class had been added by 1819. Boler headed the first class, which met at his home, while Joseph Reynolds headed the second. Boler wrote to Philadelphia requesting that a black minister be sent to serve Washington's black Methodists. The Reverend David Smith arrived in Washington in 1820 in response to this request. Shortly thereafter, the congregation built a church on a lot between Chestnut and Walnut Streets in the black neighborhood at the east end of town. That more than half of Washington's eighty-one blacks joined youth and adult classes at St. Paul's testifies to the importance of the church in the black community. The establishment of a separate church reflected the growing wealth and independence of the black community—and probably also reflected the desire to be free of white supervision. As Gayraud S. Wilmore has commented, the black church was "the one impregnable corner of the world where consolation, solidarity, and mutual aid could be found and from which the master and the bossman—at least in the North—could be effectively barred."<sup>62</sup> Another AME church, Wright's Chapel, was organized in Washington in 1843.<sup>63</sup>

The expansion of black churches in Washington County paralleled national developments. Between 1836 and 1846, AME churches proliferated across the North, increasing from eighty-six to nearly three hundred.<sup>64</sup> Two AME churches appeared in the eastern part of the county in the 1830s and 1840s. (See Map 3.) William Paul Quinn, who had been present at the



Map 3



1. Fallen grave marker in Little Zion AME Church graveyard, Centerville, PA

founding of the AME Church in Philadelphia and became a major force in the church, helped to organize the Bethel AME Church in Monongahela in 1833. The Reverend Samuel Clingman served as the first pastor of the church, and Bowman and Ralph families were stalwart members of this church for several generations. The first building occupied by the church stood at the corner of Geary and Fair (now Sixth) Streets. The church moved to its current location on Main and Seventh Streets in 1871.<sup>65</sup>

The other antebellum black church in eastern Washington County was the Little Zion AME Church in West Pike Run Township, founded in 1844 by Augustus R. Green. It was unique in Washington County in that it was a rural church. Abraham Lowdrake hosted meetings of this church at his home until 1850, when the congregation erected a log building. In 1880 the congregation built a frame church northeast of Centerville. Among the members were William Wallace, a major figure in the local Underground Railroad, and William Ralph from nearby Monongahela, who served briefly as the pastor of the church.<sup>66</sup>

The Payne AME Church in Canonsburg dates to the early 1830s. The church initially met in private residences. After it formally organized, Reverend Clingman became the pastor of the church. By 1843, the church had evidently found a permanent home. A letter written by Daniel Arnet, James Brown, and F.L. Chambers, all of whom lived in the Canonsburg area,

called for a countywide meeting of African Americans in the Canonsburg AME Church in that year. The congregation built a new church in 1853 or 1854 in the west end of town.<sup>67</sup>

The slow demise of slavery, the emergence of free black communities, and the establishment of institutions independent of white control all helped to create the roadbed for the local Underground Railroad. As David Smith has commented, "A strong free black population was an important component to successful aid to fugitive slaves."<sup>68</sup> By 1830 a fugitive slave could find a refuge in the small but established communities of free blacks in towns such as Washington, Canonsburg, and West Middletown. The growth of radical abolitionism in the 1830s among a small but dedicated minority of whites in Washington County enabled a growing number of fugitive slaves to find a safe haven either in the county or in Canada. The next chapter examines how this minority took up the cause of abolitionism.