

Ye Meetg Hous Smal

A Short Account of FRIENDS in Loudoun County, Virginia, 1732-1980

by

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Catherine Phillips was not the only Quaker whose spirits suffered when she viewed humans held in bondage. True, in early days Friends did indeed own slaves, and for its first quarter-century all the Fairfax Monthly Meeting [at Waterford] had to say about them was, "Blacks in the home should be well treated," and another admonition capable of the broadest interpretation, African children should be given a useful education.

John Woolman of the tender spirit, and others of his mind, however, spoke throughout the county against slavery. His treatise *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* would have been available in the meeting libraries, since Fairfax purchased several copies. Gradually, and not so gradually, the position of Friends on Slavery hardened. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting made slaveholding a disownable [ousting from membership in the meeting] offense in 1776 and other meetings followed.

What finally became Baltimore Yearly Meeting, having shuffled its feet for twenty years, was still only two years behind Philadelphia, and directed the disowning of slaveholders in 1778. In twenty more years, this Yearly Meeting had even taken a position against the mere hiring of slaves. It was at the yearly Meeting for the Western Shore of Maryland and Adjacent Parts of Pennsylvania and Virginia held 15th of Tenth month to 19th, 1798, that area Friends received specific instructions about such hiring: "Fairfax Quarterly Meeting informs this that they are apprehensive the Discipline is not sufficiently explicit with respect to treating with such members as hire slaves [and] request the advice of the meeting therein." Fairfax also wanted to know what to do with members who purchased slaves to be freed after a term of years.

The Yearly Meeting's reply to Fairfax's first inquiry ran: "The practice of hiring slaves is contrary to our Christian Testimony & Discipline . . . It is our sense . . . these [members of the meeting] ought to be tenderly labored with . . . if they cannot be reclaimed that a Public Testimony go forth against them." As for "the practice of purchasing to be liberated at a term of years . . . it is too generally gone into from interested views . . . the practice ought to be discouraged." Friends were encouraged to be more excited and diligent for the improvement of Black people in religious and school education. (Interesting to not that the word "Black" and not "Negro" is used. There is not much new!)

Even though a committee had been formed to "care for freed slaves" about a decade before Fairfax thus queried the Yearly Meeting, still it took a long time for the resulting

directives to be thoroughly enforced. There must have been some trouble at Goose Creek [Lincoln] about the hiring of slaves, for in 1824 we find Moses Gibson of that place stating that “he now has no slaves in his hire and will never again hire any slaves.” At Waterford, several Friends had been disowned for buying slaves and in 1856 there was a general crackdown on those who only hired them. In that year, a committee from Fairfax treated with William Stone for hiring a slave, disowned Mary Jane Hough for doing the same, and would have subjected her husband Isaac to the same fate if he hadn’t said he was sorry and wouldn’t do it again. Mary Jane was a galvanized Friend (as in galvanized metal) [not born a Friend] who had joined the society after her marriage, whereas Isaac was a birthright member. Evidently Mary Jane’s plating [joining the Friends] did not last. Old customs die hard, for this was 58 years after the first clear instructions had been given by the Yearly Meeting on the hiring of slaves!

Even the very owning of slaves did not cease instantly upon the decision of the Yearly Meeting in 1778. William Nichols of Goose Creek died in 1804, and slaves appear in the inventory of his estate. After that, however, we know of no slaveholders at Goose Creek who did not suffer disownment. Mayo C. Janney was reported in 1856 to have bought two slaves and was promptly disowned. We have Mayo’s ballot that he cast in the Confederate States election: Jefferson Davis of Mississippi for President and Alexander H. Stevens of Georgia for Vice President. Mayo not only backed the wrong horse . . . he lost his slaves anyway.

The Loudoun Manumission and Emigration Society was organized at the Oakdale School in 1824 for the purpose of getting owners to free their slaves and of sending the freed slaves to Haiti. Yardley Taylor was president, and Jonathan Taylor would take your subscription to their mouthpiece. “The Genius of Universal Emancipation” was published in Baltimore and is one of the worst printed pieces of paper we have ever tried to read.

The LM&E Society saw to it that people knew what they were doing. Some of their output would have been worthy of a Hinton Helper or a Fredrick Law Olmsted. [noted abolitionists] In fact, those two, who came along later, might even have been influenced by it. As Charles P. Poland tells, quoting from the society’s writing, the LM&E Society identified slavery for what it was, “an atrocious debasement of human nature” that denied “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” that had a tendency to “nourish indolence and discourage industry,” and that “cannot be justified and is a pernicious and dangerous evil.” In 1827, at the Goose Creek schoolhouse, our LM&E Society was host to 21 delegates from seven local societies at the first annual convention in Virginia for the abolition of slavery. Delegates from Goose Creek were Daniel Janney, David Smith, William Holmes, Sr., William Holmes, Jr., Henry S. Taylor, Yardley Taylor, and Benjamin F. Taylor, including also Edward Beeson and Elisha Fawcett from South Fork.

Another antislavery organization that interested Quakers was the American Colonization Society. Though many of its members were slaveholders, its Loudoun auxiliary brought the evils of slavery to the attention of the county at least. Quaker members from Goose Creek and Fairfax were Israel Janney, Samuel Nichols, Asa Moore, and Jacob Mendenhall, and later Samuel M. Janney. These made it a point to be useful to the

organization, thought it was no doubt had going for persons of their strong views to hold membership along side such old-line Virginia names as Washington, Ball, Noland, Lee, Roszel and others. The Colonization Society was instrumental in sending some freed slaves to Liberia, and letters from some of these settlers to their former masters have been treasured keepsakes in several Loudoun homes ever since.

One would be safe in believing that Yardley Taylor never turned away slaves seeking their freedom by flight to the North, but such things were not put down in diaries in this part of the country before the Civil War. After the War, they still were not recorded, because Friends as well as others were content to let sleeping dogs lie. Friends were also caught in a cleft stick [a dilemma] because they were not supposed to engage in subterfuge or anything that could not bear the light of day, but by its very nature participation in the Underground Railroad had to be kept quiet. Not kept quiet at all, however, were Friends' feelings about the institution of slavery itself. In 1857 a broadside addressed to Yardley Taylor started out, "There are but few persons in the county, I presume, who have not heard of you as the chief of the abolitionist clan in Loudoun."

Taylor received an assist when Samuel M. Janney and his wife Elizabeth came to Goose Creek. Janney had gone broke trying to run a cotton mill at Occoquan with his brother-in-law. In Goose Creek he had his home, called Springdale, built in 1832 by Will Bolen and Thornton Whitacre, who took in payment rents realized over a period of time from a wharf that Elizabeth owned in Alexandria.

Springdale opened as a boarding school for girls in 1839 and was at once a success. From the school's profits and those he realized from his *Life of William Penn*, his *History of Friends* and his prolific outpouring of other writings, Samuel was able to pay off his creditors to the last penny. The clarity of his style and the directness of his unencumbered prose make his books as easy to read today as when he wrote them. Perhaps the most useful of his works to us is his posthumous *Memoirs* for the light it sheds on his life and the times of which he was a part.

An author and an educator, Janney was also a leader in peaceful relations with the Indians, and the outstanding personality of the Commonwealth of Virginia in the antislavery crusade. Samuel never forgot that he was a Quaker; in fact it was his Friendly persuasion, he admits, that brought him to those things instead of to his desired life as a poet. He enjoyed the confidence of editors, who hunted him out for his antislavery articles. Since he was a friend of J. H. Pleasants, the editor of the "Richmond Whig," he had a state wide readership.

Even though he did not join the abolitionists, as Yardley Taylor did, in their vitriolic judgment, it was his antislavery work that got him into trouble with the law in Loudoun.

The State Constitutional Convention of 1850-51 produced that most broadly proslavery constitution that Virginia had ever had. It must have been in preparation for the convention that William A. Smith, the president of Randolph-Macon College and a

minister, took it upon himself to swing around the state preaching that slavery was just, and right, and moreover sanctioned by the Bible. With the blessings of the states-righters and proslavery advocates, Smith delivered one of his speeches at the Leesburg courthouse in August of 1849, to a generally enthusiastic audience. Samuel Janney could not stand this flaunting of the proslavery banner in his bailiwick and replied in an article published in a Leesburg paper, "The Washingtonian."

A grand jury indicted Janney for the article as "calculated to incite person of color to make insurrection or rebellion." One can read in his *Memoirs* the arguments he presented to the court when, after some delays, he was finally brought to trial. Sufficient to say that his defense, delivered in person, was irrefutable, even in a proslavery area. "The longer you keep this subject before the people," his closing argument ran, "the more they will be to my way of thinking." This struck home, and the indictment was dropped.

As a consequence of Friends' antislavery stand, there were fewer blacks in the area of Quaker settlement than in other parts of the county, with a greater proportion of freedmen among those blacks. Yet we can find no record that Goose Creek ever counted a single black among its members. (Quakers in other parts of the nation did not make much progress in this direction either.) Still, Friends in Loudoun aided slaves in every way they could, while at the same time they lent a helping hand to freedmen in buying their own land and building their own homes. They even allowed them burial in Goose Creek's cemetery, a thing not often done by other Virginia churches.

As the Northern Abolitionists increased their baying, just so much more did the proslavery crowd bear down on Southerners who were antislavery advocates. One Goose Creek Friend had a knife drawn on him, and, as we have seen, a newspaper finally gave them their crowning glory and called them Black Republicans!