

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN EARLY PERINTON

Slaves arrived in New York as early as 1626, imported by the Dutch to solve a labor shortage both in farming and in commerce. The slave population was concentrated downstate and was quite widely diffused, with the average slave master owning one or two slaves. By the 1770's the black minority totaled about 11% of the population of New York. In the beginning slavery was not formally defined and the laws did not clearly distinguish between indentured servitude and slavery; however, by the mid to late 18th century the combination of fear and economic necessity had hardened attitudes, resulting in restrictive slave codes. At the same time, the invention of the cotton gin had reinvigorated slavery in the southern cotton growing states, and slaves became a crucial component of the American economic system. A healthy slave could be worth as much as \$2,500.

In 1790 there were about 21,000 slaves in New York, including 12 slaves in Perinton. During the early years of the 19th century, New York moved to end slavery in the state, and in 1801 an act was passed banning the importation or exportation of slaves. By 1817, the state had declared that anyone born a slave after July 4, 1799, would be free as of July 4, 1827. After 1827, slavery was banned in the state.

The Ellsworth family, who moved to Perinton in 1832, purportedly brought with them former slaves. According to former Perinton historian Helen Butler, there was a cemetery on the southwest corner of Ayrault and Turk Hill Roads, on the Slocum property, where some of the former slaves were buried along with five Slocum children. Today there is no evidence of those burials. It is said that Julie Rose, who worked as a cook for the Walter Hubbell family and spent her final years in the Fairport Baptist Home, was the daughter of one of the former slaves buried in that plot.

Nineteenth century pre-Civil War Perinton had several African-American families. The John Jackson family owned land along the canal and lived in Perinton probably between 1835 and the late 1840's. Doc Sharpe probably lived here around the same time. He is said to have been well versed in the use of herbs for healing and often treated his neighbors. The 1850 census notes a Nancy Armstrong living with the John Knickerbocker family and a William Clency from Georgia living with the Gideon Ramsdell family. The 1855 census showed a "colored" population of ten in the town - five men, three women, and two children.

John Parker, his wife Charlotte, and their children William and Marietta, came to Perinton in the 1870's, John having been born in Maryland in 1827, and Charlotte in Virginia in 1849. William apparently died in childhood, since he is not listed on any subsequent census records. Another son, John, was born in 1880. John owned a barber shop in the village, and his wife, a nurse, was active in church and community affairs, introducing Sojourner Truth when she spoke in Fairport, possibly at Shaw's Hall on West Avenue. She is also said to have been quite outspoken against the commonly used derogatory racial epithet, stating that there was no such word. John died in 1900, their son John, Jr. in 1919, and Charlotte in 1921. All are buried in Greenvale cemetery.

The Abe Taylor family arrived after the Civil War, appearing in the local census for the first time in 1875. He, too, worked as a barber for a time, but then went to work in Albany as a porter for the State Senate. His wife Rebecca and daughter Mary lived on

Main Street. Mary attended school here and went on to work at the Sanitary Can Company and then Forman's.

Former Perinton historian Helen Butler also writes about two brothers, Don and Charlie Hull, who lived for a time on Budlong Road where they operated a still. After it blew up and burned the house down, Don left town and Charlie moved to Filkins Street and opened a barber shop. He and his wife Carrie are in both the 1915 and 1925 census records. He was very popular with his customers, making them feel "like kings." Also known as a good boxer and card player, he was a common sight riding his bicycle along Main Street to work. After his bicycle riding days were over, he was always given a spot riding on a fire truck in parades.

As the twentieth century progressed, many African Americans moved north, leaving the land to work in the growing industrial centers of the north and diversifying the population of the nation as a whole. African-Americans have fought in all of our nation's wars, and have in all ways been an integral part of American life, even after years of lynchings, Jim Crow, and the KKK. While the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's ended legal segregation and protected voting rights, it did not end economic segregation or institutional racism. Those issues continue to challenge citizens of a nation whose values state that all persons are created equal.