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# TREDYFFRIN EASTTOWN HISTORY QUARTERLY

## Phillis and Slavery in Tredyffrin Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania



## Hugh Steen, Serial Entrepreneur of Tredyffrin The Black Bear Inn

## From the Editors



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Firstly, the incoming triumvirate editorial team would like thank outgoing editors Tim Lander and Bonnie Haughey for their years of dedicated effort and strong contributions to the ongoing evolution of the *History Quarterly*.

It is with great pleasure that we present the first article offered in the *Quarterly* by author Patricia Henry – “Phillis and Slavery in Tredyffrin Township.” Patricia’s article is well researched and documented by a variety and breadth of sources and provides a unique insight into what life may have been like for a few slaves who lived in Tredyffrin Township, particularly one named Phillis. Although we know very little about “Phillis”, what we discover is a possible window into the life of this woman. As Patricia explains, much of Phillis’ story comes “from evidence surrounding her.” Patricia paints a possible scenario for slaves’ living conditions and captures an apparent uneasiness of some slaveholders to continue as such. While it was commonplace to refer to them as “household servants”, slaves were in fact “property” – a moral and ethical dilemma for many owners. As some slaveholders indeed vacillated about slave ownership, it was still not until late in 1833 when the Declaration of the Anti-Slavery Convention was enacted in Philadelphia.

Take a voyage back in time for a view into Phillis’ life and imagine what freedom or the lack thereof meant to her and to other slaves. We hope this article provides the impetus for future pieces from this gifted author.



There is precedent in the *Quarterly* for consideration of issues related to local race relations. One outstanding example is Roger Thorne’s article “Segregation on the Upper Main Line: The ‘School Fight’ of 1932-34” in Volume 42, Number 1 (December 2005) depicting the dramatic story of an unsuccessful attempt to impose school segregation in our community and how the will of concerned citizens ultimately triumphed over failed bureaucratic policy.

We also welcome two shorter articles from a regular contributor, Mike Bertram. The first – “Hugh Steen, Serial Entrepreneur” – is about a man involved in a variety of different business ventures unusual for his time. The second “The Black Bear Inn” article is about a long lost inn no longer standing. Please note the interweaving story lines shared between the two articles.

We hope that our inaugural issue continues in the fine tradition of previous volumes and provides substantial and thought-provoking historical perspectives. We seek to provide the best possible content and we welcome contributions as well as your comments and feedback.

# Tredyffrin Easttown History Quarterly

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#### Cover Descriptions

- Front Cover: Rear or servants' entrance of the Isaac Potts house, also known as George Washington's Headquarters, in Valley Forge National Historical Park. The photo opposite is the kitchen of the same house. *Photos © 2013 John O. Senior*
- Back Cover: Declaration of the Anti-Slavery Convention, Philadelphia, December 4, 1833. The original was printed on silk.  
*Courtesy Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA*

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He that STEALS a man, and SELLERS him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.—Ex. xxi. 16.

Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee: He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose, in one of thy gates where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him.—Deut. xxiii. 15, 16.

And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that they are bought with money, he shall let him go free for his eye's sake. And if he smite out his man-servant's tooth, or his maid-servant's tooth, he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.—Ex. xxi. 26, 27.

If a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right; hath not oppressed any; hath spoiled none by violence; hath executed true judgment between man



Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

and man, he shall surely live.—Exodus xviii. 2.—2.

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke.—Isaiah lviii. 6.

Ye tithe mint, and anise, and cummin, and all manner of herbs, and pass over the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone.—Matthew xxiii. 23.

Thou shalt devote his fellow man—Chain him, and take him, and exact his rent.

With stripes, that weary with a bleeding heart, When the sore inflicted on a breast, I would not have a slave to fill my breast.

To carry me, to fan me while I sleep, And trouble when I wake, for all my wealth.

That slave's bought and sold have ever said.

Nay, dear as freedom is—

I had much rather be myself the slave, And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him.

## DECLARATION OF THE ANTI-SLAVERY CONVENTION.

ASSEMBLED IN PHILADELPHIA, DECEMBER 4, 1838.

THE Convention assembled in the city of Philadelphia to organize a National Anti-Slavery Society, promptly seize the opportunity to promulgate the following DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, as cherished by them in relation to the enslavement of one-sixth portion of the American people.

More than fifty-seven years have elapsed since a band of patriots convened in this place, to devise measures for the deliverance of this country from a foreign yoke. The cornerstone upon which they founded the TEMPLE OF FREEDOM was broadly this: "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness." At the sound of their trumpet-call, three millions of people rose up as from the sleep of death, and rushed to the strife of blood; deeming it more glorious to die instantly as freemen, than desirable to live one hour as slaves. They were few in number—poor in resources; but the honest conviction that TRUTH, JUSTICE, and RIGHT were on their side, made them invincible.

We have met together for the achievement of an enterprise, without which, that of our fathers is incomplete; and which, for its magnitude, solemnity, and probable results upon the destiny of the world, as far transcends theirs, as moral truth does physical force.

In purity of motive, in earnestness of zeal, in decision of purpose, in integrity of action, in steadfastness of faith, in sincerity of spirit, we would not be inferior to them.

Their principles led them to wage war against their oppressors, and to spill human blood like water, in order to be free. Ours forbid the doing of evil that good may come, and lead us to reject, and to entreat the oppressed to reject, the use of all carnal weapons for deliverance from bondage; relying solely upon those which are spiritual, and mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.

Their measures were physical resistance—the marshalling in arms—the hostile array—the moral encounter. Ours shall be such only as the opposition of moral parity to moral corruption—the destruction of error by the potency of truth—the overthrow of prejudice by the power of love—and the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance. Their grievances, great as they were, were trifling in comparison with the wrongs and sufferings of those for whom we plead. Our fathers were never slaves—never bought and sold like cattle—never shut out from the light of knowledge and religion—never subjected to the lash of brutal task-masters.

But those, for whose emancipation we are striving—constituting at the present time at least one-sixth part of our countrymen—are recognised by the law, and treated by their fellow-beings, as marketable commodities—as goods and chattels—as brute beasts; are plundered daily of the fruits of their toil without redress; really enjoying no constitutional nor legal protection from licentious and murderous outrages upon their persons; are ruthlessly torn asunder—the tender babe from the arms of its frantic mother—the heart-broken wife from her weeping husband—at the caprice or pleasure of irresponsible tyrants. For the crime of having a dark complexion, they suffer the pangs of hunger, the infliction of stripes, and the ignominy of brutal servitude. They are kept in heathenish darkness by laws expressly enacted to make their instruction a criminal offence. These are the prominent circumstances in the condition of more than two millions of our people, the proof of which may be found in thousands of indisputable facts, and in the laws of the slave-holding States.

Hence we maintain—That in view of the civil and religious privileges of this nation, the guilt of its oppression is unequalled by any other on the face of the earth; and, therefore, that it is bound to repent instantly, to undo the heavy burden, to break every yoke, and to let the oppressed go free.

We further maintain—That no man has a right to enslave or imbrute his brother—to hold or acknowledge him, for one moment, as a piece of merchandise—to keep back his hire by fraud—or to brutalize his mind by denying him the means of intellectual, social, and moral improvement.

The right to enjoy liberty is inalienable. To invade it, is to usurp the prerogative of JEHOVAH. Every man has a right to his own body—to the products of his own labour—to the protection of law—and to the common advantages of society. It is piracy to buy or steal a native African, and subject him to servitude. Surely the sin is as great to enslave an AMERICAN as an AFRICAN.

Therefore we believe and affirm—That there is no difference, in principle, between the African slave trade and American slavery—That every American citizen, who retains a human being in involuntary bondage, as his property, is (according to Scripture) a MAN STEALER.—That the slaves ought instantly to be set free, and brought under the protection of law.—That if they had lived from the time of Pharaoh down to the present period, and had been entailed through successive generations, their right to be free could never have been alienated, but their claims would have constantly risen in solemnity.—That all those laws which are now in force, admitting the right of slavery, are therefore before God utterly null and void; being an audacious usurpation of the Divine prerogative, a daring infringement on the law of Nature, a base overthrow of the very

foundations of the social compact, a complete extinction of all the relations, endearments, and obligations of mankind, and a presumptuous transgression of all the holy commandments—and that therefore they ought to be instantly abrogated.

We further believe and affirm—That all persons of colour who possess the qualifications which are demanded of others, ought to be admitted forthwith to the enjoyment of the same privileges, and the exercise of the same prerogatives, as others.—That the paths of preferment, of wealth, and of intelligence, should be opened as widely to them as to persons of a white complexion.

We maintain that no compensation should be given to the planters emancipating their slaves—Because it would be a surrender of the great fundamental principle, that man cannot hold property in man—Because SLAVERY IS A CRIME, AND THEREFORE IT IS NOT AN ARTICLE TO BE SOLD—Because the holders of slaves are not the just proprietors of what they claim; freeing the slaves is not depriving them of property, but restoring to the outraged and guiltless slaves, and not to those who have plundered and abused them, it to its right owners; it is not wronging the master, but righting the slave—restoring him to himself—Because immediate and general emancipation would only destroy nominal, not real property; it would not amputate a limb or break a bone of the slaves, but by infusing motives into their breasts would make them doubly valuable to the masters as free labourers; and, because, if compensation is to be given at all, it should be given to the outraged and guiltless slaves, and not to those who have plundered and abused them.

We regard, as delusive, cruel, and dangerous, any scheme of expiation which pretends to aid, either directly or indirectly, in the emancipation of the slaves, or to be a substitute for the immediate and total abolition of slavery.

We fully and unanimously recognise the sovereignty of each State, to legislate exclusively on the subject of slavery which is tolerated within its limits; we concede that Congress, under the present national compact, has no right to interfere with any of the slave States, in relation to this momentous subject.

But we maintain that Congress has a right, and is solemnly bound to suppress the domestic slave trade between the several States, and to abolish slavery in those portions of our territory which the Constitution has placed under its exclusive jurisdiction.

We also maintain that there are, at the present time, the highest obligations resting upon the people of the free States, to remove slavery by moral and political action, as prescribed in the Constitution of the United States. They are now living under the pledge of their tremendous physical force to fasten the galling fetters of tyranny upon the limbs of millions in the Southern States; they are liable to be called at any moment to suppress a general insurrection of the slaves; they authorize the slave owner to vote for three-fifths of his slaves as property, and thus enable him to perpetuate his oppression; they support a standing army at the South for its protection; and they seize the slave who has escaped into their territories, and send him back to be tortured by an enraged master or a brutal driver. This relation to slavery is criminal and full of danger; IT MUST BE BROKEN UP.

These are our views and principles—these, our designs and measures. With entire confidence in the over-ruling justice of God, we plant ourselves upon the Declaration of our independence and the truths of Divine Revelation as upon the EVERLASTING ROCK.

We shall organize Anti-Slavery Societies, if possible, in every city, town, and village in our land.

We shall send forth Agents to lift up the voice of remonstrance, of warning, of entreaty, and of rebuke.

We shall circulate, unsparingly and extensively, anti-slavery tracts and periodicals.

We shall enlist the pulpit and the press in the cause of the suffering and the dumb.

We shall aim at a purification of the churches from all participation in the guilt of slavery.

We shall encourage the labour of freemen rather than that of the slaves, by giving a preference to their productions; and

We shall spare no exertions nor means to bring the whole nation to a speedy repentance.

Our trust for victory is solely in GOD. He may be personally defeated, but our principles never. TRUTH, JUSTICE, REASON, HUMANITY, must and will gloriously triumph. Already a host is coming up to the help of the Lord against the mighty, and the prospect before us is full of encouragement.

Submitting this DECLARATION to the candid examination of the people of this country, and of the friends of liberty throughout the world, we hereby affirm our signatures to it; pledging ourselves that, under the guidance and by the help of Almighty God, we will do all that in us lies, consistently with this Declaration of our principles, to overthrow the most execrable system of slavery, that has ever been witnessed upon earth—to deliver our land from its deadliest curse—to wipe out the foulest stain which rests upon our national escutcheon—and to secure to the coloured population of the United States all the rights and privileges which belong to them as men, and as Americans—come what may to our persons, our interests, or our reputations—whether we live to witness the triumph of LIBERTY, JUSTICE, and HUMANITY, or perish ultimately as martyrs in this great, benevolent, and holy cause. Done in Philadelphia, this Sixth day of December, A. D. 1838.

\*Exodus xxi. 16.—Deuteronomy xxiv. 7.

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