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ON THE EDGE OF FREEDOM:
THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ISSUE IN SOUTH CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA,
1820-1870

A Thesis in
History

by

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ABSTRACT

The development of abolitionism in south central Pennsylvania, a border region of a border state, was different than in the upper North. Early attempts at antislavery activity met with fierce resistance, and so the area’s abolitionists adopted a less confrontational approach, to which the fugitive slave issue was well suited. South central Pennsylvania (Adams, Franklin, and Cumberland counties) had hundreds of fugitives traveling through during the antebellum decades, aided by an organized underground railroad. The issue appealed to humanitarianism, and the individual fugitive was less threatening than the potential results of mass emancipation. Area abolitionists helped lead an unusually effective petition campaign that changed state law, and they crafted a legal strategy prosecuting kidnappers who seized innocent African Americans as fugitives. Their success brought about a response from the south, and several prominent figures were tried for aiding fugitive slaves. Through Thaddeus Stevens, the border perspective on the issue even surfaced in Congress during the debates on the 1850 Compromise. In the border state of Pennsylvania, however, the fugitive slave issue alone could not drive a revolution in politics; the Christiana riot helped unseat an antislavery governor and by the end of the decade of the 1850s, it was the opponents of helping fugitives that were agitating this issue more than the proponents.

The drawbacks to emphasizing this issue over militant, immediate abolitionism with an emphasis on equal rights became apparent during the Civil War and its aftermath. The fugitive slave issue was writ large during the war, as hundreds of “contrabands” from Maryland and Virginia swarmed into the area, and scores were recaptured by the Confederate army during its invasions. After the war, a variety of social and demographic changes worked against African Americans achieving lasting improvements in status or opportunities. Although many works of popular memory remembered this area as a vanguard of the Underground Railroad, by the 1920s, south central Pennsylvania had become in many ways as segregated as most parts of the Jim Crow South. Ironically, the fugitive slave issue, by reinforcing images of dependency, may have actually worked against achievement of lasting social change.
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DEDICATION

To my mother, Caroline C. Smith (1931-2000), for her love and perseverance.

To Valerie, for all her love.

And to Sherry B. Davis, for perhaps knowing first of all.
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Introduction

The Fugitive Slave Issue on “the Edge of Freedom”

This study is an investigation of the impact of the fugitive slave issue, broadly defined, on a particular area of the antebellum North. Because of the scope and the nature of the sources, it involves aspects of social history, political history, legal history, rural history, biography, and military history. It touches on issues of race, society, and jurisprudence. The aim has been to see what can be learned by focusing on one region through the lens of the fugitive slave issue.

The area, south central Pennsylvania, consists of Adams, Cumberland and Franklin counties. It was a key locale, a border region of a border state. Lying atop Maryland’s Cumberland and Virginia’s Shenandoah valleys, intersected by numerous roads and divided by mountain ranges that acted as northward guides, south central Pennsylvania was a vital entry point for fugitive slaves seeking freedom. It had an active Underground Railroad, encompassing black and white participants. It also had an antislavery community which chose, once it became apparent that mass antislavery organizing would not be successful, to employ legal and political means to help the fugitive. These instruments were unusually effective in their hands, and resulted in convictions of slave catchers and the enactment of a new personal liberty law, which caused Pennsylvania’s legal code to collide with Federal statute after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Still, in both Pennsylvania as a whole and south central Pennsylvania in particular, the fugitive slave issue did not guarantee political success for those who tried to appropriate as part of an antislavery critique. In this region, it was the
Democrats who usually agitated the issue as a weapon against the Republicans and antislavery reformers. As this region gradually turned more Democratic and conservative, and many of its reformers died or moved away, the edge of freedom gradually became a place of inequality, not opportunity.

The experience of this region differed from that of the Upper North. South central Pennsylvania lay hundreds of miles from the reservoirs of antislavery commitment in New England, upstate New York, and Ohio’s Western Reserve. In Boston in 1850, Daniel Webster was denied the use of Faneuil Hall for a speech because of his support for the fugitive slave law. In Syracuse, New York, a crowd of nearly 3,000 people, white and black, gathered outside the courthouse as part of the 1852 rescue of Jerry Henry. In 1851, large biracial gatherings tried to prevent the rendition of the fugitives Shadrach and Sims from Boston. In 1854, the Anthony Burns fugitive slave case convulsed both Boston and Worcester, and resulted in the rendition of Burns under military guard. It also resulted in the removal of a Harvard lecturer and judge. Later in the decade, noted episodes of resistance to the fugitive slave law occurred in Oberlin, Ohio, Troy, New York, and in Wisconsin. No such mass activity happened in south central Pennsylvania, and when large rescues did occur – at Carlisle and at Christiana in nearby Lancaster County – they were led exclusively by African Americans.

Farther from the border, antislavery activists were more open about their involvement in the Underground Railroad. In some locations, even the members of the Underground Railroad were common knowledge. Frederick Douglass, in upstate New York, complained that some western abolitionists, who published names of “conductors” in the paper, were much too cavalier with information that could mean the difference
between freedom and reenslavement or death for escaping slaves. Henry David Thoreau wrote freely about helping a fugitive in *Walden*. This did not happen in south central Pennsylvania, where some Underground Railroad routes were so secretive they remain unknown today.

As a result, an unwary reader could almost gather from the above accounts that the key nexus of the fugitive slave issue was in New England and the Upper North. In reality, the fugitive slave issue was more critical in a practical sense in southern Pennsylvania than it was in upstate New York, New England or the Western Reserve. Southerners knew that every single fugitive escaping by land east of the Appalachian Mountains had to pass through Pennsylvania. Kidnapings and seizures of fugitives were not uncommon, as were slave catchers, informants, and reward seekers, white and black.

Unlike their counterparts farther north, these abolitionists did not rely on mass actions or demonstrations, their efforts at large-scale public organizing having failed in the 1830s. They were more discreet about their Underground Railroad activity, and like many embattled, idealistic minorities, they crafted a strategy based on the court system and political and legal change. In so doing, they threw significant roadblocks in the way of slave catchers and Southern slave owners in the very first state North of the Mason Dixon line. This emphasis placed the region on the cutting edge of legal and political developments regarding the fugitive slave in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, as the legal status of African Americans, free and fugitive, was contested in the legislature, constitutional conventions, the press, and the halls of Congress. By working within a legal framework, they eventually gave space for tentative border politicians and
professionals to define Pennsylvania’s legacy as a “free” state, and to regard support for the state’s personal liberty laws to be upholding law and order.

Once helping fugitives was more effectively criminalized by the 1850 fugitive slave act, pressure from conservatives to preserve “law and order,” support the new law, and ease the sectional crisis worked against the agitation of opposition to the fugitive slave issue politically. It was actually Pennsylvania’s Democrats, not the Whigs or Republicans, who exploited the fugitive slave issue and anti-black rhetoric the most in the 1850s. During the secession crisis in the winter of 1860-61, it was the Democrats who resurrected the issue, and organized a massive petition campaign to repeal state restrictions on the rendition of fugitive slaves.

Pursuing a strategy based primarily on covertly helping fugitive slaves and pushing for legal change paid substantial dividends in a new personal liberty law. The greatest payoff, however, may have occurred during the Civil War. Border antislavery activists and political antislavery supporters generally promoted a reverence for law, order and Constitution that was consistent with most antebellum American’s veneration for their founding documents.¹ During the early days of the war, thousands of Pennsylvanians flocked to the standard of Union and Constitution, as they did throughout the border North. More Union soldiers came from Pennsylvania than anywhere other than New York. Had this border state’s response to the secession crisis been significantly different – more prosouthern, neutral, or ambivalent - so might have been the course of the war.

¹ For the importance of this concept to Civil War Americans, see Phillip S. Paludan, “The American Civil War Considered as a Crisis of Law and Order,” American Historical Review 77:4 (October 1972): 1013-1034.
Still, law can be used as a tool for aggressive change, or it can be used to justify entropy and indifference. With the heart of the abolitionist community removed after the war due to migration, aging and death, it would be a hundred years before African Americans enjoyed the full equality that they had fought to win during the war.

As a border area, south central Pennsylvania was home to seeming paradoxes and contradictions. Two local farm families were stalwarts in helping fugitives escape, but also employed them as labor for months, increasing their risk of recapture. A brand-new antislavery organization seemed as interested in politics as moral reform. A man who would be later lauded as an anti-slavery giant helped a slave owner retain his slave eight years after he had supposedly converted to antislavery. A local minister and educator boldly condemned any legislation that would force the return of fugitive slaves years before the 1850 law was passed, and yet served on the board of the state colonization society for nine years in the 1860s. A lawyer expressed regret that the fugitive slave clause was ever placed in the Constitution and then became the Northern Whig Senator who most consistently supported the 1850 Compromise, including the new fugitive slave law. A local slave catcher supported Republicans. A Confederate army, heading towards what popular memory holds as the climactic battle of the Civil War, expended energy and attention capturing scores, if not hundreds, of African Americans along the way. An area so engaged with the fugitive slave issue becomes home, after the Civil War, to discrimination, massive Ku Klux Klan rallies, and lost opportunities. These paradoxes underscore the challenges of interpreting and appraising activity along the border.
Methodology

Rural areas do not always offer the same richness of sources as a study of an urban area does; this is particularly the case in south central Pennsylvania, where the Franklin County courthouse and its records were burned by Confederate forces in 1864. Still, despite these challenges, the history of the fugitive slave issue in this key border area demands to be told regardless. For this study, I have been inspired and instructed by Winthrop Jordan’s *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek*, a stellar example of what can be accomplished studying events in a rural setting. Like Jordan, I have tried to piece together evidence from a wide variety of sources: newspapers, first person recollections, census data, letters, court records, legislative records, local histories, the holdings of local historical societies and their journals and publications, and antislavery society records. In addition, for my study of the captures of African Americans by the Confederate army, I visited archives up and down the East Coast. The result is a fascinating from fragmentary sources. The pages that follow are organized around particular sets of sources as well as flow of events. In more cases than I would have liked, I have had to make reasonable suppositions about the linkages between events. There were very few “smoking gun” letters or documents that explained the thoughts and motivations of the participants. I welcome future scholars – and there are a number working on Adams County alone – testing and improving these findings.²

² Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge, 1993)
Along the Pennsylvania border, the fugitive slave issue in the press assumed an inverted parabola during the key years of the 1850s. At first, it was very important during the controversial adoption of the Compromise of 1850, crested as a result of the Christiana riot, the resulting trial, and the 1851 governor’s campaign, waned during the middle years of the decade, and revived at its end due largely to John Brown and then the secession crisis.

It remains to be seen if historiographically, the issue travels the same parabolic course from prominence to eclipse to a return to significance. Thus far its track has largely been one of descending interest and attention. It is unclear whether renewed interest in the Underground Railroad will translate into a new prominence for the fugitive slave issue in social and political accounts of the antebellum period.

Early commentators believed that the issue was extremely important. Writing just before the Civil War, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri felt that the fugitive slave issue was a critical contributor to the sectional crisis, and Pennsylvania’s obstructive legislation especially so. After the war, Massachusetts antislavery Congressman Henry Wilson made the fugitive slave issue a key ingredient of all or part of over one-fourth of the chapters in his massive two-volume study, *The Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*. Philadelphia abolitionist William Still gathered over five hundred pages of dense notes and recollections on the operation of southern Pennsylvania’s Underground
Railroad. Numerous Quakers recorded their reminiscences or wrote histories as well, including several who concentrated the story on southern Pennsylvania.3

Academically, the study of the fugitive slave issue reached an early crest in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, when Albert Bushnell Hart and his students emphasized the issue’s importance in a number of works. Their conclusion, synthesized by Professor Hart in his introduction to Wilbur Siebert’s *Underground Railroad*, was that the ability of slaves to escape introduced a key element of uncertainty into Southern slaveholding, forcing Southerners to remain politically aggressive to defend it. In short, for these Harvard and Radcliffe historians, the fugitive slave was the key ingredient to the coming of the Civil War.4

After Professor Hart and his students reached these conclusions, however, a shift occurred. In the larger study of the antislavery movement, it was the highly literate Garrisonians who intrigued historians. Not only had the Garrisonians and their descendants written many of the first histories of the movement, but many had left letters, publications, and expounded philosophies of interest to 20th century writers and academics. Interest in Garrison and his followers expanded as historians grew more interested in ideologies and radical philosophies and action, and less interested in rural folk helping fugitive slaves. William Lloyd Garrison himself worried that the fugitive slave issue, by turning abolitionists toward helping the individual fugitive, could divert

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4 Marion G. McDougall, *Fugitive Slaves* (Boston, 1891); Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1898); Albert Bushnell Hart, *Salmon Portland Chase* (Boston, 1899); Albert Bushnell Hart, “Introduction,” in Siebert, *Underground Railroad*. Elsie Singmaster (Lewars), a writer who lived in Gettysburg and who did much to popularize southern Pennsylvania’s Underground Railroad in her novels and children’s books, was also taught by Hart at Radcliffe. Mrs. E. S. Lewars to W. H. Siebert, June 23, 1943, Wilbur H. Siebert Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Roll 12.
their attention from destroying the institution of slavery. Many historians seem to have adopted his view.

Changes to the historical profession also contributed to marginalizing the fugitive slave issue for much of the 20th century. Charles and Mary Beard brought the study of mass economic and social factors to the forefront; for them, the story of the antebellum years was a massive clash of diverging civilizations, a story in which the individual fugitive had little role. Revisionist historians like Arthur Cole and Avery Craven, influenced by the horrific bloodshed of World War I, emphasized that the Civil War was a blunder brought on by sensationalist journalists and blundering statesmen. To them, the fugitive slave issue was primarily important as an issue to be agitated by these villains.  

As the historical discipline became more professionalized, historians embraced new forms of evidence, and the adoption of “scientific” methods for the study of history also helped push the fugitive slave to the background. The personal reminiscences of individuals, even those of former Underground Railroad participants who conscientiously tried to write for the historical record, seemed far less important than other scientific methods of exploration. As scholars began to make increased use of the invaluable but flawed resources of the U.S. census, historians from James Ford Rhodes to Robin Winks relied on census data that suggested few fugitives were escaping north per year – only 1,814 fugitives were enumerated in the 1850 and 1860 censuses combined. These

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figures, however, cannot be accepted uncritically. There seems to have been absolutely no incentive for individual slave owners to admit to the census taker, who was probably a neighbor, that they could not control their labor force.\textsuperscript{7} Certainly at times, Southern politicians, especially from the border states, were willing to claim that their losses of fugitive slaves were high in number, expensive, and unacceptable. In another application of scientific method to the fugitive slave issue, Stanley Campbell analyzed court records to determine that slave owners prevailed in the vast majority of fugitive slave proceedings in the North. In his mind, the South should have had no complaints about the operation of the law, because these proceedings resulted in findings for the slave owner in “the great majority” of cases. His study did not consider that in large areas of the North, Southerners did not even bother to try to recover fugitives. Despite this limitation, the fact that, until recently, Campbell’s limited study remained the last word on fugitive slave cases for nearly forty years is evidence of the academic neglect of the issue.\textsuperscript{8}

Campbell’s work reinforces, however, that there has been an important academic strain of thought which argued that the fugitive slave issue and the Underground Railroad were overemphasized and, at times, mythologized in the literature. Even before Campbell concluded that Southerners had little to complain about in the enforcement of the fugitive slave law, Larry Gara had sharply critiqued prevailing accounts of the Underground Railroad, which he felt were unduly influenced by the myth of valiant Quakers, cloaked lanterns, and helpless fugitives. Gara pointed out that many African

\textsuperscript{7} In addition, Southern sympathizers – and Southerners controlled the census bureau for most of its antebellum history - had already shown their ability to manipulate the census data, most notably in a fraudulent assertion that the 1840 census proved that Northern free blacks went insane at a markedly higher rate than Southern slaves. See William Stanton, \textit{The Leopard’s Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-1859} (Chicago, 1960).

Americans escaped north with no assistance from Northern whites, relying on their own resources or on African American helpers. He argued that the Underground Railroad was not an organized, systematic institution but an ad hoc one for which far too much influence was claimed. Gara’s necessary corrective was sufficiently harsh, however, as to inhibit Underground Railroad research for several decades.9

Meanwhile, historians were investigating other questions relating to slavery and the sectional crisis, and exploring new sources. Southern historians turned to wonderful manuscript plantation records, and produced studies of Southern slavery that aggregated and analyzed census records, plantation records and diaries, and other evidence. Much of this was informed by, and helped support, an analysis of slavery from a class perspective. Some of the great studies of plantation slavery focused on “weapons of the weak” resistance such as work slow-downs, destruction of tools, and negotiation of privileges with the master. There was less emphasis on individual escape. Even John Ashworth, who, in a more sophisticated version of Hart’s analysis, considered the agency of the slave the key component to the coming of the Civil War, focused largely on these collective actions. Eric Foner, in his magisterial study of the free labor ideology, considered the fugitive slave issue primarily as a tool wielded by radical Republicans to wrest control of the party from conservatives, not as an issue in the North-South rupture. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, in their comprehensive study of runaway slaves, suggested that few fled north.10

Recently, signs have emerged that this neglect of the fugitive slave issue is changing. A renewed interest in the Underground Railroad, with early assistance from the works of Charles Blockson and the initiatives of National Park Service, have stimulated a new crop of Underground Railroad publications. Individuals and communities have been rescued from scholarly neglect. Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, the most famous fugitives of all and leaders in the fight to help fugitive slaves, have received much scholarly attention lately. The field of Underground Railroad research seems to be undergoing a renaissance.

**Contribution**

This study maintains that south central Pennsylvania’s antislavery activity, centered largely around helping fugitives was distinctive, differed from abolitionism farther north, and was significant in its own right. It was less confrontational, and gave greater emphasis to legal and political remedies. It resulted in protections for fugitive slaves, prosecutions for kidnappers, and a substantial contribution to the 1847 personal liberty law which deeply angered Southerners and helped lead to the 1850 Federal Law. During the Civil War, the fugitive slave issue was repoliticized in the “contrabands” debate. Its limitations, however, can be seen in the failure to win meaningful equality for

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those African Americans who escaped to, migrated to, or were born in south central Pennsylvania.

This work makes contributions in three major areas, and, I believe, corrects the historical record in several respects. First, it argues that abolitionism centered on the fugitive slave issue led to a political and legal involvement which, along with Garrisonian activism, were vital components to antebellum antislavery. This study also takes issue with recent historiography that portrays mass organization and action as “modern abolitionism,” and dismisses tactics like legal engagement as too conservative and pre-modern.14 South central Pennsylvania abolitionists wielded such tools aggressively and effectively. They deliberately turned from Garrisonian-style organizing to what was for them more effective, a legal and political strategy. Second, if we neglect the fugitive slave issue, we leave out an important aspect of the sectional crisis, and we limit our understanding of the border North. There, hundreds of individuals were involved in “antislavery” activity every day by helping fugitives flee, and yet it was hidden and unpublicized. This makes it easy to misunderstand or mischaracterize the extent of antislavery sentiment in these areas. At the same time, individuals involved in helping fugitives did not necessarily have to challenge their own preconceptions of race and society, the way more radical abolitionists often did. Third, in a more minor vein, it shows how the antebellum preoccupation with law and order was particularly relevant to the border, and, except for the civil disobedience of the Underground Railroad, seems to be a consistent strain. Once the 1847 law was passed, abolitionists could help fugitives and feel they were within the law, a position they articulated during the secession crisis,

when they wanted the “laws and Constitution upheld” while resisting efforts for compromise on the fugitive slave issue. In the postwar years, however, the law became a conservative force without the animating spirit of the antislavery activists. By the second decade of the Twentieth Century, local writers condemned African Americans for breaking the laws of nature by passing as whites, and used law and order to condemn the Underground Railroad as a sentimental, illegal activity.

In smaller corrections to the historical record, I believe that Thaddeus Stevens’ early antislavery commitment is overestimated. This contributes to an oversimplified view of antislavery positions along the border, and almost unwittingly detracts from the courage of Stevens’ later choices and crusading egalitarianism. Also, in this study, as in Fergus Bordewich’s recent survey of the Underground Railroad, antislavery Quakers play a vital role, despite Gara’s contention that their contributions had been overemphasized. I also show that the capture of African Americans by the Confederate army during the Gettysburg campaign was widespread and likely intentional and authorized, and that it significantly disrupted the local community. Finally, I suggest that postwar westward migration was a powerful factor why, after the war, some rural Northern areas with strong prewar antislavery movements did not live up to their seeming egalitarian potential and remained racially oppressive and discriminatory.

As we consider the importance of the fugitive slave issue in border Pennsylvania, the central insights of Ed Ayers’ work comes to mind. Ayers cogently argues that the “edges” of our antebellum and Civil War story – Virginia, the Upper South, the Mississippi Valley where many planters supported the Union, and Franklin County, Pennsylvania – complicate our national narrative significantly, and cannot be omitted
without obscuring the canvas. His work inspired the title to this study.\textsuperscript{15} For years, many historians considered the North an undifferentiated monolith lying north of the Mason Dixon line. It is hoped that this work will add nuance our understanding of the North, and thus the nation.

It is hoped that this work neither underestimates nor overstates the importance of the fugitive slave issue. In border Pennsylvania, it was a key vehicle for the expression of a different type of abolitionism than that practiced in New England. Regrettably, it also proved unable to support African American aspirations for post-war equality – although perhaps it should not bear the entire blame for that in a changing area “on the edge of freedom.”

\textit{A Note About Terminology}

In 1774, Pennsylvania reformers formed the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage; in 1787, the organization was reorganized and renamed the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. In the contemporaneous press, individuals who belonged to the organization were called members of the “ABOLITION Society,” and decades later, local historians would call members of the PAS “original abolitionists.”

As a historian who wants to give voice to the people of the past, it is difficult not to call an “abolitionist” individuals who self-identified themselves as such. Nevertheless,

since part of the historical profession generally restricts the use of the term “abolitionist” to those who favored immediate abolition, I have tried to conform to that usage in this work. I also use the term “African Americans” to refer to Americans of African descent, although occasionally I will use the term “black,” primarily for stylistic reasons.
Chapter 1

South Central Pennsylvania, Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad

At dusk, a shadow creeps along a road from central Maryland to Pennsylvania, trying to follow the road while avoiding exposure. He is unaware of the precise moment when he crosses the Mason-Dixon line, but when he does, this fugitive slave has entered south central Pennsylvania, a region with its own history of slavery, antislavery activism, and unequal freedom. Home to a significant free black community and an effective underground railroad system, south central Pennsylvania is also replete with slave catchers, informers, and those who resent fugitive slaves. In short, he has entered a place of significant opportunity and substantial danger: he is on the edge of freedom.¹

South central Pennsylvania – defined in this study as Adams, Cumberland, and Franklin counties, with a particular emphasis on Adams - was in fact home to multiple “edges” of freedom.² There was the well-known edge represented by the Mason-Dixon line dividing North and South. There was also, after 1820, an edge between state and federal fugitive slave legislation. There were also “edges” in the community between those who helped fugitives and those who supported efforts to apprehend them.

This region (see figure 1.1) became this place of edges because of its location, geography, and economy, as well as its cultural and historical legacy. Initially, south

² Abolitionist networks and the underground railroad are not confined to single counties. This study examines three south central Pennsylvania counties. However, because Edward Ayers has studied Franklin County and Richard Tritt is researching fugitive slaves in Cumberland County, I decided to focus this study on Adams County, which had the richest source material, while discussing the other counties as well.
central Pennsylvania was frontier, with communications and trade back to Philadelphia inhibited by abysmal roads and the broad Susquehanna River. In 1814, it cost nearly a quarter of a million dollars to bridge the river, but into the 1820s, south central Pennsylvania’s social and economic ties to Virginia and Maryland, especially Baltimore, were as strong as they were to eastern Pennsylvania. Better roads and the railroad finally tied this region more definitively to Philadelphia; even then, development was sporadic and Gettysburg was not connected to the railroad – as a spur – until 1858.\(^3\)

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The geography that encouraged these Southern ties also aided fugitive slaves escaping to south central Pennsylvania. The North and South mountain ranges funneled the traffic, commerce and fugitives of the Shenandoah Valley and Maryland’s Cumberland Valley to south central Pennsylvania. That area’s goods were directed largely southward as well. The mountain ranges were paralleled by a series of gentle ridges which also ran roughly southwest to northeast. Streams in the area also generally ran north-south, also potentially guiding fugitives to freedom. As the waters eroded the limestone ridges over millennia, they contributed to the stunning fertility of the entire Great Valley region.4

This region was also a part of the great colonial era migration path, with settlers disembarking in Philadelphia and then heading to south central Pennsylvania before turning south to the back country of Virginia, Tennessee, the Carolinas, and Georgia.5 As the National Road was completed across Pennsylvania, Gettysburg and Chambersburg became important stage stops between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The region, particularly Gettysburg, developed a booming carriage trade, and many customers came from the South for the distinctive “Gettysburg” carriage.6

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Many different groups trod these migration paths; particularly significant for the fugitive slave issue were the Quakers. Socially and economically dominant in eastern Pennsylvania, here they competed with Germans and Scots-Irish Presbyterians, but they would craft space for their own institutions and mores. In this region, Quakers were important to fugitive slave assistance. The Quakers’ practice of westward migration, often county by county, meant that this area’s Underground Railroad workers could connect to kin or trusted friends all the way back to Philadelphia.

The Quakers began as a radical sect in England, but gradually they traded most of their radical beginnings for sober thrift, accumulation and organization. Consequently, they often could also be found running local banks, organizing financial networks, or involved in the legal system. Stemming from their own persecutions in England, they had a deep concern for the suffering, including fugitive slaves. Quakers were pacifists and preferred to be non-confrontational, at least in terms of physical resistance. These characteristics would contribute to the nature of both the larger antislavery movement and to fugitive aid and the Underground Railroad in this region.7

Pennsylvania, its Quakers included, however, had a long relationship to slavery. Slaves were present along the Delaware before William Penn owned the colony. Although there was a testimony against slavery in the colony since 1688, many of Pennsylvania’s prosperous Quakers owned slaves, including Penn. As a result, although

the Quaker-dominated assembly tried to regulate the importation of slaves from 1703 on, meaningful actions against slave owners in the Philadelphia Yearly (Quaker) Meeting were delayed until the commencement of the French and Indian war. From then on, Quaker emancipation efforts, under the leadership of reformers like John Woolman and Anthony Benezet, accelerated.\(^8\)

The Revolutionary War resulted in a loss of Quaker influence, because of their pacifism and suspected Toryism. Slavery, however, did not fit many patriot’s revolutionary ideals. The antislavery movement started to pick up influential non-Quaker supporters including Thomas Paine and Benjamin Rush. In 1780, the Pennsylvania assembly passed a gradual abolition bill which freed no slave then living, but would liberate their children – i.e. those born after November 1780 - at the age of 28. The law also established a registry for slaves, which in it itself was a highly significant step, creating the presumption of freedom for every African American in Pennsylvania whose name was not found on registry. Slaveholders immediately tried to evade the law, and a stronger version was passed in 1788 which regularized the registry and imposed kidnapping penalties for those who would take slaves out of state to evade the law’s requirements.\(^9\)

Pennsylvania passed this Revolutionary era gradual abolition act in 1780, at the same time that several New England states were abolishing slavery. Pennsylvania’s law

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was gradual, not immediate, however, and contained several insidious features. While the children of slaves born after November 1780 would gain freedom at age 28, itself a significant compromise from the originally proposed age 21, their children would not be born free. Instead, these children would also be slaves until age 28. This provision was supposed to give the slaveholder a return on the money spent on slave children while they were growing up, but it provided a way for slavery to exist perpetually in the state.

Eventually Pennsylvania’s Supreme Court ruled in 1826 that the children of slave due freedom at 28 would be free.¹⁰ East of the Susquehanna, this decision was largely immaterial. Slavery there vanished relatively quickly, because of substantial Quaker pressure and because of access to an apprenticeship and indentured servitude system for African Americans that was nearly as oppressive as slavery. Elsewhere, though, it could be a long time in dying out, particularly in south central Pennsylvania.

South central Pennsylvania’s social geography was also shaped by another significant group, the Pennsylvania Germans. German settlers, perhaps more than any other group outside of England, had heeded William Penn’s call to religious minorities and migrated to Pennsylvania. Most settled in the southern part of the state, where they could practice a grain-based agriculture similar to that in their homeland. Pennsylvania Germans were so numerous in south central Pennsylvania that it seems misleading to speak of them as a “minority.” One scholar has estimated that in 1850, Pennsylvania Germans composed 49 percent of the population of Adams County, 39 percent of

Franklin County, and 37 percent of Cumberland County. York County, adjacent to both Adams and Cumberland, was 52 percent German.\(^{11}\)

Pennsylvania German attitudes towards slavery affected the character of the region as much as those of the Quakers. Some of Pennsylvania’s first German settlers, fleeing from their own oppression in Europe, disapproved of slavery. In 1688, at Germantown, three hundred German Mennonites and Quakers signed a memorial to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting urging equal treatment of all men, opposing slavery and condemning slave traders and slave owners, and even positing a right of resistance for slaves.\(^{12}\) While some Germans protested the institution, however, many others willingly adopted slave labor to help in their homes, workshops and fields. Adams County historian Larry Bolin estimates that at least 20 percent of that county’s slaveholders were of Germanic origin.\(^{13}\)

The Pennsylvania Germans competed with the area’s Scots Irish and English populations for prime lands and cultural leadership. Politically, although some Germans were Whigs or antislavery, generally they formed the core of the region’s Democratic


\(^{12}\) Leon Higgenbotham, In the Matter of Color, cited by Alosi, Shadow of Freedom, p. 6; Nash and Soderlund, Freedom by Degrees, pp. 41-42.

\(^{13}\) Larry Bolin, “Slaveholders and Slaves of Adams County” Adams County History 9 (2003), p. 10 & 19. Twenty percent is a significant percentage, but less than the proportion of the county’s overall population that was of Germanic origin. Bolin’s list of Adams County slaveholders from 1770 to 1830 shows many German family names interspersed with English, Scottish and Irish ones. In one township alone, these include Barnitz, Brosius, Dutterer, Felty, Groft, Hinkle, Hoke, Keller, Kurtz, Maus, Metzger, Pellentz, Reinaker, Shorb, Shriver, and Slagle. Bolin, “Slaveholders,” List B: Distribution of Slaveholders, Heidelberg Township, pp. 50-51.
party strength. A Pennsylvania German, Henry J. Stahle, would edit Gettysburg’s Democratic paper, the *Compiler*, for decades.\(^\text{14}\)

A third important demographic group was south central Pennsylvania’s black population. They were vital to the local economy, to antislavery activity, and to aid to fugitive slaves. During the colonial period, skilled African American slaves were invaluable. It was a classic case of labor control - with so much of Pennsylvania’s labor force migrating westward, there was substantial advantage to keeping skilled, experienced workers through force of law, backed by custom. Even after Pennsylvania’s gradual abolition commenced in 1780, prejudice and discrimination closed off employment opportunities for African Americans. Most worked long hours doing manual labor, often performing the dirtiest, least desirable, and lowest paying jobs, such as working in tanneries and iron furnaces. African Americans also composed much of the region’s service class of barbers, waiters, domestics, launderers, and livery stable attendants, although they faced competition with Irish and German women in domestic service.\(^\text{15}\)

In the antebellum period, south central Pennsylvania was home to a significant percentage of the state’s rural African Americans, because after 1780, much of Pennsylvania’s slavery had been concentrated here. Once emancipated, many African Americans chose to remain in the area, where they had family, friends, or established business or labor relationships.\(^\text{16}\) In addition, free blacks migrated into the area from the


South. Some of these were fugitive slaves, but most were freed slaves or free blacks. For much of the antebellum period, Maryland and Virginia required slave owners to transmit manumitted slaves out of state, so some slave owners carried their slaves across the Pennsylvania line and freed them. Franklin County, with several villages located close to the Mason Dixon line, was a popular destination. Such immigration was not always welcome: in York County in 1819, when a group of 52 slaves from Virginia arrived, a newspaper reported that “all is consternation and conjecture here,” as locals feared that an influx of freed slaves would compete for jobs.17 A group roughly that size arrived in Chambersburg in Franklin County as late as the 1850s. As Pennsylvania’s abolition and indentured servitude laws became better known, instead of emancipating their slaves, some Southern slave owners took them to southern Pennsylvania and sold them as indentured servants until age 21. The slave eventually received freedom, but the owner received some compensation instead of the total loss of manumission. This was actually illegal – slaves coming into the state to stay were to be freed immediately – but in some areas this practice may have continued until 1845.18

Other former slaves from Maryland or Virginia relocated in south central Pennsylvania voluntarily after escaping or purchasing their freedom. Although hazardous because the area was honeycombed with slave catchers and kidnappers, living in southern Pennsylvania enabled them to stay in contact with kin, and possibly help


them escape also. For farm laborers, southern Pennsylvania’s grain growing economy, similar to that of central Maryland and Virginia, would have offered familiar labor.¹⁹

Pennsylvania’s slavery died a lingering death from 1780 to 1840, although most slaves had been freed by 1830. During this period and up until 1850, the free black population of Adams and Cumberland counties generally matched or exceeded the state average, as Table 1.1 shows. Franklin County, however, nearly doubled the statewide average during those years. If the data for the counties of Philadelphia and Allegheny are excluded, as a rough proxy for Pennsylvania’s urban population, then in 1830 the three counties of south central Pennsylvania (out of 49 “rural” counties) held nearly 16 percent of Pennsylvania’s “rural” African American population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Adams</th>
<th>Cumberland</th>
<th>Franklin</th>
<th>South-Central Pennsylvania, % of State’s Population of Free Blacks / Rural Free Blacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800*</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>1.3% / 6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810*</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>0.9% / 5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>3.1% / 6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>3.2% / 7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>3.2% / 7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>2.8% / 6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = Data for free nonwhite persons excluding Indians not taxed

Table 1.1 Free Black Population in South Central Pennsylvania in Proportion to Total Population of each County²⁰

¹⁹ While tobacco was still cultivated in the tidewater region of both states, that crop had been largely abandoned for cereals in the interior. Robert D. Mitchell, Commercialism and Frontier: Perspective on the early Shenandoah Valley (Charlottesville, 1977). Of course, natural increase among all three groups also contributed to the growth of the African American community.

²⁰ The information on free black population shown in table 1.1 illustrates the weaknesses of early census data. First, the sizes of counties were shifting – Cumberland county in particular underwent a dramatic reduction in size, as parts of it were carved off to form other counties. There is also reason to suspect, as Karen James of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has suggested, that most Pennsylvania censuses undercounted the African American population. African Americans were often
The concentration of African Americans in southern Pennsylvania had important ramifications for the movements of fugitive slaves. Scholars of the Underground Railroad have long recognized that a strong free black population was an important component to successful aid to fugitive slaves. In Maryland, just to the south, nearly 40 percent of the African American population was free by 1840, a higher percentage by far than any other Southern state. This presence of these two emerging free black communities—Pennsylvania’s and Maryland’s—created opportunities for networks based on race, class, or kinship. Free blacks might help fugitive slaves and direct them north. In south central Pennsylvania, free African Americans could shelter escaping African Americans, guide them through the region, direct them to helpful organizations or individuals, or even entice slaves to flee. They could also ignore fugitive slaves, urge them to “move on,” or act as informants or slave catchers. Either way, they are an important part of the story.\(^{21}\)

Some of these African Americans formed the backbone of south central Pennsylvania’s Underground Railroad. Others became prominent elsewhere. J. W. C. Pennington fled through the area before becoming a student and then a leader in New York’s Presbyterian Church. South Carolina’s Daniel Alexander Payne studied in Gettysburg, then became a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and later the president of Wilberforce University. John Peck, a local barber, supported the Underground Railroad, helped lead Carlisle’s antislavery society, served as vice president...
of the Colored Men’s Convention in Harrisburg, and then, after relocating to the Pittsburgh area, helped found a training institute for African Americans. His son, David J. Peck, became the first African American graduate of a U.S. medical school.22

Certain white families also helped fugitives. One prominent area family headed by William and Phebe Wright began helping fugitives around 1819, starting with a runaway from Baltimore County, Maryland.23 Other residents, white and African American, undoubtedly started sooner. The years 1816-1819 are the earliest dates for which complete statewide membership records exist for the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery (PAS), a statewide organization which played a national role in helping to lead the fight against slavery until the rise of Garrisonian abolition in the 1830s.24 The vast majority of the group’s membership came from Philadelphia. From the outlying southern Pennsylvania counties, however, the most members – four - came from Adams County. In Jesse Russell, George Wilson, Nicholas Wireman, and Samuel Wright, Adams County had greater representation than the more populous Lancaster,

24 Recent studies like Richard Newman’s The Transformation of American Abolitionism do an excellent job describing the PAS’s legal and legislative tactics, often (but not entirely accurately) described as “conservative.” Overlooked, however, are some of the radical arguments PAS lawyers put forward in court, and the fact that the Society had national impact, encouraging manumissions in the Shenandoah Valley, Tennessee, and the Carolinas. In addition, many of the antislavery societies started in Southern states had ties to the PAS. Edward Turner recognizes “the diligence of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in helping to found similar societies in other states.” He proclaims, “If not the parent, she was at least the foster-mother of most similar societies elsewhere.” (Turner, Negro in Pennsylvania, p. 214).
York or even Chester County, which lay adjacent to Philadelphia and had a strong nineteenth century antislavery movement.25

These membership records give evidence of Adams County residents’ participation in the statewide antislavery organization; there is also limited evidence of a local antislavery organization before the 1830s. In 1820, there was a newspaper notice for a meeting, in Menallen township, of an Adams County Protection Society “to protect the sable descendants of Africa from being unlawfully held and dragged into bondage.” The notice proclaimed that slavery was inconsistent with Christianity and was an “absolute violation of our bill of rights.” The society disclaimed any intention to interfere in relations between masters and slaves, but it did determine to protect free blacks from kidnapping. Jesse Russell was the president, and Isaac Pearson, secretary. Despite this bold beginning, little more was heard of this organization.26

Records of the capture of fugitive slaves from this region appear non-existent before 1826, apparently because most Southerners exercised a “right of recaption” to recover fugitive slaves. Under this property right, if a horse wandered away, and the owner found it, he was justified in recovering it without legal process, unless someone objected. The same principle was used to recapture slaves until Pennsylvania passed enabling and regularizing legislation in 1826.27

According to the 1793 fugitive slave law, slave owners or their agents were supposed to take fugitives before a U.S. judge, or the magistrate of the county, city, or

25 “Lists of Membership, 1784-1819,” Records of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (microfilm), Reel 25. No members were listed from Cumberland or Franklin County.
26 Adams Centinel, November 22, 1820, Adams County Historical Society Anti-Slavery file. There was a general effort statewide to start protection societies around this time, stemming from a case where a fugitive killed a slave catcher trying to enter his home. For York county, see Mr. Webb to Thomas Shipley, January 1822, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Miscellaneous Correspondence, reel 13, 9:19.
27 Morris, Free Men All, pp. 3-4, 25-27.
town in which the fugitive had been seized. In southern Pennsylvania, though, many
slaveholders, their agents, or fortune hunting slave catchers apparently did little more
than travel north of the border, grab individuals whom they claimed were escaped slaves,
and carry them back south with them. In some cases, the owner might appear before a
magistrate and make a perfunctory declaration of identification. Such a system was rife
with potential for abuse, and, in many cases, the individuals they grabbed claimed they
were not their slaves. This led to an outcry against “kidnappings.” Kidnapping had long
been a concern of Pennsylvania abolitionists. After all, the Pennsylvania Abolition
Society had began as the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in
Bondage (1775), essentially an anti-kidnapping organization – its goal was to make sure
that African Americans who were supposed to be free were not held as slaves. It was a
direct predecessor to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, and even after the PAS was
formed, the old society’s name was still part of the group’s lengthy official title, the
Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and for the Relief of Free
Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage.28

South central Pennsylvania, located close to the Mason Dixon line and with its
mixed black population of free, slave, and fugitive, was particularly fertile ground for
kidnappers. Reports of kidnappings were prevalent across southern Pennsylvania, and in
their memorials to the biannual American Convention on Antislavery, the PAS routinely
decried kidnapping and made it a significant focus of their message.29 In addition to

28 Nash and Soderlund, Freedom by Degrees, p. 80. An insightful study of the kidnapping of African
Americans is Julie Winch, “The Other Underground Railroad,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and
29 “To the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Affairs of the
African Race,” Pennsylvania Abolition Society (1825). In addition, William Rawle of the PAS was
president of the Convention in 1825, and was the signer of “To the Abolition and Manumission Societies of
compassionate concerns about the carrying off of free African Americans, these kidnappings symbolized the fragility of liberty in general. In the kind of “slippery slope” thinking that was prevalent during the Revolution and the early Republic – which Bernard Bailyn has masterfully illustrated through his study of pre-Revolutionary War pamphlets – there was a fear that permitting the compromise of any of the rights of one “freeman” could ultimately result in the loss of all of them for everyone. So allowing African Americans to be wrongfully carried south into bondage could be the first step of a larger repression against all Pennsylvanians. This may not have been difficult for Pennsylvania Quakers to believe, as they knew the history of their bitter repression by the British Government, and they routinely faced persecution from the state for refusing to pay militia fees or take oaths.

The 1826 law regularized the fugitive slave rendition process and mandated stiff penalties for kidnapping free blacks or selling them to be carried out of state. For either offense, an individual could be fined up to $2000 - one half payable to the persons who prosecuted the case - and jailed for five to twelve years, including hard labor and solitary confinement. In order to recover a fugitive slave, the law mandated that the slave owner or his agent must swear to a judge, justice of the peace, or alderman that the individual claimed was his slave, and produce an legal affidavit including the slave’s name, age and description from the jurisdiction from which the slave escaped. Then the judge or magistrate issued a warrant empowering the sheriff or constable to bring the fugitive

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the United States of America,” which complained, “We fear the practice of kidnapping free people of colour, is still continued in our country.” In fairness to the critics of the Pennsylvania’s abolitionists before Garrison, the Chester County address largely concerned manumissions, not kidnapping. The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery… (New York, 1969), p. 819-822, 878, 841. For a convoluted example of a kidnapping case, see Webb to Thomas Shipley, January 19, 1822, PAS Papers. 30 Bernard Bailyn, Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 94-159.
before his bench. If the judge was satisfied that the individual was indeed the fugitive slave sought, he was to issue a certificate, called a warrant of removal, “which shall be sufficient… for removing the said fugitive to the state or territory from which he or she fled.” This warrant was to include the name and residence of the person alleging the escape of the slave, and the name, age and description of the fugitive. The judge was to file a certified copy with the clerk of the court of Quarter Sessions.31

This law apparently changed the practice of some slaveholders, who either conscientiously tried to fulfill the law or realized that they could be placed in significant legal jeopardy if they did not. In early 1827, records of apprehensions of fugitive slaves in the form of writs sworn out in Adams County begin to appear. There are only twelve records in all, covering from 1827 to 1834. Like most fragmentary records, they raise more issues than they answer, but together with contemporaneous fugitive slave advertisements and slave narratives, they still give a valuable portrait of those willing to risk the flight north to freedom, where they came from, and of their capture and return from this border area.

According to these writs, most of the slaveholders claiming fugitives were from Maryland counties that abutted the Pennsylvania line. In most cases, the warrants of removal were granted by William McLean, a judge of the Court of Common Pleas in Adams County. In two cases, in 1827 and 1834, a local justice of the peace supplied the warrant instead (Figure 1.2 shows an example of a warrant of removal). Eight of the twelve records show warrants issued to slave owners from Washington County or

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31 Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, p. 233. Bolin, “Slaveholders and Slaves,” pp. 87-90. Fugitives could be lodged in the jail if they were not prepared for the hearing and had exculpatory information elsewhere that they wished to retrieve.
Frederick County, Maryland. The close proximity of Gettysburg to these counties both allowed slaves to escape more easily and masters to respond quickly.

Figure 1.2 Record of Warrant of Removal, Adams County Quarter Sessions

Some fugitives came from greater distances; records exist of one case each from Baltimore and Prince George’s County, Maryland, and Loudoun and Culpeper counties in Virginia. These locales ranged from roughly sixty to one hundred and forty miles away from Gettysburg. In the vast majority of cases, the slave owner appeared personally to reclaim his property. In some cases, the trip may have been an adventure, a diversion, or an opportunity to buy Northern goods. Forgoing employing an agent also decreased the cost and may have increased the security, by preventing a dishonest agent from selling your fugitive to slave traders rather than returning it to you.
That the slaves were valuable there is no doubt. Male slaves had the highest worth; according to the research of Ulrich B. Phillips, unskilled prime young male field hands were valued at $400 each in Virginia in 1828-1829. If they could be transported to New Orleans or Georgia, they could bring $700 to $800. Skilled laborers would be worth even more.32

Many of the slaves fleeing to south central Pennsylvania were skilled, and most were in their prime as laborers and thus highly valuable. Of the thirteen slaves named in these twelve cases, twelve were male, between the ages of eighteen and fifty (Ephraim Valentin, listed only as a “boy,” may have been younger). Two men were approximately forty and fifty, but the overwhelming majority were between eighteen and thirty. Most were described as “stout,” indicating they were well muscled and would have been valuable laborers. Only one woman was mentioned, Mary, but she was young and had attributes (“lively gait”) that indicated she could have particularly valuable as a laborer, household assistant, or potential source of slave children.

The frequency of the warrants decreased rapidly after 1828, when six were recorded. From 1829 to 1831, only one certificate was recorded a year, and then in 1834, there is one more case. This last example has a twist: rather than just a record describing the issuing of the warrant of removal, there is an actual case in the Adams County court records, The State v. Negro Jim and Ephraim Valentine. The result of the case is also unusual; the judge did not issue a warrant for removal, but rather ordered the constable to arrest the two alleged fugitives, and to bring them in for questioning. While this may have happened in similar cases without any records surviving, this seeming change of

practice may have indicated a growing reluctance to help slave owners. After Thaddeus Stevens died, area residents claimed that rendition of fugitive slaves had been very difficult, if not impossible, after his conversion to antislavery views. If so, it is possible – although this is speculative – that this change in practice reflected a lessening of sympathy for the slaveholder in the Adams County legal system. This new process may not have denied slave owners their legal rights, but may have tried to discourage them by making the process slower. If there were individuals willing to help fugitives, magistrate Sampson King’s actions in this case may have given them time to get organized.33

The failure to find any records after 1834 may reflect a diminished willingness by south central Pennsylvania judges to participate in fugitive slave renditions. Also, it could reflect a reluctance of slave owners to rely on the south central Pennsylvania legal system.34

Additional evidence concerning fugitive slaves, their escape strategies, and their master’s fears can be found in runaway slave advertisements placed in local papers.35 Not all runaways, of course, struck out for Pennsylvania, or reached the south central counties. Some stayed near home, hiding out in the woods, and staying in touch with

33 State v. negro Jim and Ephraim Valentine, 1834, Miscellaneous court records, Office of the Prothonotary, Adams County Courthouse. Conversely, magistrate King owned a slave himself as late as 1830, so this may be a misreading of this case.
34 I used Adams County fugitive slave records collated by individuals in the Adams County Office of the Prothonotary for researchers Larry Bolin and Debra McCauslin. Other records may exist, but I and the courthouse staff were unable to find them. See Debra S. McCauslin, “Reconstructing the Past: Puzzle of Lost Community,” Appendix II (Gettysburg, 2005), pp. 48-50.
family. Others headed for a city. In this border area, however, where the free states were nearby, many runaways tried to reach the uneasy safety of Pennsylvania, as shown by ads placed in one of the Gettysburg papers, the Adams County Sentinel (or Centinel).

Twenty-eight fugitive slave advertisements, describing thirty-three escaped slaves, appeared in the Sentinel from 1820 to 1828 (see Appendix A for capsule summaries). By 1828 the number of advertisements had begun to wane dramatically. With the progress of Pennsylvania’s gradual emancipation law, the slaveholders had fewer natural allies in Pennsylvania in the form of other slaveholders, and local sentiment may have led to a diminution in the advertisements.

Generally, the advertisements followed a similar style: an account of when and from where the slave escaped, the slave’s name, a description of the slave and his or her clothing, and the reward offered. Usually, the expectation was that the slave would be captured and lodged locally; the reward would be greatest if the jail were out of state, and less as it got closer to the slave owner’s locality. In one case, “reasonable charges would be paid if the slave was delivered back to the owner’s house,” in addition to the reward.

The reward system was critical to the recovery of fugitives. In Pennsylvania fugitives were often recovered through the cooperation of several individuals, and a large reward would mean ample payment to everyone involved. As commonly practiced, however, the arrangements seem backwards from the slaveholder’s perspective, as he would pay the largest reward if the slave were farther away and would necessitate a potentially costly trip for his recovery. Two Maryland slaveholders recognized this, and

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36 Franklin and Schweniger, Runaway Slaves, pp. 97-123.
37 Ad for Jason Chub, Adams Centinel, April 9, 1823.
offered a larger reward ($125 or $150) if their fugitive was lodged in Frederick jail rather
than the Gettysburg jail ($100). They were the exception to the rule, however.38

Half of the ads were from nearby Frederick County, especially from owners who lived only a few miles from Adams County. Others came from Hagerstown in nearby Washington County. Ads were also received, however, from Montgomery, Baltimore, and Allegheny counties in Maryland, Loudoun County, Virginia and Georgetown in the District of Columbia. Only three of the advertisements were from Pennsylvania – two from Adams County and one from York. In two of those cases, the runaway was described as an African American indentured servant, not a slave, but in most cases the distinction meant little. Although there were African American indentured servants, because most Pennsylvania slaves could not be slaves for life but were freed at age 21 or 28, many slave owners simply called them indentured servants rather than a term which might bring censure from their non-slaveholding neighbors.39

The warrants for removal were heavily skewed towards male slaves; so were the advertisements. Of the twenty-eight ads for thirty-one individuals, only one is for a woman, Sophia, who had runaway on September 2, 1820. She was about 19 years of age, and so could have been valuable either as a bearer of children or household or field labor. Another motivation for ad’s placement was the owner’s conviction that Sophia would be in Adams County, “as she has been there before.”40

Most slaveholders advertised for their slaves immediately, but some waited several months, perhaps to see if the slave returned voluntarily. Near south central

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38 Ads for Philip and Bob (Robert Brooks), Adams Centinel, June 27, 1821.
39 Oblinger, “New Freedoms, old miseries,” pp. 60-63 and Turner, Negro in Pennsylvania, pp. 89-120. have describe the apprenticeship and indentured servant systems as they applied to African Americans.
Pennsylvania, many slaves escaped around Christmas time. Most slave owners gave their
slaves several days to a week off at that time, and the owners were often indoors during
that season as well, so fugitives could have a substantial head start before their absence
was noticed. Christmas was at the winter solstice, so the nights were long, helping slaves
who wanted to flee under the cover of darkness.41

Recent commentators on fugitive slaves, Loren Schweninger and John Hope
Franklin, note that those who ran away to the North almost always needed money to be
successful. What is striking about the Adams County advertisements is the number of the
fugitives who are described as having money or, in one case, being an adept
counterfeiter. One owner wrote that his slave’s mother, who was free, had probably
supplied him with money for his escape. Clothing was also a critical need. As
abolitionist Graceanna Lewis described it near the end of her life in 1912, slave clothing
could be a gigantic badge of fugitive status in the north. Such clothes were often
manufactured from cheap, coarse textiles, and sometimes carried striped patterns more
commonly associated with nineteenth and twentieth century prison clothing. They
looked very different than clothing worn in the North. These clothes would need to be
quickly exchanged, and Lewis, free blacks, and others on the Underground Railroad
contributed to that.42 Many slave owners, after writing a detailed description of the
clothes the slave was wearing, closed resignedly by saying “but undoubtedly he will

41 (Christmas) John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community (New York, 1972), p. 112; (Solstice) Jean
historian of the Underground Railroad and a scholar of Chester County Pennsylvania believe escapes were
more likely in the summer and fall. William C. Kashutas, Just Over the Line: Chester County and the
Underground Railroad (West Chester, PA, 2002), p. 18; see also J. C. Furnas, Goodbye to Uncle Tom
42 Graceanna Lewis, Manuscript Memoir, Lewis-Fussell Family Papers, RG-5/087, Friends Historical
Library, Swarthmore University.
exchange his clothing.” In the ads, many fugitives seem well-dressed with new, less obvious clothing, particularly if they escaped around Christmas. They had either waited for the master to distribute new clothes, or they had helped themselves to some when they fled. They often appropriated other assistance too – several had stolen horses or dogs.

Several advertisements support Schweninger and Franklin’s claim that it is often the “most ingenious, persistent, and intelligent” fugitives who successfully headed north.43 One accomplished slave spoke several languages.44 The fugitive Frank Hill illustrates the resourcefulness and achievements of some fugitives, the options they had in border areas, and the resulting confusion that this could cause the slave owner:

$100 Reward. Ranaway on the 26th of December, from the Subscriber, living in Frederick County, Maryland, negro Frank, who calls himself Frank Hill;… He has a number of good clothes. He is a smart fellow, reads very well, and writes a tolerably good hand.

Frank has been accustomed to working in the house, and can also do any work which is to be done on a Farm, but is rather too much of a house servant to work on a Farm. He is an excellent knitter and has always been very anxious to live in Town. He is very neat in his dress; and persons not knowing him would suppose him to be a waiter. It is supposed he left Frederick-Town on the 27th of December, and I have no doubt he has made for Philadelphia and will endeavor to get employment as a waiter in a tavern, drive a hack or open a Blacking Shop… I have no doubt he will change his name. He has been seen in company with a negro from Ohio … and perhaps he may take the Ohio routes.

I will give the above Reward, if he be taken out of the state, and secured in any jail, and 40 Dollars, if taken in the state and secured in jail so that I get him again.

Lloyd Luckett
Living near New-Town or Trap, Frederick County, Maryland
Jan. 8, 1822

3t [3 times]
It is supposed said Negro is in the neighbourhood of Gettysburg.45

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44 Ad for Isaac, Adams Centinel, January 9, 1822, p. 3 c. 5. Isaac was claimed to be an indentured servant.
45 Ad for Frank Hill, Adams Centinel, January 9, 1822, p. 3 c. 4.
Such slaves, while perhaps more identifiable because of these skills, could support themselves while fleeing, or make themselves valuable in new communities. Their skills gave them options, making them difficult to locate. This ad also reveals that as early as 1822, area slave owners expected fugitives to flee to Philadelphia and its large African American population, and that Gettysburg lay on the route they would take.

One famous fugitive who did just that was James Pembroke, later known as J. W. C. Pennington. In 1828, he appeared as a cold and wet runaway slave on the doorstep of William and Phebe Wright in northeastern Adams County. Pennington was a blacksmith by training and had escaped from slavery near Reisterstown, in Baltimore County, Maryland. He took the “good road” between Baltimore and Gettysburg, after doubling back several times to avoid recapture. When he reached a tollgate near Gettysburg, he asked the woman there where he could find work; she directed him to the Wrights’ house. He stayed there for several months, working in their stables and orchards while they improved his writing and taught him arithmetic. One day Pennington was quite frightened by the voice of Joel Wierman, Phoebe Wright’s brother – it sounded like his master’s voice. He determined to push on. It was a wise decision, as it was later learned that slave hunters were on his trail. Pennington traveled to New York, and eventually attended Yale Theological Seminary, receiving a license in 1838. In that same year he presided over the marriage of the just escaped fugitive Frederick Douglass and his wife Anna in New York. The “fugitive blacksmith” became a leading nineteenth century African American divine. In 1849, he received an honorary doctorate from Heidelberg University, the first man of African descent ever to be awarded that honor. In his autobiography, he expresses great gratitude to the Wrights. His case shows that south-
central Pennsylvania was both a place of escape and a place of danger for fugitive slaves.46

In addition to Pennington’s, only a few other antebellum fugitive slave narratives have been identified. One of the few additional slave narratives from this region have been identified. One involved another fugitive blacksmith, Charles Bentley. In 1841, Bentley and two other slaves fled north from Leesburg, Virginia. He and his companions traveled for ten nights, hiding by day. They suffered from a lack of food and shelter. Desperate for food, they accosted a lime-kiln worker, who immediately suspected that they were fugitives. He advised them, “If you travel on, by daylight you will cross Mason and Dixon’s line, and get among the Dutch. Keep away from the big road, travel near it, but not in it, - walk during the daytime, but keep in the woods.”47

Following the man’s directions, by ten o’clock in the morning, they found themselves at a “Dutchman’s” house. There, as Bentley described it:

The man was out, – but the woman and girls set the table. We ate all they had in the house, – I ate until I was ashamed. The good woman told us to avoid Shippensburg, as six had been carried back from there just before. She told us, if anyone questioned us, to say that we were going to Horse Shoe Bottom camp meeting on the Susquehanna. We did accordingly, and soon struck the track of the underground railroad, which we followed into the northern free States.48

Bentley’s narrative is one of the few first-person accounts that exists of fugitive slaves moving through south central Pennsylvania. It shows that in south central

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48 Drew, Refugee, p. 75. This reference to Shippensburg, a town on the border between Franklin and Cumberland counties, makes it likely that Bentley’s party was in southern Franklin or Adams county when they encountered this family.
Pennsylvania, the escape of fugitive slaves was due to the initiative of the escapees themselves, aided by informal helpers along the way, and, when contacted, a more formal “Underground Railroad.” Even the Underground Railroad itself was more secretive and possibly involved more cooperation between white and black participants than historians such as Larry Gara believed was generally the case.\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{The Underground Railroad in South Central Pennsylvania}

Helping fugitives in south central Pennsylvania could be a dangerous occupation, and some of the area’s abolitionists would pay in legal difficulties. The Underground Railroad in south central Pennsylvania appears to have involved more women, more secrecy, and more black and white cooperation than some historians have believed. It utilized already existing networks of kinship, religion, and rural social and economic obligations.

According to local accounts, the abolitionists actively helping fugitives to escape were organized around family and kin groups. Religious and benevolent organizations could also play important roles in helping fugitive slaves. By far the most important aid to runaways came from the free blacks in south central Pennsylvania. The leading African American communities in the area were located in or just outside of Mercersburg, Chambersburg, Gettysburg, and Carlisle (Figure 1.3 shows the area’s major towns). There, African Americans worked as day laborers, iron workers, laundresses, and seamstresses, and, according to unsympathetic census takers, as prostitutes, thieves, and card sharps. While some fugitives made their way through the area with little outside

assistance, many others relied on the African American community to feed, shelter, and guide them, or help rescue them if they were taken by slave catchers. However, not all African Americans along the border could be trusted. Carl Oblinger, a scholar of African American communities in southern Pennsylvania, believes that there was widespread resentment of fugitive slaves by free blacks there, because the poverty and crime some whites associated with runaways threatened to bring down repression on the entire African American community. No clear evidence of such sentiment exists in south central Pennsylvania, but certainly some individuals actively worked against fugitives. They helped in the capture of runaways, either as spies or in some cases as active slave catchers.\footnote{Oblinger, “New Freedoms, Old Miseries,” pp. 10, 86, 93, 151, 155. Oblinger studied eight communities including Columbia, where there was a black middle class and even an elite whose social position could be threatened by the misbehavior of new arrivals.}

![Figure 1.3 Significant Towns of South Central Pennsylvania Region](image)

In southern Pennsylvania, an African American family in the border town of Greencastle was reportedly in league with the slave catchers. In Gettysburg, a Maryland-born hostler named Eden Devan rose to some wealth and prominence while allegedly
helping return fugitives. In Chester County, near present-day Lincoln University, a prominent African American family was remembered in two divergent ways by the local population. Some lauded them as underground railroad workers; others remembered their underground railroad activities as a ruse, allowing them to win the trust of fugitives before turning them over to slave catchers.51

While danger lurked in south central Pennsylvania, even among the African American community, there were also resources for help. In 1840, Gettysburg Slave’s Refuge Society was established. It had been founded by a committee of five Gettysburg African American men in December 1840 (James Camron, Henry Butler, James Jones, Henry D. Chiler, and John Jones). The group’s purposes included helping not only fugitive slaves who reached the area, but extended to “our brethren groaning under the tyrannical yoke of oppression.” The group passed resolutions indicating that one of its leading grievances was Maryland’s laws restricting the movement of free blacks into and out of the state. The five signers of the Self-Protection Society charter complained that this prevented African Americans in southern Pennsylvania from attending “public worship” across the border in Maryland.52

This complaint likely had multiple motivations. Undoubtedly, church and camp meetings facilitated the escape of many slaves – Frederick Douglass used a camp meeting near Baltimore to help plan his escape – but the demand also points to a basic human

51 Ted Alexander, personal communication, August 2003; S. R. McAllister to J. Howard Wert, December 2, 1904, in G. Craig Caba, ed., Episodes of Gettysburg, p. 58; Robert F. Engs, commentary at 2002 Pennsylvania Historical Association Meetings. As Ervin Jordan has noted concerning African Americans who volunteered to help the Confederate army, each individual had to make the best choices for them and their family, even if such choices may appear illogical from today’s perspective. Ervin L. Jordan, Black Confederates and Afro-Yankees in Civil War Virginia (Charlottesville, 1995).
need to see friends and kin. Nothing prevented a white resident of Gettysburg from visiting in Hagerstown, or going to church there with their friends or relations. Gettysburg’s free African Americans protested that they should be able to do so as well.

They could not because of restrictions stemming from Maryland’s attempts to control its free black population. By 1850, over 40 percent of Maryland’s African Americans were free. In Virginia, in comparison, only 13 percent of the African Americans were free. Maryland’s African Americans were becoming increasingly important to their local economies while Maryland’s slave owners saw them as a threat to the security of their slaves.53

While Gettysburg’s free black leaders could do nothing about the Maryland’s legislature’s determination to exercise increasing control over free blacks, the opportunities for worship in south central Pennsylvania were improving. Gettysburg’s African Methodist Episcopal church (A.M.E.), which would become a fixture in the local African American community, was also established in 1840. The meeting to establish the Slave’s Refuge Society was held at the A.M.E. church. The church reportedly played a leading role in helping fugitives in the area, as the denomination did throughout the North.54

These organizations strengthened the African American community for decades and provided space for organized political and social action. In 1847, for instance, when Gettysburg’s African American community petitioned the state legislature to pass a

53 Barbara Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middleground*.
strengthened personal liberty law; the petition may well have been drafted and “signed” -
most of Gettysburg’s African Americans were illiterate - at the A.M.E. church.55

A well-organized black community in Gettysburg and Carlisle, and a significant
African American presence in Chambersburg and Mercersburg, while of great help, was
not completely sufficient for helping fugitive slaves. Others townships in south central
Pennsylvania had no African Americans at all. Any concerted effort to bring African
Americans to freedom – however loosely organized – had to adjust to this reality and
develop plans for an emergency which might rely on sympathetic white families. The
social geography of south central Pennsylvania almost forced some degree of cooperation
between white and black abolitionists trying to help fugitive slaves.

One example of this occurred in 1846, when an African American wagon driver
with a cargo of fugitives headed for a local iron furnace were still on the road as day
broke, and instead turned aside to a local white farmer’s house. When the farmer was
later sued for the value of the slaves, it became a celebrated Cumberland County court
case. The potential legal liability that this case revealed underscored the necessity for
abolitionists to have a system of rapidly passing fugitives through a variety of locations,
as well as emergency plans, to minimize the legal exposure of any one set of underground
railroad workers.56

Charles Bentley’s narrative makes it clear that Larry Gara was correct in stating
that many fugitives escaped largely through their own resources, with occasional help
from white or black residents. This was true even the dangerous border areas of southern

55 See Appendix C and chapter 3 for a discussion of this petition. “To The Senate and House of
Representatives of the State of Pennsylvania,”[Petition of inhabitants of Adams County], January 15, 1847,
Petition no. 54, Senate File, Pennsylvania State Archives [this number includes many petitions].
56 See Chapter 4 for a discussion of this case.
Pennsylvania. Others, however, did contact the rough network of safe houses and escape routes in south-central Pennsylvania which constituted that region’s “Underground Railroad.” Unfortunately, the risks of the border meant that much of the work was unpublicized and undocumented, leaving little historical record. What we know today of escape routes for fugitives has to be teased out of legend, lore, and rumor.

Escape Routes

Discussing “routes” of the Underground Railroad immediately makes the escape of fugitive slaves sound too organized and regularized. The main factor causing the underground railroad to be decentralized were the fugitives themselves. Almost none of them had maps to where they were heading; some might have directions or know the name of potentially friendly families or communities. Many made it through risky areas on their own, unaware that there were willing helpers. Because those areas also often contained individuals, both white and black, who were eager to turn them in, many fugitives wisely relied solely on their own resources.

Sometimes Underground Railroad workers themselves deliberately contributed to this confusion over routes and tactics. Graceanna Lewis, a Quaker naturalist involved in helping runaway slaves, indicated that there were several directions in which her family could forward fugitives from their Chester County home, depending on which heading seemed safest. A modern scholar of the Underground Railroad, Tracey Weis, has pointed out that multiple routes often increased safety because it lowered the traffic on any one

route. If all fugitives went along the same roads and paths, it would be easy for the escape routes to become known and for fugitives to be recaptured.\(^{58}\)

Many of the routes were determined by simple geography. The Appalachian mountain ranges extended into Pennsylvania, and many slaves in the Shenandoah Valley escaped northward, keeping the mountains to their left as a guide. Others chose to escape along the mountains themselves, a more difficult but possibly safer route. Once in Pennsylvania, the North and South mountain ranges gradually turned east, acting as a natural funnel to direct fugitives toward Harrisburg on the Susquehanna. Historian William Switala suggests that Indian trails were often followed through the hills and woods. Pennsylvania’s verdant forests also offered protection to the fugitive by night and day. Woodlands could also provide employment for fugitives who wanted to work for a time in the state’s timber industry, or making charcoal for the region’s iron furnaces.\(^{59}\)

Examining the road network also reveals why many fugitives crossed the Mason-Dixon line into the center of the Pennsylvania. Good roads from Baltimore led to Gettysburg, Hanover and York; roads from Washington converged on Gettysburg as well. Fugitives faced several obstacles to traveling by the most direct route from the Baltimore area to Philadelphia, where the African American community and the Vigilance Committee could protect them and they could seek urban employment, they


faced several obstacles on the most direct route. First, the road remained in Maryland much longer, increasing the risk of exposure within a slave state. Secondly, the fugitives would likely have to cross the Susquehanna River at Havre de Grace, Maryland. Some fugitives did, but it was generally safer to make that crossing in a free state, where ferrymen might be less likely to ask for papers. Traveling to York or Gettysburg, and then taking the road to Harrisburg would allow the Susquehanna crossing to be made in Wrightsville or Harrisburg.60

So all manner of physical geography – topography, the forests, and the road network – could influence the escape path of a slave. Many times, the natural routes through physical landscape were also modified by information or rumor the fugitive might have received. Fugitives might take a more difficult route if it reached the free states sooner, if they were less likely to be seen, or if they knew of a friendly house along the way. A historian of the Kentucky borderland has summarized this well, saying, “fugitive slaves… followed routes determined by the human, political, and physical geography of the region.”61

Many fugitives from the central parts of Virginia and Maryland fled on foot. Some stole horses, or occasionally carriages to transport their wives and family. Taking the stagecoach was risky as some drivers reported their black charges, and departing by train or boat was very dangerous without an extensive set of corroborating papers.62

Some areas had reputations for being particularly hazardous. Bentley’s “Dutch” woman had warned his party from Shippensburg. Gettysburg also could be troublesome.

60 Today Havre de Grace is a stop on Maryland’s Underground Railroad tour.
62 Still, *Underground Railroad*, p. 92; Frederick Douglass, who fled by train and then by boat from eastern Maryland, had a set of seaman’s travel papers.
William Still, the chairman of Philadelphia’s Vigilance Committee, remarked that Baltimore was “one of the most difficult places in the South for even free colored people” to leave, “much more for slaves.” Some who did escape fled in market wagons of sympathetic Quakers.

Washington, D.C., was significantly farther south than Baltimore, increasing the dangers for escapees from there, but almost all the major northern roads led directly to Pennsylvania. Stanley Harrold has found that south central Pennsylvania was a key locale on an escape network leading from Washington, D.C. to New York City. In the vicinity of south central Pennsylvania, slave catchers knew to hunt around the African American settlements at Mercersburg, among the Quaker farmers of eastern Adams County. Shippensburg, as Bentley’s informant revealed, could be a particularly dangerous place, as was Funkstown in Maryland, just south of Franklin County.

Once they reached some degree of seeming safety in Pennsylvania, relatively few fugitive slaves continued traveling until they reached Canada. Pennsylvania was a large state with opportunities for employment and community. Geography and climate also helped increase the attractiveness of southern Pennsylvania for slaves who wanted to stay. Fugitives who did not bring sufficient funds — or who did not make contact with a network of activists willing to pay for and arrange train fares or wagon transportation — would not have walked from Virginia to Canada, particularly not those with small children. Many accounts of ordinary fugitives, such as Benjamin Drew’s North-Side

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63 A Rand McNally road map from 1922 clearly shows the old major roads. See also Bridner, “Fugitive Slaves of Maryland,” p. 42, 46. Still, Underground Railroad, p. 92.
View, depict even most refugees in Canada fugitives as living and working in the U.S. for several years before pushing on.65

While historians have emphasized the ingenuity, persistence, money, job skills and resourcefulness required for a successful escape, some of these requirements can become blurred by proximity to the border.66 If a fugitive lacked sufficient money to push on to Philadelphia or New York, he or she could stop in south central Pennsylvania and earn money, either at traditional rural occupations or by using any special skills (seamstress, blacksmith, barber, tanner, etc.). Many others undoubtedly chose to stop to be near their kin on the other side of the line – either to help them escape later or engage in the dangerous practice of sneaking back to see them. As Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley had largely converted from tobacco production to grain production around 1800, fugitives would not need to learn a new set of agricultural skills to work in the rich grain belt of Pennsylvania. All of these factors made south-central Pennsylvania a natural gateway for many fugitives and a stopping point for some.67

The routes in south central Pennsylvania are particularly obscure because of the dangers to fugitives and abolitionists in the area. The pioneering Underground Railroad researcher Charles Blockson stated that Franklin County was “a hazardous area of one hundred miles contained the most secretive, tangled lines of the Underground Railroad.” One central point was the African American settlement of “Little Africa.” Here the free black community could shelter fugitives and slave catchers would have to run considerable risks; in this area one fugitive killed a constable and wounded two others

66 Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, pp. 116-120.
67 Mitchell, Commercialism and Frontier.
attempting to arrest him in 1837. African Americans also ran Underground Railroad “stops” in Chambersburg, and fugitives were sometimes directed to Carlisle or Harrisburg through the dangerous Shippensburg area. Other routes ran through the eastern part of the county: white abolitionist Hiram Wertz identified a route that from Rouzerville along the South Mountain to Thaddeus Steven’s Caledonia furnace, on the border of Franklin and Adams Counties. From there fugitives were usually directed eastward towards Carlisle and Harrisburg.  

Although these are the supposedly “documented” routes of the Underground Railroad in Franklin County, in reality, of course, many fugitives reaching this area from Maryland or Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley traveled through it on their own, following the mountains or feeling their way through the woods. Sometimes they were helped by individuals giving them directions or food. Their experiences were more like those told by the fugitive Sam Davis from the safety of Canada:

When I was passing through Orangetown, in Pennsylvania, I went into a shop to get some cake. Two men followed me with muskets. They had followed me from a village I had passed through a little before. They took me, and were going to carry me before a magistrate – they said to Chambersburg. I walked just before. By and by, watching my chance, I jumped fence and ran. They were on horseback. I got into a piece of woods – thence into a wheat field, where I lay all day; from 9 A.M. until dark. I could not sleep for fear. At night I traveled on, walking until day, when I came to colored man’s house in the mountains. He gave me a good breakfast, for which I thanked him, and then directed me on the route. I succeeded, after a while, in finding the Underground Railroad. I stopped awhile at one place sick, and was taken good care of. I did not stop to work in the States, but came on to Canada.  

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By the time Davis reached the organized “Underground Railroad,” he had already survived one attempt at recapture, and received invaluable informal aid from an African American in the mountains.

Several major routes crisscrossed through Adams County. One followed the eastern slopes of the South Mountain to Bendersville, and then to Carlisle or Harrisburg. Fugitive slaves moving up the Marsh Creek could also wind up in the Bendersville area. William Switala believes that the Bendersville route became less significant later in the antebellum period when some of Adams County’s Quakers (including the Wrights) moved from that area to be closer to the Menallen Meeting (Friends) outside of York Springs. Still, in 1845 an African American family was kidnapped from near Bendersville, and a 1942 historical novel, The Drums of the Morning, described an important escape route from Chambersburg over the North Mountain to Bendersville.70

Around Gettysburg the routes become confused. The town was dangerous because of the presence of several slave catchers and informants. Many fugitives seem to have bypassed the central part of town. In the late antebellum period, one purported route led from African American farmhand and veterinarian Basil Biggs’s residence on the McPherson farm to Edward Matthews’s residence across the “Quaker Valley.” Fugitives were guided from Mathews’ house in central Adams County to Carlisle.71 Some fugitives who reached southern Adams County were directed up White’s Run and avoided Gettysburg entirely. Another route led up the Rock Creek from the Maryland border to James McAllister’s mill, where fugitives were hidden. From there they could

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be escorted to or around Gettysburg by Mag Palm, known in legend as “Maggie Bluecoat” because she wore an 1812 officer’s uniform to be identifiable to fugitives. In addition to the defying the risks involved with helping fugitive slaves, Palm survived at least one attempt to kidnap her.\(^\text{72}\)

Gettysburg’s African American community was centered on the southern and western outskirts of town, and it was there that fugitives most likely were hidden. The Gettysburg A.M.E. church was the center for the Slave’s Refuge Society and may have been a hiding place. Henry Butler, who signed the 1840 Slave’s Refuge Society charter, reportedly was a leading conductor. Mag Palm lived for several years in the 1850s in a cabin by the Emmitsburg road on Abraham Brien’s farm on Cemetery Ridge, southwest of the town. Brien was an African American farmer who had to make do with the thin soils of the ridge until 1863 put his property near the apex of Pickett’s charge.\(^\text{73}\)

If for some reason fugitives had to be taken through the county seat, sometimes a diversion was planned. According to J. Howard Wert, a Gettysburg College student in the 1850s, a group of young men and College students known as the “Black Ducks” would occasionally stage pranks or disturbances to disguise the fact that runaway slaves were passing through the town. These same individuals reportedly hid fugitives on Culp’s Hill, a heavily wooded rocky prominence south of town. Some scholars doubt these claims, noting Gettysburg College’s president in the 1850s, Henry Baugher, was a

\(^\text{72}\) Blockson, *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, pp. 145-146; Switala, *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, p. 108; Palm, who was listed in the 1860 census as a “mistress/harlot,” purportedly wore the officer’s coat to be recognizable to fugitive slaves; a reasonable precaution in an area abounding with kidnappers and informants, black and white. A romanticized depiction of her is in Elsie Singmaster, *A Boy at Gettysburg* (Boston, 1924).

\(^\text{73}\) Blockson, *Hippocrene Guide*, p. 114; Switala, *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, pp. 109-110. Peter Vermilyea, “Tour of Gettysburg’s Historic African American Sites,” Civil War Institute, June 2003. Some claim that the house of Daniel Sell and Mary Long Thompson on the Chambersburg Pike was also an underground railroad station, and had been interpreted that way by Gettysburg tour guides in the mid-20\(^{th}\) century. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson were sufficiently close that there were rumors of a possible affair.
notorious disciplinarian who would not have tolerated such activities. Such accounts may not be implausible, however. Baugher was moderately antislavery, several of the Black Ducks were not college students, and they apparently met off campus, where it may have been difficult for Baugher to control them. The group may have been aided by Jack Hopkins, a prominent member of the African American community who was the College janitor and was rumored to be an Underground Railroad guide. Figure 1.4 shows, in an unknown hand, writing alleging the same on a locally popular print of Thaddeus Stevens’ unfinished “Tapeworm” railroad leading to Gettysburg.

Figure 1.4 Alleged Fugitive Aid Involvement of Jack Hopkins and the “Black Ducks” (B.D.s)

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A 1910 account by Underground Railroad participant Hiram Wertz stated that Steven’s Caledonia Furnace was a temporary destination for fugitives, and Robert Black, manager, would forward the fugitives to the east. Some of them could have gone to Gettysburg, although most appear to have gone to Pine Grove or Carlisle.

Although the Gettysburg area drew many fugitives, a second major route through Adams County ran to the east, through York Springs. In some cases, fugitives were taken from McAllister’s Rock Creek mill to York Springs, avoiding Gettysburg entirely. York Springs lay in a different economic network than Gettysburg, being closer to Cumberland and to York County than it was to the Adams County seat. It was also nineteen miles from the Mason-Dixon line, rather than Gettysburg’s seven. Abolitionists there may have been less exposed to economic coercion or social unpleasantness from pro-southern merchants and elites. William and Phebe Wright, who were leading friends of the fugitive in this area, had their home in Latimore Township, to the north of York Springs. As local historian G. Craig Caba points out, they were surrounded by kin and close friends, who, if not active members of the Underground Railroad, were “passive” helpers. In some instances, they would warn the Wrights of the approach of slave catchers; while they might not be involved in the Underground Railroad themselves, getting fellow Quakers in trouble with the law for practicing their religion was considered anathema to the Friends. The Quaker custom of “marrying in the faith” helped create these networks of interrelated families. Some believe that the Wright’s house, “Plainfield,” was specifically located and designed for service on the Underground Railroad. It was off the
main road and up a lengthy lane that would give the inhabitants ample warning of the approach of strangers. It also may have had several hiding places for fugitives.76

William and Phebe Wright, and their children, were some of the most important figures in the Underground Railroad in south central Pennsylvania. Several nineteenth century historians credit the Wrights with helping hundreds of fugitives. Graceanna Lewis, in a brief manuscript account of her Underground Railroad activities written shortly before her death, discusses the Wrights first among all the Underground Railroad participants in south central and southeastern Pennsylvania. William Still, the head of the Vigilance Committee in Pennsylvania, listed the Wrights among forty-five families who were important friends of the fugitives, and included a profile of William Wright in his Underground Railroad memoir. William and Phebe Wright, married in 1817, became involved in aiding fugitives around 1819, when William Wright and Joel Wierman rescued Hamilton Moore from recapture by his Baltimore County master. When the Wrights lived near Bendersville, the curve of the mountains helped guide fugitives to their home.77 In 1828, another Baltimore County slave, James W. C. Pennington appeared on the Wrights’ doorstep – but this time to their new farmhouse in eastern Adams County.

Ties of kinship helped forge links in the Underground Railroad in the dangerous border region. Both William and Phebe Wright had the support of family members in their work. Phebe Wright was the sister of Joel Wierman, another prominent Adams

county abolitionist, and Hannah Wierman Gibbons, a key abolitionist in Lancaster County. William Wright had a legacy of antislavery work from his extended family. One of his cousins and an uncle belonged to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and brought “freedom suits” in southern Pennsylvania to compel slaveholders to free their slaves in accordance with the gradual abolition law.\footnote{Still, \textit{Underground Railroad}, pp. 691-693.}

Several letters published in Still’s work illustrate William Wright’s connections with abolitionists in Washington, D.C. Some of them, including reportedly Dr. William L. Chaplin, directed or transported escaping slaves to him, sometimes via McAllister’s mill. The Wrights appears to be a key part of network of abolitionists, identified by Stanley Harrold, who forwarded fugitives through southern Pennsylvania using Lewis Tappan’s vast organizational and financial network, coordinated by Philadelphia’s Vigilance Committee.\footnote{Letters from J. Bigelow, Esq., to William Still, June 22, 1854 and September 9, 1855, in Still, \textit{Underground Railroad}, pp. 41-42, 178. Mrs. E. Singmaster to W. H. Siebert, July 24, 1945, Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Roll 13. Singmaster’s information was based on an article on Chaplin and Adams County’s Underground Railroad by J. Howard Wert. Harrold, \textit{Subversives}, p. 204.}

Although many fugitives from York Springs proceeded through York County to the home of another William Wright in Columbia, and then to the home of Hannah and Daniel Gibbons in Lancaster County, there were also links between the Adams County Underground Railroad and the routes in Cumberland County to the north. Stephen Weakly helped link between the Adams County and Cumberland County Underground Railroad. He was a Cumberland County resident and an active member of the railroad in
Cumberland County; but he also signed the 1840 Annual Report of the York Springs (Adams County) Anti-slavery society.80

In Cumberland County the escape routes are obscure, but Carlisle served as a major destination for fugitives. Here we may see a divergence between this area’s “white” and “black” Undergrounds. Some of the African Americans in the “black Underground” in Adams County, including Basil Biggs and Edward Matthews, are reported as escorting their charges to Carlisle. In 1847, the fugitive slaves involved in a noted slave rescue riot had traveled from Chambersburg to Carlisle. In contrast, the white abolitionists centered around York Springs appear to have sent fugitives to Boiling Springs or through to Harrisburg, Mechanicsburg, Wrightsville, or Goldsborough. Boiling Springs had several families willing to hide fugitives. Daniel Kaufman, who founded Boiling Springs in 1845, was an important figure. He was aided by his brother-in-law, the aforementioned Stephen Weakly, and Philip Brechbill, owner of a tavern in Boiling Springs along the Yellow Breeches Creek. When Kaufman’s property came into legal jeopardy during a fugitive slave court case in the late 1840s, Weakly assumed Kaufman’s legal liability and Kaufman dropped out of Underground Railroad activities. After that, Weakly and Brechbill hid fugitives on islands in the swamps of the creek instead of in barns and homes. John Harder of Carlisle was reportedly another key individual; a market man, his wagon was frequently used to convey fugitives because locals were accustomed to seeing it on the local roads. It was also hoped that as a prominent Democrat, Harder would be above suspicion. From Carlisle fugitives were generally conveyed to Harrisburg, with Mechanicsburg occasionally mentioned as a stop.

Harrisburg was an important location on the railroad, with a large free black community and prominent white supporters. Fugitives sent on a more southerly route east from Adams County sometimes went to Harrisburg, but often crossed the Susquehanna at Wrightsville and passed on through Lancaster and Chester counties to the Philadelphia area. Many would pass on to Philadelphia, to be helped by the Vigilance Committee and other fugitive aid associations. Some would be forwarded to New Jersey or New York; others went into Bucks County to work.\textsuperscript{81}

As these descriptions have made clear, understanding the importance of networks is vital to understanding the success of the Underground Railroad in south central Pennsylvania. Free blacks had extensive networks of kinship, fellowship, and friendship both in south-central Pennsylvania and across the border into Maryland and Virginia.\textsuperscript{82} Certain individuals who traveled and had business connections in both Pennsylvania and Maryland might be critically important; Basil Biggs worked as a veterinarian in both Carroll County, Maryland, and Adams County, Pennsylvania before the Civil War, an occupation that would bring him in contact with Southern agricultural slaves. He is reputed to have been an important member of the Underground Railroad in Adams County, but since Biggs was illiterate and left no record, we may never know.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} Shughart,, “The Underground Railroad in Cumberland County,” CCHS. In 1855, Harder would become sheriff of Carlisle; he was undoubtedly even more helpful to abolitionists in that position. Edward H. Magill, “When Men were Sold, Reminiscences of the Underground Railroad in Bucks County and its Managers,” \textit{A Collection of Papers Read Before the Bucks County Historical Society}, v. 2 (1909), pp. 511-515.

\textsuperscript{82} This would be consistent with the networks of slaves and free blacks in the South, which Tony Kaye has identified as extremely important to African Americans sense of place and worldview. Anthony E. Kaye, “Neighborhoods and Solidarity in the Natchez District of Mississippi: Rethinking the Antebellum Slave Community,” \textit{Slavery and Abolition} 23:1 (April 2002), pp. 1-24.

The networks of white abolitionists also extended into the Southern states. Joel Wierman’s wife, Lydia, requested and received permission to travel to Maryland and the Shenandoah Valley and speak at the various Quaker meetings. In her letters she sent to an antislavery newspaper, she mentions getting into discussions with Southerners at these meetings about slavery, but her letters are understandably vague and discreet.

Central Maryland also had significant antislavery sentiment and organization. The Pipe Creek Antislavery Society and the Pipe Creek Protection Society had been formed in the 1820s in Carroll County, Maryland. Their founding documents were published by Benjamin Lundy in Baltimore. Carroll County was due south of Adams County, Pennsylvania, and members of the Pipe Creek Meeting would meet with their Adams County counterparts during Quarterly meeting.84 Adjacent to Carroll and southwest of Adams County was Frederick County, Maryland. For a locale south of the Mason-Dixon line, Frederick County appears to have had an unusual amount of antislavery sentiment; hundreds of residents signed antislavery petition to Congress in 1829, an extreme rarity for a Southern slave state. There are reports of a secretive Underground Railroad in Frederick County, of necessity even more obscure than the southern Pennsylvania one.85

In addition to networks of kin and religion, scholars recognize that into the twentieth century rural Americans lived in interlocking networks of mutual help and

85 “Memorial of the undersigned, Inhabitants of Fred’k Co.,” February 2, 1829, Committee on the District of Columbia, Slavery in the District of Columbia, HR 20A-G5.1, National Archives. Mark Lewis, “Garfield’s ‘Big Charlie’ Misner was a larger-than-life legend,” Middletown Valley Citizen, April 26, 2001, Slavery-Underground Railroad File, Frederick County Historical Society, Frederick, MD.
obligation. One farmer might help another raise a barn, and be repaid in turn by a bushel of apples and help at the harvest. Sometimes these arrangements were sufficiently codified that farmers kept ledgers of help rendered and assistance returned. The net effect of this sort of mutual dependency in rural living was to create a network of individuals who, if not motivated to help fugitives, at least would not be likely to help a stranger with apparent ill intent looking for a friend’s house. Local economic centers could act as central points of these relationships; for example, the Wright family was surrounded by Wiermans and Griests, who they were related to by marriage, as well as Deardorffs, a family who owned the local mill. The Deardorffs and the Wrights were reputed to be on good terms and occasionally helped each other in Underground Railroad activities. One of the other millers in the county, James McAllister, was very involved in the antislavery society and the Underground Railroad, as was Jesse Cook, who also owned a mill in eastern Adams County. Another family, which owned Shriver’s mill, may have been involved as well. If you informed a slave catcher that a fugitive was at the Wrights, it is possible you might have to find a new place to grind grain if your involvement was suspected. Similarly, area abolitionists occasionally had a sympathetic relative, such as Isaac Wierman, in the office of the local justice of the

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87 (Deardorff) Caba, “Episodes of Gettysburg;” (Cook) “Albert Cook Myers traces Underground Route from Gettysburg north to Jesse Cook’s Mill,” A. C. Myers to W. H. Siebert, April 19, 1944, and Mrs. Daniel C. Jacobs, Arendtsville, PA, to E. S. Lewars, Gettysburg, March 21, 1944, both in Wilbur H. Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Rolls 13 and 1, respectively. Myers was a noted historian at Swarthmore. (McAllister, Shriver) Switala, *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, pp. 108, 111.
peace. They also maintained a strong presence on the Gettysburg bank. This tactic, which was mirrored by abolitionists out west, held real promise for economic coercion. Cooperation with slave catchers might not only be met with difficulty grinding grain, but also getting a loan.  

Conclusion

The extant fugitive slave narratives, the Adams County fugitive slave cases and advertisements paint a picture of determined fugitives moving through this divided border area. They often found their own routes through. They were helped by the fact that there was a sizable African American population in south central Pennsylvania, and occasionally they encountered networks of sympathetic white and black abolitionists who helped them settle down or keep moving, including Henry Butler, Mag Palm, and Basil Biggs, William and Phebe Wright, and Joel and Lydia Wierman.

With Pennsylvania’s own slavery dwindling and the testimony of escaping fugitives bearing witness to the oppression of the Southern system, it might seem to the opponents of slavery an ideal time to begin agitation. When they did so in south central Pennsylvania, however, they collided with a society where some of the leading members of the elite opposed antislavery. Some had recently been slaveholders themselves, others who were just part of an economy and culture that was tied to the South in many ways. Many south central Pennsylvania citizens valued mollifying white Southerners over protecting escaped black ones, and resisted open action for abolition. In the next few years, these tensions would erupt.

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88 Various Wiermans and Werts served on the bank board. John McPherson, a close friend and business associate of Thaddeus Stevens, was a senior bank officer for many years. There is some credible evidence that his farm served as an Underground Railroad station. (West) Henrietta Buckmaster, Let My People Go (Boston, 1959; orig. pub. 1941), p. 78; Bordewich, Bound for Canaan, pp. 219-220.
South central Pennsylvania was liminal ground, lying on the dividing line between the border North and the Upper South. This physical circumstance, combined with a legacy of slavery lasting into the 1830s, gave the area a distinctive, almost Southern character. At the same time, many Quakers, Mennonites, and other non-resistant, pacifist groups who had settled in the area opposed slavery, but preferred non-confrontational forms of opposition. This environment would influence the tactics and development of the white antislavery movement in the area, which preferred legal and political engagement over public confrontation. As a result, antislavery sentiment in south central Pennsylvania evolved differently from abolitionism in New England. Here, the movement had strong political as well as moral overtones from the beginning of the renewal of antislavery activity in the 1830s. Adams County’s abolitionists, in particular, would be politically involved from the inception of their organization. The fugitive slave issue would be an important part of this border abolitionism – but, for most of the 1830s, the principal contest was between two different proposed solutions to America’s race problem: abolitionism and colonization. When Garrisonian antislavery lecturers traveled through the area, it would be in part in response in part to the political needs of the region’s leading political figure. Approaches these lecturers had developed in Massachusetts, New York and Ohio, however, would largely prove to be unsuccessful here, forcing the development of alternative tactics and strategy.
Viewing this early antislavery movement from a dual social and political perspective is valuable, because most scholars encounter the rise of antislavery through monographs about antislavery or reform movements. In these books, the overall narrative proceeds this way: leaders such as Theodore Weld and William Lloyd Garrison inspired and organized dedicated, religiously or idealistically motivated activists to organize antislavery sentiment throughout the North. Although these activists and their leaders did not abjure politics, they shared grave concerns about the morality of partisan activity, and initially, the work of organizing societies and spreading the antislavery gospel precluded political involvement. Once formed, the societies engaged in an activity almost naïve from our perspective, moral suasion through petitioning of Congress. Eventually, these societies decide to engage in bipartisan questioning of political candidates (“interrogation”); when that proves unsuccessful, only then do some antislavery activists consider forming a third political party, in 1839. This splits the movement.¹

In contrast to this dominant theme, there have been hints of an alternative approach which emphasizes the emergence of antislavery activism in the midst of a mid-1830s political struggle over Jacksonian Democracy. Particularly in areas where Antimasonry was once strong, the emergence of the antislavery movement looks suspiciously like a political tool being developed as the basis to rally Northerners against a new, politically dominant conspiracy. This time, it was not the secretive Freemasons,

but the Southern slaveholders of the Slave Power Conspiracy who were to be the mortal enemy.²

Both interpretations could be true, with inspired organizers being employed by politicians to build new constituencies, but little of the traditional narrative holds for Adams County, Pennsylvania, while the alternative one does. Antislavery there was born out of political turmoil occurring with the decline of Antimasonry. Indeed, it appears that the growth of antislavery organizations may have been accepted and encouraged in hopes that the movement would grow to be the basis of a Northern political party capable of defeating the Southern-leaning Democratic party. The initial antislavery agents sent out by the American Antislavery Society do not appear apolitical at all. For a variety of reasons, Thaddeus Stevens, a leading regional and national politician, helps support the new antislavery initiative with his newspaper, his funds, and, more cautiously, his own presence.

A transplant from New England, Thaddeus Stevens, would be an important part of these developments, and he serves as a visible illustration of the pressures on antislavery in a border area. While Stevens would later become known for his strong stand on African American equal rights, in border south central Pennsylvania, Stevens adopted an antislavery position slowly, and later than many of his biographers believe. When he finally did move to an openly antislavery stance, it would be in large measure a result of his political situation in addition to any moral repugnance he may have felt towards slavery. In particular, Stevens confronted the choice between abolitionism and

colonization, and sometimes embraced both. While not all antislavery activists shared Stevens’ stark political concerns, his dilemma in choosing a new cause to build a political movement around illustrated the pressures on antislavery reformers in this area as a whole. Because it can be traced and documented, Thaddeus Stevens, his path to antislavery, and the emergence of strong antislavery sentiment among his constituency are all important because they offer a valuable window into the explosion of border abolition and anti-abolition sentiment in the mid to late 1830s.

Thaddeus Stevens was a significant, at times, even dominant figure in south central Pennsylvania politics. Even after he relocated to Lancaster in 1842, he maintained substantial property holdings in the area, served on the board of Pennsylvania College, and frequently spoke in the area. His influence was profound, but it has also been misunderstood.

As a politician, Thaddeus Stevens was a dynamic, divisive figure; in the one hundred and forty years since his death, historians and biographers have remained divided about the controversial politician. Soon after his death, Stevens was either lauded as the consummate politician or reviled as a political Antichrist who had destroyed America’s Constitutional government. Much, of course, depended on the historian’s attitude towards Radical Reconstruction, which Stevens helped lead. In the early 20th century, historians were more distant from the post-war animosities, but they still struggled with Thaddeus Stevens. Some strongly denounced him as spiteful and hate-filled; Richard Current produced a scholarly biography of Stevens, but unsympathetically characterized him as a grasping, scheming politician. Popular
chroniclers of the Underground Railroad, however, found Stevens to be a noble, even saintly figure.³

A shift in the academic view of Stevens commenced after World War II. Biographers treated Stevens more sympathetically, humanizing him. Fawn Brodie lauded Stevens as a defender of human rights, and as the Civil Rights movement progressed, Stevens was virtually canonized in certain circles, and portrayed as a man a century ahead of his time. His most recent scholarly biographer has largely followed the emphasis of the last forty years in his treatment of Stevens. So does a recent, exhaustively researched account of Stevens’ early years in Gettysburg.⁴

There was, however, significant truth in the perspective of earlier biographers. Stevens was, as Richard Current portrayed, first and foremost a politician, and his commitment to antislavery early in his career appears weaker than recent biographers have portrayed. To say this is not to diminish the principled, egalitarian stands Stevens took later in life, after he moved to Lancaster; it is simply to recognize that with Stevens, as with so many other politicians, his convictions were evolving early in his career. In fact, it was not until Stevens faced a significant political dilemma that his connection to antislavery rose to the fore.

³ Alexander Hood, “Thaddeus Stevens.” The Biographical History of Lancaster County, ed. by Alexander Harris. (Lancaster, 1872); Alexander Harris, Political Conflict in America... Comprising Also a Resume of the Life of Thaddeus Stevens (New York, 1876); George Fort Milton, The Age of Hate. Andrew Johnson and the Radicals (New York, 1930); James G. Randall, Civil War and Reconstruction (New York, 1937). Thomas F. Wooley, Great Leveler, the Life of Thaddeus Stevens (New York, 1937); Richard N. Current, Old Thaddeus Stevens: A Story of Political Ambition (Madison, 1942); Henrietta Buckmaster, Let My People Go: The Story of the Underground Railroad and the Growth of the Abolition Movement (New York, 1941); see also Henrietta Buckmaster, Freedom Bound (New York, 1965), p. 6; Elsie Singmaster, I Speak for Thaddeus Stevens (Boston, 1947).

The Early Career of Thaddeus Stevens

Thaddeus Stevens was born in Vermont in 1792, and grew up in hardscrabble poverty. After graduating from Dartmouth in 1816, Stevens moved to York, Pennsylvania, and studied law. After learning that he could be indefinitely blackballed by local lawyers, he took the bar exam in Maryland, then he moved to Gettysburg to set up practice in September 1816.5

Early in his career, Stevens encountered the Pennsylvania’s complex legalism of slavery and abolition. In 1821, he represented a Maryland slaveholder whose slave, Charity Butler, was suing for her freedom under the 1780 abolition statute. This act mandated that all slaves brought from out of state be freed if they resided in the state for six months or more.

These were the facts of the case: after Charity Butler was born a slave in Maryland, she was subleased to an individual named Gilleland. In exchange for feeding and clothing Charity, he had her services until she turned sixteen. Soon after this agreement was reached, Gilleland separated from his wife, who went to live with her mother near the Pennsylvania line. She took Charity to look after her infant. Nearly destitute, Mrs. Gilleland traveled to find work as a seamstress, often going into southern Pennsylvania for weeks. When she finished a job, she and Charity would go back to her mother’s. When Charity reached age eleven, she was returned to the original owner.6

5 “Remarks by Mr. Dickey,” Memorial Addresses on the Life and Character of Thaddeus Stevens (Washington, 1869), pp. 1-3; Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 22-33; Korngold, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 14; Meltzer, Thaddeus Stevens and the Fight for Negro Rights, pp. 8-15. Adams Centinel, 18 December 1816, Thaddeus Stevens Papers (microfilm), Reel 1, Frame 10. Advertisement dated October 1, 1816.
6 Butler et. al. v. Delaplaine (1821), Sergeant and Rawle, Pennsylvania Reports, 3rd ed., v. 7 (Philadelphia, 1872), pp. 378-379. Brodie believes that Charity Butler carefully tallied up her days in Pennsylvania, but owing to her young age, this is unlikely. Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 33.
Butler’s lawyers argued that since the total time of her residence in Pennsylvania was greater than six months, she and her two children, born after the alleged six months’ stay, should be freed. Stevens, defending the slaveholder, contended that leasing slave property did not convey the right to destroy it by taking it to Pennsylvania. He also argued that the drafters of the 1780 law had intended six months’ continuous residence, even though that was not explicit. This “common sense” position matched the desires of the state’s business elite. Many Southerners visited Pennsylvania annually to relax or shop, and merchants did not want them worried that by so doing, they would eventually liberate the servants who accompanied them. The court agreed with Stevens, citing in particular the need to be hospitable to Southern visitors to Pennsylvania resorts, including Adams County’s York Springs. Charity Butler and her children were returned to slavery.7

Many of Stevens’ recent biographers have seen the Butler case as a seminal moment in his career. They believe he was ashamed of his participation in the case and soon converted to antislavery opinions. As evidence, they cite an 1823 toast, at a large Fourth of July celebration, where Stevens proposed, “To the next President of the United States – may he have never fastened fetters on a slave!” Of course, such a toast had a political subtext. Stevens was moving towards the Federalist camp, and their presidential candidate would likely be from New England, not from slaveholding Virginia.8

Stevens’ biographer Fawn Brodie believed that this toast proved that Stevens was moving towards opposing slavery, and that he followed it with other antislavery actions in the 1820s. Other modern Stevens biographers follow Brodie; his latest biographer,

8 Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 33; Gettysburg Sentinel, July 9, 1823.
Hans Trefousse, contends that Stevens’ response to the Butler case led him to “[t]hereafter… invariably ma[k]e his services available to defend fugitive slaves, of whom there were many in the border region in which Gettysburg was located, and his neighbors remembered that he rarely lost one of these.”

Records of Adams County fugitive slave cases involving Stevens, however, have been impossible to find, and most of the recollections Trefousse cites were written over forty years later, which is why Current believed that they were unreliable. Stevens did, according to other anecdotal evidence, perform stirring gestures of compassion for some African Americans, such as spending $300, money he had set aside to buy a law library, to purchase a boy out of slavery in Maryland.

Whether Stevens’ attitude towards slavery substantially changed after the Butler case appears less likely than most modern biographers claim. They fail to acknowledge that in 1829, Stevens was back in court on behalf of a slaveholder. There he argued - using a dictionary – that a common-sense understanding of the term “yeoman” was a sufficient indication of profession for registration of a slaveholder’s occupation. This argument prevailed, allowing his client to retain his slave. If there was a transformational moment for Stevens after his involvement in a legal case involving slaveholding, it may have been after this 1829 case. If Stevens did alter his views after

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9 Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 14, citing “Remarks by Mr. Orth,” Memorial Addresses, p. 53.
10 Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 14-15, citing Memorial Addresses, pp. 53-54. Current, Old Thad Stevens, pp. 34-5. Current complained that no proof of Stevens involvement in fugitive slave cases have emerged from Adams County court records, but if Stevens was successful and no warrant of removal was issued, it is not clear that there would have been any record made whatsoever.
12 The most cogently presented counterargument to this interpretation is by Bradley Koch. Koch cites a freedom suit in which Stevens was involved at the same time as the Butler case, which went through five
involvement in a slave case, possibly area residents looking back at Stevens’ early career from forty years’ distance, confused the Butler and Thompson cases. The fact that warrants of removal issued from Adams County fell off sharply after 1828 may support this, if Stevens had just begun working to represent or protect fugitive slaves.¹³

Meanwhile, Stevens had become a sought after lawyer in Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, and York counties. Some considered him the finest member of the Pennsylvania bar, and he won nine out of the first ten cases he argued before the state supreme court. He aligned himself with Anti-Jacksonian and Federalist party activities, serving as a member of the Anti-Jacksonian Committees of Correspondence in 1823, 1824, and 1828. By 1826, Stevens was one of the largest property holders in Gettysburg; by 1829 he was one of the wealthiest men in Adams County. Although prospering, he did not yet have corresponding political influence. That was about to change.¹⁴

Stevens’ first major political cause would not be antislavery, for which he later became famous, but rather opposition to Masonry. In 1826, publisher William Morgan disappeared in New York state, after having written an exposé revealing the secret rites of Freemasonry. It was presumed that the Masons had murdered him. A popular antimasonic reaction soon became a political movement. Stevens participated in the first Antimasonic meeting in Gettysburg in 1829, and he and a co-investor acquired a newspaper, the Star and Republican Banner. Stevens asked two of his principal political

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¹³ There is some indirect evidence that these two cases may be confused – while there are ample fugitive slave renditions in Adams County before 1829, there are very few afterwards. As local lore remembers Stevens making an effective defense for many area fugitives after his change of heart, it seems possible that this after the 1829 Cobean case and not the 1821 Butler case.

¹⁴ Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 38-39, 45; Current, Old Thad Stevens, p. 10; Melzer, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 17; Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 17, 21, 24-27.
rivals, Robert Harper and Jacob Lefever, to edit it. This was likely a crafty way for Stevens to get them both on the record as not endorsing Antimasonry. Harper actually belonged to the Masonic order. Both chose to remain with the papers they were already editing, and the position fell to Robert Middleton. It was widely believed that Stevens was the paper’s controlling influence, however.15

Through Antimasonry, Stevens expanded his political activities regionally and statewide. In 1830, he was a delegate to both the state and national Antimasonic conventions. He began to speak in Maryland and elsewhere. In 1833, Stevens was elected to the Pennsylvania legislature, the beginning of a long political career which was dominated by Antimasonry at first, but in which antislavery and egalitarianism would play an increasingly prominent part.16

As Antimasonry was rising, Pennsylvania’s own slavery was dying out, essentially vanishing by the mid-1830s. The few slaveholders who remained lacked the political clout that the slaveholding class had once possessed, even a decade earlier. Fugitives were likely still captured and carried south, but local papers no longer printed runaway advertisements, except occasionally in Franklin County. The reasons for the change of sentiment are not completely clear, but the loss of a slaveholding constituency in Pennsylvania certainly was a major factor. As late as the 1820s, a number of leading families in south-central Pennsylvania owned or had recently owned slaves, but by the 1830s, very few had.

16 Current, Old Thad Stevens, p. 17; Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 13, 28-33. Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 57.
Allowing slavery to die out in Pennsylvania was one thing; so was standing against its extension, as the Pennsylvania legislature did during the Missouri crisis. Actively pushing for its elimination in the nation was quite another, which usually required a worldview of slavery as a sin and aberrant human behavior. The origins of this area’s antislavery sentiment were built on Pennsylvania’s own legacy of gradual emancipation and Revolutionary heritage. The American and French Revolutions had sparked a global interest in human rights and liberty, and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (1784), in spirit the first national antislavery organization, fought to free slaves both through legislative action and the courts. In the early nineteenth century, antislavery Quaker preachers had traveled through the south central Pennsylvania, and since the mid-1820s, at least, the writings of the Quaker abolitionist Benjamin Lundy had reached the area. In fact, several of his children lived in Adams County before moving west in the late 1830s. Both his half-sister, Lydia, and his daughter married into the Wierman clan, a prominent local antislavery family. There are indications of a protection society in the area, even if it met irregularly, and through the PAS, several area residents, including Samuel Wright, William Wright’s cousin, provided legal aid to slaves and free blacks.

While their progress was fitful and slow, Pennsylvania’s abolition acts allowed white Pennsylvanians to avoid identifying with an institution increasingly perceived as brutal and oppressive. Consequently, an opportunity was created for greater animosity.


towards slavery and the South to grow. In the 1830s, the abolitionists achieved hard-fought gains, and the fact they were able to publicly criticize slavery at all in this border area was an accomplishment, but the degree of resistance they faced forced them to alter tactics and lessen their visibility. By the mid-1840s, the result was a new legal strategy, more confrontational than simply representing slaves in “freedom suits,” but that was markedly different from Garrisonian-style mass organization.

It should not be surprising that tensions over slavery and the fugitive slave erupted in south central Pennsylvania in the 1830s – it was a turbulent decade throughout the United States, as Jacksonian populism merged with racism and ethnic and class resentments. South central Pennsylvania experienced tumult on various levels, from unrest concerning Irish laborers working on the railroad to a bitter theological dispute in Carlisle which resulted Dickinson College collapsing as a Presbyterian institution and being reorganized as a Methodist one.19 Turbulent environments are made for politicians who can capitalize on them. One of the best at doing so was Thaddeus Stevens.

**Thaddeus Stevens’ Dilemma & Antislavery Organizations in South Central Pennsylvania**

In the mid-1830s, Thaddeus Stevens faced a dilemma: what to do next. A political dynamo, he had ascended to prominence in Pennsylvania on the strength of his energetic leadership of the Antimasonic party. As a national movement, Antimasonry had collapsed after its candidate for President, William Wirt, carried only Vermont in 1832. Largely because of Stevens’ influence, however, it persisted as the primary

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political movement opposed to the Democratic party in Pennsylvania from 1829 to 1834. After 1834, it had to share the opposition stage with the emerging Whig party.

Thaddeus Stevens was the driving force behind Antimasonry in Pennsylvania, but he was also the movement’s chief lightning rod. In 1831, he gave an incendiary speech in Hagerstown, Maryland, one of several instances when he accused Masons of drinking blood from human skulls. No sooner had Stevens arrived in the state legislature in 1834 than he began a controversial investigation of Freemasonry.

Stevens held other controversial positions as well. While in the legislature, Stevens championed public schooling; many taxpayers did not want to pay for the education of others, and, in his own county Pennsylvania Germans feared efforts to Americanize their students through the public schools. They applauded the state aid Stevens brought to Gettysburg’s Lutheran college and seminary, however. Stevens, who owned large amounts of real estate as well as the controlling interest in two iron furnaces, also backed measures to increase internal development and manufacturing, and promoted the Wrightsville, York and Gettysburg Railroad. His interest in Pennsylvania’s industrial development would ease his later reluctant move to the Whig Party. Despite this variety of political interests, in the mid-1830s, Stevens was still better known for his contentious Antimasonry than anything else.20

The bruising fight over the school bill notwithstanding, Stevens’ star continued to rise in the Antimasonic movement and in state government. In 1835, Pennsylvania’s Democratic party had split over the national bank, the desirability of a state constitutional convention, and over Democratic Governor George Wolf’s support of the school law.

20 Current, Old Thad Stevens, p. 19; Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 34-41.
This created a rare opportunity for the anti-Jacksonians. Pennsylvania was traditionally Democratic state – in fact, the leading political history of its early national period called it the “Keystone of the Democratic Arch” – but the possibility of victory led to a coalition between the Antimasons and the new Whig party. Jacob Ritner, a Pennsylvania German who had been Speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, was the fusion candidate. Stevens campaigned heavily for Ritner, and in October, he was rewarded not only with his own reelection, but also the election of Ritner and sufficient Whigs and Antimasons to hold the majority in the assembly.21

These victories enabled Stevens to launch an even larger investigation into Freemasonry. Chairing a special committee which armed him with subpoena powers, he summoned numerous Democratic luminaries, including former Governor Wolf (1829-1835), and George Dallas, a future U.S. vice president (1845-1849). All refused to testify. Stevens’ heavy-handed tactics backfired when the House refused to compel their testimony. The investigation also disrupted the fusion of the Whigs and Antimasons, as it hurt relations between Stevens and those Whigs who were Freemasons.22

Despite this reverse, Stevens’ successful efforts to have the Bank of the United States in Philadelphia rechartered, however, confirmed that he was a leading politician in Pennsylvania, a state with a lot of political talent in this period. When he tried to move to a larger stage, though, he was rebuffed. Suggestions that Thaddeus Stevens should be the Antimasonic candidate for president, or, in 1836, a possible Whig vice presidential candidate, never came to fruition. That same year, he tried to persuade William Henry

22 Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 42-43.
Harrison that the Antimasons, not the Whigs, should be his key electoral ally in Pennsylvania. When his advice was ignored, an angry Stevens led a splinter group of Antimasons away from cooperation with the Whigs.23

As the 1835 fusion efforts had shown, and the divisions which occurred afterwards reinforced, Antimasonry in Pennsylvania, despite Stevens’ drive and political abilities, was unable to sustain a viable party. Stevens was safe for the time being, because he had a strong political base. He came from a region where many religious sects opposed the oath taking, a significant part of Masonic ceremonies. Nationally, though, the movement had waned rapidly. In Pennsylvania, Stevens’ investigation drove away moderate and Whig support and contributed significantly to its eventual collapse.24

With Antimasonry dwindling, what were Stevens’ political options? He could not join the Democratic party. Even if he had not tried to investigate their leaders, to him they represented the aristocracy and the old guard. The Democratic Party had ruled Pennsylvania since the election of Jefferson in 1800, and the popular presidency of Andrew Jackson had cemented their hold.25 While the Jacksonian Democracy broadened the suffrage and cast itself as the party of the people, in Pennsylvania, because of their long tenure in power, the Democrats also represented the elite that Stevens hated – the lawyers who kept him from taking the bar in York, for example.26

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23 Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 45-46. On the vice presidential nomination, see also “Thaddeus Stevens Esq.,” Gettysburg Star and Republican Banner, October 19, 1835, p 3 c. 2.
24 Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 57.
26 In his study of Vermont, Hal Barron has a useful discussion of Anti-Masonry as a rural movement against the local elites who were Jeffersonian Republican-Democrats. He describes the movement as “an attack on local privilege and a home-grown aristocracy centered in the village instead of the countryside,” Hal S. Barron, Those who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth Century New England (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 23-5, 134.
Stevens’ distaste for the Democrats was reinforced by his running battle with Jacob Lefever, the editor of the Gettysburg Republican Compiler (short name: Compiler), the Democratic newspaper in Adams County. In the 1820s, Lefever printed several anonymous letters which suggested that Stevens had murdered a young, visibly pregnant black woman to cover up his affair with her. Stevens’ responses to Lefever was no less heated, and he sued Lefever for libel. Still, Stevens was not unwilling to set aside a long-standing rivalry in the interests of political gain, and his animosity towards the Democrats underwent a brief thaw. In 1836, angered at the collapse of the Whig-Antimason legislative alliance and the Whigs’ refusal to back Stevens’ favored presidential candidate, Daniel Webster, he argued that while honest Democrats could become good Antimasons, Whigs could never do so. In reality, however, both temperamentally and practically, there was no way for Stevens to become a Democrat.27

The other major party in Pennsylvania politics was the Whigs, who in the mid-1830s coalesced opposition to Andrew Jackson and the Democrats. In many ways, the Whigs were the successor to the old Federalist party. Since they supported Henry Clay’s “American System” of internal improvements and so attracted wealthy merchants and budding industrialists, it could be argued that they represented elitism and privilege even more than the Democratic Party. Stevens, however, believed deeply in the necessity of internal improvements, especially for south central Pennsylvania, isolated from the eastern Pennsylvania economy. Pragmatically, Whig support would also be useful to Stevens as he sought appropriations for railroads to his iron works, or money for the college in Gettysburg. Stevens was also a firm supporter of the national bank, which

27 Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 35-44; Harrisburg Chronicle, March 14, 1836, cited by Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 46. See also Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 253, fn. 35.
Whigs also favored. Stevens ultimately, if reluctantly, chose to become a Whig in the 1840s.

In the 1830s, though, Stevens did not want to become either a Democrat or a Whig. Instead, he hoped for another mass movement, a popular cause like Antimasonry. Where would such a cause come from? In February 1830, he had been elected a manager of the Temperance Society in Gettysburg, and for some time played an energetic role in the temperance movement in Adams County. He told others that he had “taken the pledge” not to drink alcoholic beverages, and it does appear that he drank very little the last half of his life. Stevens took his commitment to temperance seriously, and even in 1836 and 1837, when he began his move to a political antislavery stance, temperance often occupied a more prominent part of the *Star and Republican Banner* than anti-slavery. Politically, however, temperance was not sufficient to inspire a successful electoral movement in Pennsylvania, especially not in a county with a heavily German population. In addition, some of Stevens’ political rivals – like Robert G. Harper, the editor of the local Whig newspaper, the *Adams Sentinel* – were also prominently involved in the temperance movement. This was not a cause to which Stevens could claim clear-cut leadership, even in his own county.28

Another promising cause for generating political momentum was the colonization movement. Colonizationists promoted solving Pennsylvania’s “problem” of poor free blacks by shipping as many of them as they could to West Africa or other destinations. The colonization movement appealed to lofty aspirations in pursuing its goal of an all-white America, through dreams of exiled Pennsylvania free blacks christianizing Africa.

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The American Colonization Society had been founded in 1816, and counted some of the country’s leading statesmen as adherents, including James Monroe, James Madison, John Randolph, Francis Scott Key, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster. Colonizationism was particularly popular in the southern Pennsylvania counties, where both fugitive slaves and recently manumitted African Americans swelled the native African American population already present due to Pennsylvania’s own legacy of slavery. In fact, as the decades of the 1820s and 1830s progressed, local and state legislation became more restrictive against Pennsylvania’s African American population. For example, regulations were issued prohibiting African Americans from drinking in taverns or staying at inns; in the past, such policies had not been spelled out, allowing for exceptions. Now, some cities, like Lancaster, required African Americans to register in the “Negro Entry Book” when they reached the city. Harrisburg did the same. According to historian Peter Vermilyea, Gettysburg never adopted such restrictions in its legal code, but whether that border town had a markedly different stance towards African Americans is unclear.29

These laws reflected a long-standing belief in the superiority of white Americans and a need to control the African American population. In the 1830s and beyond, these views were gaining academic backing. Scientific racialism, the conviction that science itself proved a “natural inequality” of the races, contributed significantly. James Kirke Paulding, an ardent Northern supporter of Jackson and Van Buren, was one early proponent who wrote a defense of Southern slavery based on scientific principles. Samuel Morton, the renowned founder of the American School of Ethnography, 

measured the skulls of Caucasians, African Americans, and Native Americans in an effort to prove the superiority of the white race. Morton was based in Philadelphia, which because of its size, wealth, and location in a border state was a major cultural influence in both North and South. In the 1830s and 1840s, Morton’s purportedly leading edge scientific research disseminated into the mostly rural areas of southern Pennsylvania, through newspapers and traveling “moral lecturers.” These lecturers often sought to prove the inequality of African Americans; one advertisement promised attendees that they would see “real live negroes” stuck with pins. Crude racial stereotypes were also presented through minstrel shows that traveled to Pennsylvania’s cities and towns.30

The colonization society tried to appropriate Independence Day to clothe its efforts in patriotism. Ministers were asked to preach pro-colonization sermons to their congregations on or near that day, and churches took up collections; one Franklin County church took up a collection for the American Colonization Society as late as 1849. Some area newspapers also printed articles supporting colonization every Fourth of July. For example, on July 4, 1837, the Harrisburg Keystone, a Democratic newspaper, ran an account of the British capturing two horribly overcrowded slaving vessels off of the coast of Africa. Rather than use such scenes to condemn slavery, as antislavery publications often did, this paper asked who “can hereafter refuse to lend his aid … to the colonization society, which … will in a few years put an entire stop to this hellish slave trade, and spread the lights of colonization and religion over Africa.” The paper argued that this

would do more to help African Americans than “the emancipation of all of the slaves on our continent.”

For many, colonization seemed to be the progressive solution to the problem of a supposedly unassimilable minority population. A number of leading educators in south central Pennsylvania favored the movement. Samuel S. Schmucker was the first president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, a founding faculty member of Gettysburg College, and a leading force in the drive to create a Lutheranism tailored to America. His works would be widely read, especially among German Lutherans in the border regions of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. Schmucker himself would change from a proponent of colonization to an important border voice opposing slavery.

Schmucker attended a colonization meeting in 1835 and offered a prayer on behalf of the movement. Just two years later, however, he was telling Daniel Alexander Payne, an African American student, that the members of the College’s Society for Inquiry on Missions were “not colonizationists, but abolitionists.” Other faculty, such as Henry Baugher, supported colonization. In fact, both Schmucker and Baugher attended a meeting of the Young Men’s Colonization Society in Gettysburg in 1835, and Schmucker subscribed both himself and the college to the African Repository, the

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33 “Colonization Meeting,” Star and Republican Banner, July 27, 1835, p. 2 c. 6; the same piece was also printed in The People’s Press (Gettysburg), August 31, 1835 p. 3 c. 3. Daniel Alexander Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years (Nashville, 1888), pp. 57-58, available at Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/payne70/menu.html.
American Colonization Society’s journal. Schmucker was nominated to be a vice president of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society (PCS) in 1838, although not elected. He did also serve as a PCS vice president from 1860 until his death in 1873.  

This academic interest in colonization was regional. In Marshall College in Mercersburg, a student, Theodore Appel, wrote an essay in 1841 for professor John Williamson Nevin, a leader in the irenic Mercersburg theology. Appel, who would later become president of Franklin and Marshall College, wrote a speculative essay entitled “Our Country in Years to Come.” As he tried to predict the country’s future, he reflected the values of much of the area when he wrote:

The traveler inquires into the history of the colored man, about whom so [much] debate has been raised by the Abolitionist, the Colonization-man and the Planter of the present day…. Their chains at last fell. The sea covered with sail with every wind bound up that which bore them to Ethiopia, to favor so noble an undertaking carried them on its billows to the land of their ancestors, where they have been formed into a kingdom, and are beginning to act the part on the stage of human existence, which destiny pointed out to them.

So Appel wrote in his first draft; then, upon reflection, he made an insertion to change it to “the sea… carried a part of them on its billows,” and added a concluding sentence, “The other part of the colored race remain with us, independent and free.” The emphasis, however, was on successful colonization.

Even some of the area’s leading Underground Railroad workers did not oppose colonization. In 1835, after rioting had rocked their community, Deborah Wright of

34 “Letter from Prof. Reynolds,” Liberator, December 24, 1836, p. 2 c. 4; African Repository subscription lists, ACS Papers, Series V, v. 44, Reel 298. Minutes of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society (PCS), January 2, 1838 to December 11, 1849; Minutes of the PCS, 1856-1864, and Minutes of the PCS, 1864-1877, Papers of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, Special Collections, Lincoln University. Schmucker’s name does not appear on the list of “Names and Residences of Members” for 1857-58, 1858-59, 1860-61, 1861-62.
Columbia wrote to her nephew describing how she had recently discouraged antislavery lecturers from visiting their area. Deborah and her husband, also named William Wright, were highly significant figures in the southern Pennsylvania underground railroad. They reputedly helped hundreds of fugitive slaves escape during the antebellum decades, putting their lives and property at risk. In her letter, Wright explained that as a Quaker, she preferred to work for change silently and unobtrusively. She believed that both the abolition and colonization societies were working towards the same ends, and praised the recent return of an African prince to West Africa as a noble act that could not be criticized by even the staunchest abolitionist.36

With this broad base of appeal, supporting colonization could bring political dividends, and Stevens carried on an extensive flirtation with this movement, as he did with temperance. Several historians have noted the prominent role Stevens played in a colonization meeting in Gettysburg in 1835, but if the pages of the Star and Republican Banner are any indication, his interest in colonization began well before that and continued a number of years after.37

Stevens’ relationship to the paper was a complicated one, but he was widely regarded as “the power behind the journal.” During a local political dispute, Stevens had denied owning or controlling the Star and Banner, but in truth, he was one of the principal early investors, and likely exercised a controlling interest.38

37 “Colonization Meeting,” Star and Republican Banner, July 27, 1835, p. 2 c. 6; the same piece was also printed in The People’s Press (Gettysburg), August 31, 1835, p. 3 c. 3. Current, Old Thad Stevens, p. 33.
38 The paper itself was sensitive about Stevens’ role. Stevens’ handpicked editor Robert W. Middleton had to defend it from charges that he was only the printer for Stevens’ views. Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 27-28; Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 39.
As early as 1832, Middleton – and most likely Stevens – seemed quite interested in colonization, publishing material that supported the Pennsylvania Colonization Society or lauded progress in the colony being established for African Americans in Liberia. On December 4, 1832, the editor took the unusual step of highlighting an item he was reprinting from the *Baltimore Gazette*, recounting the efforts of the American Colonization Society to raise funds and collect Bibles. After a special printer’s mark, Middleton wrote: “We call the attention of the public to the following article. Cannot the citizens of Gettysburg and vicinity aid in colonizing the sons and daughters of Africa?”

In that same year, Middleton mentioned a petition to the state legislature from residents of Adams and Franklin counties, urging that the migration of African Americans to Pennsylvania be restricted.

On the first day of the next year, Middleton ran a prominent article based on an account of the departure of African Americans for Liberia, extracted from the pages of the *African Repository*, the journal of the American Colonization Society. Middleton wrote of the philanthropists who were financing the voyage, “God speed them in this Godlike enterprise. God speed them to make a freeman of the slave and a citizen of the freeman, and to send him back to the shores of his own radiant and verdurous soil.”

At the same time that the *Star* was advocating colonization, the first indications emerged that a firmer position against slavery might ultimately be consistent with

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Stevens’ Antimasonic positions. In 1832, Stevens was still locked in a bitter battle with Jacob Lefever, the *Compiler*’s editor, and the *Star* makes the first overt attempts to link Masonry with slavery. Middleton republished from elsewhere comments that Masons, being bound by oaths, were not free agents and were the same as slaves – except that slaves were freer than Masons, because their bondage was only physical, not volitional.42

Stevens’ support of colonization does not necessarily mean that he was racist or favored the elimination of African Americans from America, although a number of the movement’s supporters were and did. A few colonizationists were sincerely seeking to end slavery as quickly as possible, but their efforts often played into the hands of those interested in supporting Southern and anti-black positions. Leading Democrats often supported the colonization movement, as did Southern planters. Often, the motives of these colonizationists were more overtly racist and less humanitarian. One of the first pro-colonization petitions sent to the Pennsylvania legislature in 1827 makes this clear. This document listed a long litany of alleged African American misdeeds, including their disproportionate representation in jails and mental institutions. Believing that climate and constitution made African Americans unsuited for the North American continent, the petition urged support of the American Colonization Society (ACS), which was founded in 1816, but came to prominence during the Missouri controversy.43

Throughout the 1820s, the colonization movement was largely unchallenged as it portrayed itself as possessing the solution to America’s race problem. During the early 1830s, however, a new movement, begun in the offices of Lundy’s newspaper in

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43 “To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives…” [For aid to persons of color, to go to Liberia], H. R. January 18, 1828, House File 1827-28, Folder 2, RG-7, Pennsylvania State Archives.
Baltimore, was coming to the fore. William Lloyd Garrison, Lundy’s assistant editor, had been persuaded by African Americans in Baltimore that colonization was simply a tool to eliminate free blacks, who wanted equality in the United States instead.44

Not only did Garrison advocate immediate abolition and equality, but he leveled a vituperative attack on the American Colonization Society, making that movement very controversial. His caustic *Thoughts on African Colonization* (1832), based largely on the writings, speeches, and critiques of black abolitionists, circulated widely. Donations to the ACS declined precipitously, the society felt compelled to indicate that it was not an anti-slavery organization, and many Northerners began to distance themselves from the increasingly beleaguered movement.45

In response to these criticisms and the resulting potential loss of constituency, colonizationists struck back, with mobs destroying abolitionist presses, intimidating editors, and shouting down abolitionist lecturers. Leonard Richards’ study of the anti-abolition mobs of the 1830s showed that they were generally made up of laborers, often immigrants, led by prominent political and business figures — “gentlemen of property and standing.” In border areas, these local elites would have the most to lose if abolitionism caused a rupture with customers and kin in southern states; often, they were Democrats.46

A series of race riots with the characteristics described by Oblinger ravaged Columbia, Pennsylvania in 1835. This Susquehanna River town was a haven for African Americans because of the availability of work and the presence of a prospering free black community, including several successful African American entrepreneurs. The growing

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44 Mayer, *All on Fire*, pp. 80-81.
African American population was flexing political muscle and, under the sponsorship of wealthy black businessman Stephen Smith, began voting and to move into areas of the city where white workers lived. The riots devastated the African American section of town and specifically targeted prominent African American figures such as William Whipper. It was these riots which cowed area opponents of slavery and caused Deborah Wright to affirm that colonization was a reasonable solution to the area’s racial issues. Anti-abolition and anti-African American rioting also struck Philadelphia several times in the 1830s and 1840s.\(^\text{47}\)

The controversy that Garrison provoked over the American Colonization Society, and the society’s corresponding financial problems, caused many state colonization organizations to be founded or revived. These often were controlled by Northern state leaders free from any stigma of cooperation with Southern slaveholders. Pennsylvania was no exception. The Pennsylvania Colonization Society (PCS) was founded in 1826, incorporated in 1830, and soon gained support along the border. Thaddeus Stevens played a prominent part in an 1835 Gettysburg meeting of one of the PCS’s auxiliaries, the Young Men’s Colonization Society, and agreed to serve on a committee to canvass for donations. Some of Stevens’ associates, such as Simon Schmucker and Henry Baugher of Gettysburg College, were also involved.\(^\text{48}\) The mid-1830s represented a high

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\(^{48}\) Richards, Gentlemen, 25-26; “Colonization Meeting,” Star and Republican Banner, July 27, 1835, p. 2 c. 6, and The People’s Press (Gettysburg), August 31, 1835, p. 3 c. 3. In the future, such as the “friends for the Integrity of the Union” meeting in Harrisburg in 1837, Stevens would deliberately go to a meeting whose sentiments he did not agree with to try to derail its agenda. In the absence of further evidence, though, the participation of Stevens, Schmucker, and Baugher (and their consent to serve on various committees and fund-raising drives) needs to be taken at face value. Later Schmucker would describe himself as “a very warm friend to colonization” even as he adopted an antislavery position.
water mark for colonization in Pennsylvania; the PCS was enjoying favorable publicity as a result of having established a colony in Bassa Cove, Liberia, and there were hopes that the volume of African Americans leaving Pennsylvania would increase.49

The Garrisonian assault of the early 1830s drew a sharp distinction between colonizationism and immediate abolition. Not all antislavery supporters were Garrisonian, however, and for much of the 1830s, south central Pennsylvanians did not always see a conflict between the two movements. Many individuals, Stevens likely included, would not have seen the two goals as necessarily contradictory, although certainly Garrisonian abolitionism was locked in battle with the colonizationists.

Stevens’ public support for colonizationism in July 1835 was not an isolated aberration; in this period, Stevens often supported colonization or opposed abolitionism. In September he spoke at a public meeting on slavery, attended by Whigs, Antimasons and Democrats. The meeting, based on a similar Union event in New York designed to reassure Southerners, passed resolutions condemning abolitionist agitation, asserting that slavery was not necessarily “unmoral,” and denying that there was a political or “moral right” to interfere with it. The resolutions even proclaimed that the North was ready to help suppress slave rebellions if needed.50

During the 1836-37 time frame, when antislavery lecturers supported by Stevens visited Gettysburg and the pages of the *Star* contained many antislavery items, pieces

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50 Current, *Old Thad Stevens*, p. 33. “Public Meeting (For the Star and Banner),” *Star and Republican Banner*, October 19, 1835, p. 2 c. 3-4. Stevens was sometimes crafty about meetings he attended and why, but he was also careful to correct the public record if he felt constituents were getting the wrong impression about his participation. He let this stand without comment; indeed, it appears that this was a special report that only appeared in a newspaper he was closely connected with.
favorable to colonization still appeared. In early 1836, the Star published an account of the anniversary celebration of a Pennsylvania College literary and debating society. James Keiser, of Waynesboro, Virginia, spoke in favor of colonization. The Star’s correspondent - who could have been Stevens himself, owing to his relationship to the College - wrote that Keiser spoke effectively on one of the “exciting topics” of the day. “With arguments as irresistible as the rays of truth,” the paper proclaimed, he “made the cold and quivering Abolitionist turn pale!”

If Stevens wrote those words, then his feelings evolved, for on January 2, 1837, the Star reprinted an account in which a correspondent described how he had decided not to support the Young Men’s Colonization Society but rather “immediate emancipation.” Still, the Star continued to run pieces favorable to colonization for years, even after Middleton left for Lancaster in December 1838 and was succeeded as the Star’s editor by Robert Parker.

Stevens’ public ardor for antislavery varied in the early days as well, probably based on the changing political climate. In January 1838, during the contentious constitutional convention that debated African American voting and trial by jury for fugitives, Stevens responded to a request by the American Anti-Slavery Society to meet in the Pennsylvania statehouse. He proposed that representatives of both abolitionism and colonizationism be given a hearing. He characterized both movements as “honest and respectable,” “benevolent undertakings,” and suggested that by listening to both, members of the legislature might learn much “respecting two great enterprises.”

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51 “Anniversary Celebration,” Star and Republican Banner, February 29, 1836, p. 2 c. 3.
52 “Anti-Slavery,” Star and Republican Banner (S&RB), January 2, 1837, p. 2 c. 2; American Advertiser (Philadelphia), January 29, 1838, cited by Current, p. 51. Eventually, colonizationists got to use the hall while abolitionists were prohibited, a matter of some controversy. “Just Remarks,” S&RB, February 20, 1837, p. 3 c. 2; “Disingenuous,” S&RB, March 3, 1837, p. 1 c. 6.
In the end, colonizationism was not the solution to Stevens’ political dilemma either: it did not provide him an opportunity for distinctive leadership. Regardless of where such schemes may have fit into Stevens’ evolving racial views, in Gettysburg, the colonization movement was already supported by Stevens’ political rivals, including Robert Harper and Jacob Lefever. Promoting colonization would not allow Stevens to differentiate himself, and it appears that he decided that colonization was not the answer to Pennsylvania’s race problems either.

The net effect was to leave Stevens where he had started. Although he was still a powerful figure, Anti-Masonry had collapsed nationally and was rapidly losing momentum in Pennsylvania. Temperance was not powerful enough to sustain a political mass movement, particularly in a heavily German area, and some of Stevens’ political rivals were also heavily involved in the movement. Colonizationism seemed to hold promise, because it appeared to address a concern of both border Pennsylvanians and the nation, but the colonization high ground had already been seized by hated rivals such as Jacob Lefever and the Democratic party. In addition, colonizationism was under sharp attack by William Lloyd Garrison and other abolitionists, and the movement may not have fit in with Stevens’ reputed work on behalf of fugitive slaves, and his relationships with several African American citizens of Gettysburg.

Although Stevens was unable to capitalize on temperance and colonization to rally a new mass movement, by mid-decade, a solution to his dilemma began to appear. He may have been behind its emergence from the beginning, although it appears that reform-minded constituents gave him the opportunity by starting an antislavery movement. In 1835, Stevens had supported colonizationism, and condemned
abolitionists, although he also had spoken a few sentences against slavery in September.\textsuperscript{53}

The next year, 1836, his public position began to change.

That year represented a key transitional year for Stevens and his political support of antislavery. His feelings may have changed, which was in itself an accomplishment in this border area whose geography and economy encouraged cooperation with Southerners and discouraged antislavery agitation. Alternatively, he may have recognized some shift in public opinion in the state or the North due to the rise of immediate abolitionism and the Gag Rule controversy. Both may have been true. Any aggressive position against slavery, however, was muted by the border environment in Pennsylvania and the controversy attached to antislavery positions. At first, Stevens was able to portray antislavery not as the controversial issue it was within Pennsylvania, but as part of an interstate dispute, involving the principles of freedom of discussion then seen as under concerted attack from Southern neighbors.\textsuperscript{54} At this point, the importance of his personal convictions on the subject appear at least matched by the political considerations involved. Stevens appears to be staking out a position where his support for antislavery might enable him to build a committed political base statewide.

In February 1836, Stevens had reported a bill to the legislature to prevent kidnappings of free blacks. He took a stand against slavery as well. In late 1835, the legislatures of Virginia, Kentucky, and Mississippi had reprimanded the Pennsylvania legislature because of its toleration for “abolition societies and incendiary publications.”

\textsuperscript{53} Current, \textit{Old Thad Stevens}, p. 33; Trefousse, \textit{Thaddeus Stevens}, p. 46-47.

\textsuperscript{54} During the months preceding this report, the \textit{Star} had defended Pennsylvania’s “states rights” several times; these items were related to the perception that Southern states were trying to dictate policy to the Commonwealth. “The Slave Question,” \textit{Star and Republican Banner}, June 6, 1836, p. 2 c. 1. “Great Celebration – Huzza for Pennsylvania,” \textit{Star and Republican Banner}, March 14, 1836, p. 2 c. 2, “Pennsylvania,” \textit{Star and Republican Banner}, March 21, 1836, p. 3 c. 3.
Stevens drafted a committee report emphatically upholding freedom of opinion and denying the right of Southern legislatures to dictate to Pennsylvanians on these issues. The report, issued on May 30, 1836, granted that the slave holding states alone had the right to regulate slavery within their boundaries, but asserted not only that Congress had the constitutional power, but also that “it is expedient” to abolish both slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia. This was a highly controversial position during the Congressional battle over the Gag Rule and antislavery petitioning asking for abolition in D.C.  

Thaddeus Stevens was not the only Adams County resident to begin staking out an antislavery position in 1836. In July, a number of county residents picnicked near James MacAllister’s mill, southeast of Gettysburg. The flatland next to the Rock Creek was the traditional recreation spot for Gettysburg residents. This group gathered on the sixtieth anniversary of the nation’s independence to discuss antislavery reform. This was not the first antislavery society in the area – in addition to the sparsely documented meetings in Gettysburg in the 1820s, there was an antislavery society in Carlisle, made up entirely of African Americans until seminary student J. Miller McKim joined it in 1832.  

Those organizations, however, had made little public impact; this one generated sizable early controversy and publicity. At McAllister’s mill, these antislavery activists defined their key principles. They were concerned about the continued presence of slavery in the nation. They believed that slavery was supposed to have been gradually extinguished as the revolutionary light of liberty progressed; they considered the failure to do so a scandal. They believed that the federal government had the constitutional authority to abolish slavery.  

to reach that end as a betrayal of the founders. They passed various resolutions, including calling for emancipation in the District of Columbia, affirming the right of free discussion, pledging vigilant prosecution of kidnappers of free blacks, and boldly declaring that all races were “of one blood.” Perhaps most radically, they maintained that the fugitive slave clause of the Constitution directly conflicted with Mosaic law in Scripture. This was based on the book of Deuteronomy which states, “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… Thou shalt not oppress him.” (Deut. 23:15-16).57 This is the first reference to this idea we find in the region, but it became an important trope, with the same Scripture later appearing in newspapers and even a sermon of Samuel S. Schmucker in 1846.

That there was a political undercurrent to this first meeting is reflected by the fact that this group met on the 4th of July. More overt partisanship is shown by their motion to only publish an account of this meeting in the Star and Robert Harper’s Sentinel (Whig), because these, and not the Democratic Compiler, were the papers which the abolitionists denominated the “free papers of this county.” At the Star, Middleton supported the communicated article by highlighting the emphasis on the rights of free discussion, as well the right of Congress to abolish slavery where it could. He also decried the emerging use of mobs to stifle abolitionist activity. Then, perhaps hinting at

57 “Freedom vs. Slavery,” Star and Republican Banner, July 11, 1836, p. 2, c. 5-6. The very fact that the Adams County organization was more controversial than its predecessors and some sister organizations indicates that public opinion on concessions on the slavery issue was shifting in the North. It also may indicate that some forms of antislavery had more support in Adams than Cumberland and Franklin.
one of Stevens’ motivations, Middleton predicted that “a few brief months will see the
ANTI-SLAVERY PARTY control every free State in the Union.”

The Adams County abolitionists met again in September at Two Taverns, a stop on the Gettysburg road from Littlestown. This time it was September 17, “Constitution Day,” the anniversary of that document’s ratification. They passed more resolutions. The first two related to “free discussion” and may show the hidden influence of Stevens; free discussion was a clarion call of the Anti-Masons against Masons who bound their adherents with oaths and who had silenced Edward Morgan by death. It was also a potent rallying cry for evangelical Christians; a restriction on that right might ultimately limit their ability to evangelize. The antislavery society decided to correspond with other abolitionists in Adams County and to send letters to each of the candidates standing for Congress from Adams County, to determine their position on slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia. This practice, called “interrogation,” became a common abolitionist tactic in the 1837-38 time period. The interrogation tactic was not new – British abolitionists had used it, and Boston labor organizers employed it in 1833 to identify political candidates friendly to education for labor. What was new was its application by U.S. antislavery groups. In south central Pennsylvania, Adams County abolitionists were using this tactic in 1836, before the American Antislavery Society endorsed it the next year. It is unlikely that the Adams County society originated the tactic, but they were influential, as the correspondence was published by a leading...

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58 “Anti-Slavery,” “Mobism,” and “Anti-Slavery Meeting at McAllister’s,” Star and Republican Banner, July 11, 1836. Middleton’s unfamiliarity with abolitionist rhetoric was reflected by his misspelling the epithet for pliable Northern politicians as “doe faces” rather than “dough faces.”
regional antislavery newspaper, a practice which soon became standard for antislavery societies.60

The response of the committee of correspondence may show a hidden political agenda at work. When the anti-slavery society’s committee of correspondence received replies from the two candidates, James McSherry (Whig), and Daniel Sheffer (Democrat), both sought the abolitionist vote, offered evidence of antislavery commitment, and pledged to work toward future antislavery goals. Each candidate had been asked whether they believed that Congress had the power to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and whether they would work to achieve that end “regardless of all threats to dissolve the Union.” As evidence of his commitment, McSherry cited his support of Stevens’ report in response to the resolutions of the Virginia legislature. Sheffer, however, could point towards having signed a petition relating to slavery last winter, and he promised to vote for abolition of slavery and the slave trade at every opportunity.61

If the society had been politically nonpartisan, a logical course might have been to endorse both candidates or to have refrained from making an endorsement. Instead, while commenting that neither candidates’ response was wholly satisfactory, they decided that McSherry’s remarks were sufficient and endorsed him. In this case politics

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60 “Anti-Slavery Meeting,” Star and Republican Banner, September 26, 1836, p. 1 c. 5. Richard H. Sewell, Ballots for Freedom (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), pp. 12-13 indicates that the interrogation tactic started in 1837, and Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, The Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 147, includes it in his chapter discussing 1838 (when it was used in New York’s gubernatorial campaign to ask candidates if they would support jury trials for fugitive slaves). Barnes also describes the practice of printing the correspondence in the papers. Adams County’s 1836 use of the tactic predates any of the examples mentioned in these two works. “To this Complexion it Must Come, “National Enquirer, December 24, 1836, p. 62 c. 4-5.

61 “Correspondence…,” Star and Republican Banner, October 3, 1836, p. 2 c. 3. This may be because the Opposition was unusually strong in this area, and Sheffer was trying to broaden his support beyond the traditional Democratic coalition. Sheffer was not a recent convert, although he did not mention in his correspondence that he had also signed the same 1828 antislavery petition as Joel and William Wierman. See Appendix B.
may have been thicker than blood. James McSherry was a Whig and a protégé of Thaddeus Stevens which may have had more weight than the fact that Sheffer was related to the Wiermans, a prominent area abolitionist family.\textsuperscript{62}

By employing tactics such as interrogation, the Adams County antislavery society adopted political tactics from its inception. Other antislavery societies in the region were encouraged to follow its lead. This correspondence was later reprinted by the Benjamin Lundy’s \textit{National Enquirer}, a Philadelphia journal with significant regional and even national scope. As the republication was in December, after the election, it could not have been intended to sway the votes of the paper’s readership. Instead, it was probably intended to be an example for other antislavery societies to use the interrogation technique in future campaigns, and indeed, the tactic was widely used by abolitionists for the next several years, although it is not clear that the Adams County example was the cause.\textsuperscript{63}

The public appearance of a new antislavery society largely coincided with the \textit{Star} adopting a new perspective on antislavery. By November 1836, the paper was publishing a notice for the convention to form the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, and commenting that Gerrit Smith, \textit{“once the active patron of Colonization,”} had been elected president of the influential New York Anti-Slavery Society. Four years earlier it had called for a colonization society to be started in Adams County; now it asked, \textit{“Can there not be an Anti-Slavery Society formed in Adams County?”}\textsuperscript{64} Several years previously, the paper had suggested links between Masonry and slavery. Now it returned

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\textsuperscript{64} “Anti-Slavery,” \textit{Star and Republican Banner}, November 14, 1836, p. 3 c. 2.
\end{flushleft}
to the issue again, for the first time linking antislavery and Anti-Masonry, through the principle of “Free Discussion,” currently being highlighted by the Gag Rule controversy. “Take this right away,” the paper warned, “and the press is powerless – the people are slaves.” Later that month, Middleton continued the offensive by actually urging attendance at the upcoming antislavery meeting. He echoed abolitionist concerns that Northerners could be summoned to quell a slave insurrection, and critiqued the Three-Fifths compromise, urging readers to remember that for “all our boasted republicanism,” “we live under laws which are made in part, by slaves,” and by an unduly powerful slaveholding aristocracy.

This type of language raised emotions to a new level of intensity when the Two Taverns abolitionists met in Gettysburg in December. The town was not like the rural, eastern areas of Adams County, where Quaker influence was strong. The county seat was filled with merchants, businessmen, and lawyers who depended on custom from the southern states, especially Maryland and the Shenandoah Valley. With Gettysburg a stop at the junction of several major turnpikes, there was a ready market for carriages and the associated industries of carriage repairs, saddle making, harness repair, and livery stables. Controversy over slavery could drive away Southern customers. Particularly threatening would be an organized body in town, which might be seen as representing town sentiment, passing antislavery resolutions. That the Two Taverns group tried to establish its meeting in Gettysburg represented a bold move, certain to face resistance.

65 “Anti-Slavery,” Star and Republican Banner, November 21, 1836, p. 2 c.4.
66 “Anti-Slavery,” Star and Republican Banner, November 28, 1836, p. 2 c. 3.
It would be a largely unsuccessful move as well; with the call published in the local papers, the December 3, 1836 meeting was packed with opponents of antislavery. James McAllister, a wealthy citizen whose mill helped hide fugitive slaves, chaired the meeting, and Professor William Reynolds of Pennsylvania College made a speech which one unsympathetic spectator deemed to hold that “slavery was an evil and slave holders evil men.” When Reynolds moved for an Anti-Slavery Society to be organized, the opposition struck. Methodist minister Richard Bond, who had recently moved to the area from Maryland, took the floor and outlined alternate resolutions. These criticized abolitionism and deemed it “inexpedient and improper” to interfere with slavery in the Southern states. Significantly, however, even these watered-down resolutions called for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and a ban on the admission of new slave states. The new resolutions were supported by Daniel Smyser and James Cooper, both protégés of Stevens. They were opposed by Reynolds, Charles X. Martin, and apparently almost no one else except “a negro named Payne.”

“Payne” was Daniel Alexander Payne, a student at the Lutheran Seminary who would become a leading figure in the Washington, D. C. antislavery community in the 1840s. Eventually, he rose to be a prominent bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal church. At the moment, however, he was nearly anonymous to this local Gettysburg writer. Probably he was the only African American in the room; as a native of South Carolina, he certainly had more firsthand knowledge of slavery than anyone else there.

The dueling sets of resolutions reflected the deep split and emotions over the antislavery issue in this border Pennsylvania town less than ten miles from Mason-Dixon

68 For the Compiler” by “A Spectator,” Republican Compiler, December 20, 1836, p. 3 c. 2; Payne, Seventy Years, p. 58n.
69 Stanley Harrold, Subversives, pp. 40-41. Payne, Seventy Years, pp. 74-75.
According to one abolitionist observer, “a very animated, almost violent discussion took place” over the proposals. After much debate, Bond’s resolutions passed “by an overwhelming majority.” When the hijacked meeting attempted to appoint delegates to an important upcoming antislavery conference in Harrisburg the meeting chair, James McAllister, tried to stop the meeting and derided the opposition as “pro-slavery men.” The antislavery advocates decamped and reconvened nearby to hold a rump meeting, where they passed resolutions of their own, proclaiming that all races were of one blood, all men were created equal, and “immediate emancipation was the right of every Slave, and the duty of every slaveholder.” Robert Middleton, acting as the organization’s secretary, recorded the resolutions. Meanwhile, at the original meeting site, James Cooper, a Gettysburg lawyer and eventual U.S. Senator, was elected chair. Despite receiving training from Thaddeus Stevens, Cooper’s true inspiration was Henry Clay. Cooper had been born in Maryland and spent his political career, like Clay, trying to find the center on the slavery issue. Under his direction, delegates to the Harrisburg convention were selected, and they reportedly would demand admission to the convention or, in a dig at Stevens, they would decry the abridgement of their rights of free discussion. The anti-abolition “spectator” later charged in Gettysburg’s Democratic press that Reynolds’ intended purpose was to promote “amalgamation… but the people of this county are too intelligent to be caught in such a snare, more especially after they have witnessed the practical effects of his system as exhibited in the speech of his negro coadjutor [Payne].”

Leonard Richards has shown how whispers of amalgamation and miscegenation were vital fodder for the opponents of abolitionism in 1830s, voiced in hopes of stirring up a strong and visceral reaction in the white populace. As for the abolitionist observer, he would hint at his dissatisfaction with the man many believed would be Gettysburg’s emerging antislavery champion: “It was expected that Mr. Stevens would have been present to advocate the cause of the Abolitionists; but business unfortunately compelled him to be absent.” 71 That members of an ostensibly grassroots reform group would be irritated at the nonattendance of one of the area’s leading political figures speaks volumes about the political subtext behind the organization, and Stevens’ likely hand in it.

The attempt to establish an antislavery society in Gettysburg had been daring, but had largely failed. Still, the fact that even abolition opponents would pass resolutions urging restrictions on slavery in the District of Columbia and in the territories indicates a strong underlying opposition to slavery’s expansion. Adams County’s abolitionists were not completely daunted. In January, they gathered in York Springs, the second largest town in Adams County. York Springs was closer to the borders of York and Cumberland Counties than it was to Gettysburg (three, five, and fifteen miles respectively). This distance allowed it to serve as an alternative cultural and economic center for rural residents of the eastern part of the county. It was close to the Menallen meeting of the county’s Quakers, and while York Springs was a resort patronized by Southern visitors in the summer, it did not have as extensive a carriage trade as Gettysburg.

In this rural town, the antislavery society heard an address from C. C. Burleigh, one of the antislavery lecturers of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Burleigh was a

striking, controversial figure, with a long, flowing white beard in an age when most men kept their hair short. According to Ira Brown, who has written about Burleigh’s lecturing activities, the lawyer’s typical stump speeches would have included references to fugitive slaves; in one of them, Burleigh would make the point that each fugitive gave lie to the Southern claim that slaves were happy. In a portent of what was to come, opponents of abolition attended this meeting also, apparently determined to best Burleigh in debate. A female observer, probably an abolitionist, stated that Burleigh’s arguments were overwhelming, and that, for the most part, were not opposed openly. Still, the fact that antislavery opponents showed up in York Springs, just a couple of miles from Adams County’s Quaker meeting house, shows the strength of the opposition. The society determined to meet again in Gettysburg in March.72

If he was following these events in Adams County from Harrisburg, and he almost certainly was, the controversy did not deter Thaddeus Stevens. In December 1836, Governor Ritner had given the annual gubernatorial state of the commonwealth address. Within this speech, he decried the loss of state’s rights, and the “subserviency of Pennsylvania to the general Government.” Of the collapse of the traditional Pennsylvania policy of independence, Ritner maintained that “worst of all, [was] the base bowing of the knee to the dark spirit of Slavery.” The governor stated that Pennsylvania’s own abolition of slavery, its 1819 pledge to oppose admission of new slave states into the Union, and its opposition to slavery in the District of Columbia were “cherished doctrines of our State.” He concluded by defending free discussion, and

argued that if one section were to impose limitations on free speech on another, “union becomes subjection.” The speech was well-received in northern abolitionist circles and John Greenleaf Whittier even wrote a poem in Ritner’s honor. It was widely believed that Ritner’s close political advisor Thaddeus Stevens had written this part of the governor’s speech. In Gettysburg, the Star celebrated the message and emphasized the antislavery portions.73

It was in this atmosphere, with antislavery ferment peaking in both Harrisburg and Gettysburg, that a young Vermont minister named Jonathan Blanchard visited Stevens and appealed both to his opposition to slavery and to his political ambition. Blanchard explained to Stevens that his mission was to travel on behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), rallying support for the antislavery cause throughout southern Pennsylvania. He challenged Stevens to build a political organization based on antislavery, not Antimasonry, because the slaveholders would defend the institution and not deny their involvement, as so many suspected Freemasons had. Writing thirty years later, he claimed to have appealed to Stevens’ political ambitions: “If you can turn your Anti-masons into abolitionists, you will have a party whose politics will not bleach out. The Slaveholders will not ‘possum like the Freemasons, but will die game.”74

73 Republican Compiler, December 20, 1836, p. 1 c. 4. Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 64; Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 49; “Governor Ritner’s Message” and “The Governor’s Message,” Star and Republican Banner, December 19, 1836, p. 2 c. 1 and p. 3 c. 1.
74 Blanchard in The Christian Cynosure, September 22, 1868, December 29, 1868, and April 5, 1883, cited by Current, Old Thad Stevens, p. 34, and Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 64-65. Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 47. Various accounts differ as to whether the date of their first meeting was in December 1836 or January 1837. Like Stevens, Blanchard was from Vermont, and his parents were associates of Stevens. For background on Blanchard see Payne, Recollections, p. 58n; Richard S. Taylor, “Beyond Immediate Emancipation: Jonathan Blanchard, Abolitionism, and the Emergence of American Fundamentalism,” Civil War History 27:3 (September 1981), pp. 260-274. Blanchard’s activities in the 1840s to 1850s are discussed in Victor B. Howard, Conscience and Slavery: The Evangelistic Calvinist Domestic Missions, 1837-1861 (Kent State University Press, 1990).
Blanchard was just one of a number of agents whom the American Anti-Slavery Society was dispatching to rural Pennsylvania. This followed a strategic decision on the part of the AASS and its sister organization, the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, to avoid cities and concentrate their organizing and publicity efforts in rural areas of Pennsylvania. This approach had been advocated by the national abolitionist leader Theodore D. Weld, who urged that the antislavery message set afire the North’s rural areas, and then “back fires” would ignite the cities.75 The wisdom of this strategy may have been borne out by fierce opposition antislavery speakers attracted in Philadelphia, including the burning of the abolitionist’s Pennsylvania Hall in May 1838. The original motivation, however, was the great success that the AASS had had with similar programs in New York in 1836 and particularly in Massachusetts in 1835-1836, where a rural lecture campaign had resulted in the formation of hundreds of antislavery societies.76

Border Pennsylvania, however, was not Puritan New England. The lecturers met with decided opposition everywhere. Blanchard had already been mobbed several times in Pennsylvania, but with Stevens’ backing he hoped to gain a better reception in the south-central part of the state.

Stevens agreed to give Blanchard his full support, and gave him a total of $90 on two separate occasions. As Blanchard left their meeting, Stevens warned him, possibly in jest: “Go to Gettysburg, and if they Morganize you, we will make a party out of it.” This

75 One historian believes that Weld insightfully perceived that the great cities were dependent on rural areas for their trade; others simply hold that Weld, like many antebellum ministers and rural Americans, merely believed that the city was a giant sump of sin. Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, The Antislavery Impulse (New York, 1933), p. 107; Fergus M Bordewich, Bound for Canaan (New York, 2005), p. 156.
reference to the martyred William Morgan is another clue that Stevens was considering a political movement based on antislavery.77

Blanchard did travel to Gettysburg, where he spent several weeks holding a series of meetings. Along with the December 1836 meeting, these events constitute the best documented conflict between Gettysburg’s abolitionists and their opponents in the entire antebellum period. According to the Star, the first meeting occurred on Monday, March 13, when Gettysburg’s opponents of abolition had organized a meeting to nominate delegates to a Harrisburg anti-abolitionist convention, “Friends of the Integrity of the Union.” Antislavery activists packed it, just like anti-abolitionists had filled the December 3 antislavery meeting. Blanchard addressed the meeting for an hour, with James Cooper and Daniel Smyser putting forward anti-abolitionist positions and resolutions.78

On Wednesday, March 15, Blanchard spoke in the Gettysburg Court House on the topic of “Will Abolition Dissolve the Union?” He argued that the Union was not threatened by abolitionists simply exercising their legal and constitutional rights, but by Southerners who threatened secession, suppressed the mails, and restricted speech. He reassured his audience that the South “would never secede.” One reason was the fugitive slave issue: “If the Union were dissolved the separating line would be another Canada line and the slaves could not be kept on the South side of it.” In addition, he predicted that the people of the South would rise up and nullify the actions of their state governments if they did secede. In case his audience was unconvinced, he played his

77 Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, pp. 64-65; Robert Fortenbaugh’s Notes on Thaddeus Stevens, Anti-Slavery File, Adams County Historical Society.
78 “Abolition Meeting,” Star and Republican Banner, March 20, 1837, p. 3 c. 2; “Integrity of the Union,” March 20, 1837, p. 3 c. 4. “The Pro-Slavery Meeting,” Star and Republican Banner, April 10, 1837, p. 3 c. 2.
trump card for rural antebellum Americans: they would have to trust God to protect the Union.

In an appeal to local sentiment, Blanchard closed by referencing the “Genius of Emancipation,” the title of Benjamin Lundy’s first antislavery newspaper. Lundy’s writings were widely read in the county; his current newspaper, the National Enquirer, regularly published accounts of Blanchard’s wanderings.79

James Cooper, sometimes a political ally of Stevens, responded with a position befitting a border politician born in Maryland but now living in a free state. Cooper assured his listeners that he opposed slavery, and believed that Congress could abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and ban it from the territories. He favored free, open discussion, but he believed that slavery was a domestic institution, which only the legislature of each slave state could ban. While expressing opinions on slavery was fine, Cooper stated that “organized opposition is mischievous and wrong.” He argued that there was a difference in expressing a constitutionally protected opinion on the laws of slavery, and an “organized warfare” on them.80

Cooper also believed that the abolitionist scheme was impracticable: it hardened Southern resistance to emancipation, made the slave’s lot more difficult, and endangered the Union. He hammered at the reformers’ utopian perfectionism: government was inherently flawed, he believed, and not perfectible. Since he regarded the Founders as the most virtuous of all Americans, they were more to be trusted than a “newer

79 “Remarks of Mr. Blanchard on the Question, ‘Will the agitation of the Abolition Question cause a dissolution of the Union,’ ” Star and Republican Banner, April 17, 1837, p. 1 c. 1. The “genius of emancipation” was a phrase of Irish reformer John Philpot Curran. Dillon, Benjamin Lundy, p. 46.
80 “Mr. Cooper’s Remarks,” Star and Republican Banner, May 29, 1837, p. 1 c. 1. The Star republished Cooper’s remarks in their entirety on June 2. This may have been to goad the Compiler to publish Blanchard’s remarks (which was unsuccessful), but it also may have been a subtle step back for the Star and an attempt to show readers that the paper also accepted a moderate position on antislavery.
generation who would tear down their edifice.” Cooper felt that abolition violated the spirit and the intent of the Constitution. He, too, alluded to Lundy: in Cooper’s view, the “Genius of Emancipation” had been driven off by abolitionism, and replaced by evil genii. In a typical pro-slavery argument, Cooper stated that he believed that the legislatures of Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, and Tennessee, had all been poised to abolish slavery before abolitionist agitation hardened attitudes and increased fears.81

Cooper looked back at Pennsylvania’s abolition of slavery for an example of prudent emancipation. It was gradual, and it was done by Pennsylvanians. There were no antislavery meetings in Maryland and Virginia passing resolutions pressuring the Keystone state, nor were there out-of-state lecturers, like Blanchard, traveling about decrying its slavery. He challenged his listeners to judge the abolition tree by its bitter fruit, and he argued that Blanchard minimized the risks of disunion stemming from abolitionist agitation.82

At the conclusion of Cooper’s talk, Andrew G. Miller, a Gettysburg lawyer, attempted to offer resolutions hostile to abolitionists, but the crowd was too unruly.83 The excitement continued through the week. That evening, at a courthouse “again crowded to excess,” a second meeting featured a debate between Blanchard and Daniel Smyser84 On Friday, Blanchard spoke at Clarkson’s schoolhouse, arguing that Southern slavery was not justified by the Bible. In the evening, Blanchard lectured at the courthouse on West Indian emancipation, with which Cooper again took issue.

81 “Mr. Cooper’s Remarks,” Star and Republican Banner, May 29, 1837, p. 1 c. 1.
82 “Mr. Cooper’s Remarks,” Star and Republican Banner, May 29, 1837, p. 1 c. 1.
83 “Abolition Discussion,” Star and Republican Banner, March 20, 1837, p. 3 c. 2. For abolitionists, Miller would go on to notoriety as a judge in the Booth Wisconsin fugitive slave case.
84 “Abolition Discussion,” Star and Republican Banner, March 20, 1837, p. 3 c. 2.
Here, Stevens at last made his entrance, having traveled from the state legislature in Harrisburg. He defended his young friend and offered a resolution decrying the attempts to stifle the abolitionists and upholding the right of free discussion. He taunted Blanchard’s religious opponents, saying that they would easily tolerate the speech of a Muslim, Jew, or profligate, but couldn’t stand a few words spoken on behalf of antislavery. Stevens gave an eloquent address for free discussion, but, as one editor noted, “without taking sides either for or against Abolition.”

Still, Stevens’ support of Blanchard during his travels to Gettysburg was significant enough that in the midst of it, Blanchard had prevailed upon the American Anti-Slavery Society to offer Stevens his own position as an antislavery lecturer, a fact that remained hidden for nearly one hundred years. Stevens declined.

After Blanchard left Gettysburg, the battle continued to be fought in the town’s newspapers, as antislavery supporters and opponents tried to impose their version of events on local memory. Middleton, the editor of the Star, argued that no “serious disturbances” had taken place during Blanchard’s speeches, although he did admit that during Monday’s talk some attempted to abuse Blanchard, both inside and outside of the meeting place. Gettysburg’s Democratic newspaper, the Compiler, claimed – with pride – that Blanchard had been unable to finish his speech on the courthouse steps, because he had been shouted down by an angry mob led by some of the borough’s leading citizens. Moses McLean, Jacob Lefever’s lawyer who would serve as the Congressman and state legislator from the area in the 1840s and 1850s, had reportedly

87 “Abolition Discussion,” Star and Republican Banner, March 20, 1837, p. 3 c. 3.
shouted, “We do not have any slaves here, why do you come and trouble us?” William McLean, Moses’ father and the judge who signed the lion’s share of the warrants of removal in the 1820s and early 1830s, also led the efforts to shout down Blanchard.88

Like all of the AASS lecturers, Blanchard moved on. He spoke at Middletown in eastern Adams County and then Chambersburg in Franklin County. In Middletown, he was greeted with corncobs and flint stones that pelted the church where he was holding a meeting. In Chambersburg, he was mobbed.89 The controversy over his visit rocked Gettysburg for several months. The Star printed many articles about the incident and about Blanchard’s reception in Chambersburg and other parts of the state. They also printed the complete text of Blanchard’s possibly truncated speech, particularly since the Sentinel had printed the rebuttal by James Cooper. Then, Stevens’ Star went one better, and printed the complete text of Cooper’s speech – twice – challenging the Sentinel to show the same reciprocity and print Blanchard’s. The purpose was to goad the rival paper, but the Star may have also been subtly reassuring its readers it could support antislavery positions that were more moderate than Blanchard’s. From there, the controversy degenerated into bitter name calling. The insinuation by the Sentinel’s editor, that there were no (antislavery) “heathen” in Adams County needing conversion by Blanchard was twisted by Middleton into a suggestion that he had labeled those who supported anti-slavery as the “HEATHEN OF ADAMS COUNTY.” For his part, Blanchard in Chambersburg ill-advisedly suggested that the McLeans and his other

88 “Mr.Blanchard,” Adams Sentinel, May 8, 1837, p. 3 c. 2-3; Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 65; Meltzer, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 51.
89 Star, April 10, 1837, April 24, 1837,p. 2 c. 1, and May 1, 1837, p. 3 c. 2. Blanchard also apparently returned to Gettysburg to speak at a “Friends of the Integrity of the Union” meeting.”
Gettysburg opponents might be destined for hell. Since the McLeans were a prominent area family, this only polarized matters further in Gettysburg.90

The end result of the controversy was that the antislavery cause gained significant publicity in Adams County, Thaddeus Stevens had defended an antislavery lecturer, but the antislavery organization, at least in Gettysburg, had been cowed. One distressed area abolitionist, in fact, wrote a letter wondering if the organization had disbanded, because there was no activity on the next Fourth of July, in 1837. In response, Joel Wierman reassured Adam Wert that the society was still vital, but that there had been no requirement for it to actually meet then or at any other time. When we next hear of the Adams County antislavery society, it is meeting again in York Springs, in the northern part of the county.91

Thaddeus Stevens, meanwhile, had gone on to a leading role in the convention for a new Pennsylvania constitution. In 1837, Stevens, at the height of his power and leadership within Pennsylvania, was de facto ruler of the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention. The combined Whig/Antimason delegation he led had a narrow edge in the convention. In the convention, he took what appeared to be a bold defense of the enfranchisement of African American men. Under closer observation, however, it appears to have been a conservative move to forestall changes to the state’s constitution, and his proposal would have kept in place property restrictions which disenfranchised some whites. Stevens was really arguing for status quo ante, which would have kept

90 Citing intense “interest,” Harper had published Cooper’s remarks in the Adams Sentinel – “Mr. Cooper’s Reply,” May 22, 1837, Adams Sentinel, p. 2 c. 2 & p. 3 c. 2; “Mr. Cooper’s Remarks,” Star and Republican Banner, p. 3 c. 2; “Mr. Cooper’s Remarks,” May 29, 1837, Star and Republican Banner, p. 1 c. 1; “Mr. Cooper’s Speech on Abolition,” Star and Republican Banner, June 9, 1837, p. 2 c. 1; (Heathen and Hell comments) “Mr. Blanchard,” Adams Sentinel, May 8, 1837, p. 3 c. 2-3. “Integrity of the Union,” Adams Sentinel, May 22, 1837, p. 2 c. 2-3.
91 Joel Wierman to Adam Wert, August 6, 1837, J. Howard Wert Collection, G. Craig Caba, curator.
recently arrived immigrants from voting. Under the old constitution; very few male African Americans actually voted, although they had a titular right to do so. Even noted members of the Philadelphia elite such as James Forten did not vote. Carl Oblinger believes that African American men voted in Columbia, Pennsylvania, and Robert Purvis and some other wealthy African American men voted in Bucks County, but their participation was highly controversial and launched a court case that took the right to vote away from African Americans even as the Constitutional Convention was doing the same.92

Stevens left the convention early, in part because he was under attack in the state’s legislature, but also in part because he knew he was on the losing side. In his absence, the new constitution restricted the franchise to white voters. Stevens refused to sign it. He did not, however, take special steps to ensure he had his vote recorded against the disfranchisement of African Americans, as John Sergeant from Philadelphia did, and he was criticized in the abolition press for it. For one hundred and seventy years, Stevens has been largely remembered as a valiant champion of African American rights in the convention. The truth is more complicated; like much else Stevens was doing in the 1830s, his actions there indicate substantial calculations of political advantage as well as suggestions of stirring principle. Stevens’ actions at the convention reflected the difficult position he was in, trying to organize a new political movement while dealing with significant splits in sentiment among his border constituency.93

While they did not succeed in establishing a regular organization in the county seat, the Adams County abolitionists were persistent. In 1839, they brought another

93 Current, *Old Thad Stevens*, p. 51.
traveling antislavery agent to Gettysburg, J. Miller McKim. McKim had local ties – he was born in Carlisle, and went to Dickinson College there. Reading Garrison’s *Thoughts on African Colonization* had converted him to immediate emancipation. He ultimately decided, like many young, theologically inclined converts to antislavery, that the cause of antislavery was more important than his call to ministry, and began to work with the American Antislavery Society, headquartered in Philadelphia. McKim became a key figure in Pennsylvania abolitionism, eventually serving as secretary of the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society. Accounts of his 1839 visit to Gettysburg are sparse, but he apparently received a reception much like Blanchard’s at the courthouse. Again Stevens intervened to aid a speaker. This time, he cut right to the point. Whatever he might have said previously about the glories of free discussion, here he promptly threatened the boisterous crowd with jail time for refusing to let McKim speak.94

The turbulence from 1836 to 1839 had brought the issues of slavery into greater prominence in the region, but abolitionist hopes of a result similar to the previous campaign in Massachusetts, of large scale conversions and the formation of a mass antislavery movement had been thwarted. While the lecturers had stirred up controversy and made inroads in public opinion, their efforts had not been an unqualified success. Local antislavery activists in Adams County had been cowed, and in the future, they would reappraise their approach.

This border antislavery movement had also shown itself to be unusually politically involved from its onset. They had met on significant political holidays, they had criticized the Democratic press, and they had interrogated political candidates on

their antislavery stands. When the local political champion did not show as expected, they grumbled. As they moved forward in the future, they would continue to use political and legal strategies and not rely extensively on a moral crusade or mass conversions to the cause. This political component implies that in this border area, partisan political conflict contributed heavily to the 1830s development of the antislavery crusade.

Notwithstanding the controversy and conflict, however, in antislavery, Stevens had finally found a significant cause for a new political movement. Even when he joined the hated Whig party, which he would eventually do in the 1840s, he could do so as a “Conscience Whig,” firm in his opposition to slavery. In fact, his fierce rival at the Compiler suggested that was what Stevens had been up to all along: using antislavery to stir up a new controversy just as Antimasonry was dying. He suggested “[abolition] is intended… to be a political party, and in Pennsylvania to take the place of antimasonry.” Other observers thought the same; one commented in December 1836, “Anti-Masonry is defunct in Pennsylvania. What hobby can… be so appropriately mounted [by Stevens] as the abolition question?” One hundred years later, the noted political historian Richard N. Current came to the same conclusion. In the antislavery cause, and its particular resonance in rural, border Pennsylvania, Thaddeus Stevens had solved his dilemma.95

95 “Political Abolition,” Compiler, March 21, 1837, p. 3 c. 4; see also, “Abolition,” Compiler, May 9, 1837, p. 3 c. 1; Pennsylvania Reporter (Harrisburg), December 30, 1836, cited by Current, Old Thad Stevens, p. 31.
Chapter 3

Antislavery Petitioning In South-Central Pennsylvania

With the failure of the antislavery lecturers to achieve a mass movement against slavery in south central Pennsylvania, the Adams County Antislavery Society returned to two tools which had long been employed by antislavery activists in Pennsylvania: the petition and the court system. These tools were supplemented by other persuasional methods being adopted by contemporary abolitionists, such as distributing pamphlets and establishing antislavery lending libraries. All of these approaches helped the antislavery society move forward less confrontationally than contentious public meetings and inflammatory lecturers, although the petitions, the legal strategy, and the literature still had a radical edge.1 While the wide distribution of antislavery materials worked behind the scenes to change public opinion, it was the petitions and the prosecution of kidnappers which had the most visible results on the statewide level, helping discourage fugitive slave renditions and inspire and pass a new, strengthened personal liberty law which would place Pennsylvania’s legislation on a collision course with federal law.

By revisiting these tactics, the society was placing itself on a continuum that started in the 1780s and would stretch into the Civil War. Antislavery activists in the Philadelphia area had brought court cases and “freedom suits” and circulated petitions since at least the 1780s, and southern Pennsylvania activists had done so since at least the turn of the century. In fact, southern Pennsylvania activists played a leading role in the underappreciated nationwide petition campaign organized by Benjamin Lundy in 1827-

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1 Petitioning, like pamphleting and lending libraries, was aided by new technological developments which allowed for low cost printing.
1829, an important forerunner to the massive campaigns of the 1830s. While Garrisonian antislavery lecturers would be critical of the response they received in Gettysburg, although they had a little more success in the surrounding area, that did not mean that all of the region’s residents were “pro-slavery,” as was sometimes angrily charged. It meant that the antislavery society had adopted tactics suited for their situation. At the national level, the society would be no more or less successful in its petitions than the thousands of antislavery societies whose members signed petitions to Congress from 1835-1844. They did not achieve the goal of abolition, not even in the District of Columbia, but they did raise the level of attention to the issue and win broad support from Northerners concerned about Southern aggression or the right to free speech.

At the state level, however, the society was unusually successful. It successfully prosecuted individuals for kidnapping, seizing African Americans and carrying them South, and the petition campaign inspired Pennsylvania’s strengthened antikidnapping legislation, and would help define the state’s relationship with slavery and the fugitive slave issue. Both the petitions and the legal cases would allow south central Pennsylvania’s abolitionists to help influence the legal environment in favor of the fugitive along the “edge of freedom.”

The petitions allow us a glimpse into the antislavery community in terms of demographic makeup and geography. An analysis of an 1846 petition reveals that most abolitionists, at least in eastern Adams County, worked in rural occupations and somewhat older than contemporaries who supported colonization. This all white petition, and a significant petition the next year, signed by Gettysburg’s African American residents, suggests a failure to integrate the white and black antislavery communities that
would hinder the two groups’ usefulness, but the two sets of petitioners did successfully apply pressure to create a stronger Pennsylvania personal liberty law.

Despite this unusual success in helping define the law along the border and in Pennsylvania, it should be pointed out that in many ways, the Adams County Antislavery Society developed in a similar fashion to many of the new antislavery societies forming across the North. After the tumultuous meetings with Jonathan Blanchard in 1837, the antislavery society began meeting in the York Springs area, in eastern Adams County, where many Quakers lived. When anti-abolition strife manifested even in that area, the society took to meeting in a darkened schoolhouse in the middle of the woods. In 1840, soon after the hostile reception given to lecturer James Miller McKim in Gettysburg, a published report of their activities claimed that petitions regarding slavery in the District of Columbia had been circulated, inveighed against the gag rule in Congress, and celebrated the success of their pamphlet distribution and lending library, the latter under the leadership of William and Phebe Wright’s daughter, Hannah Wright. Six hundred publications had been ordered to form the library and for distribution. Low cost lending libraries and pamphleting was a major emphasis of abolitionists at this time, and this tactic also accorded with the less confrontational approach favored by most Quakers.²

Despite the mistreatment of Jonathan Blanchard and J. Miller McKim, antislavery lecturers still traveled to Gettysburg, but their accounts of their reception hint at resistance and resentment. Charles C. Burleigh spoke in Adams County at twelve different places, including five lectures in Gettysburg, during an 1840 speaking tour. He

² Charles W. Griest to Friend David, February, 1844, p. 1-2; copy courtesy Debra McCauslin. “Report of the Board of Managers of the York Springs Anti-Slavery Society,” Star, March 17, 1840, p. 2 c. 1-2. For information about the brief, late 1830s popularity of lending libraries and pamphlets, see Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, pp. 139-140.
was unsure whether he would visit Gettysburg again. In 1842, Benjamin S. Jones and James Fulton traveled through the districts close to Maryland in Adams, York, and Lancaster counties, lecturing and distributing material in English and German. An antislavery convention was held in Gettysburg in 1843, as a result of a Garrisonian program to hold one hundred conventions in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and the Northwest. Quaker lecturer, feminist, and antislavery activist Abby Kelley spoke in Gettysburg in 1845, but she complained of the chilly reception she received, and her traveling partner Benjamin S. Jones said that lecturing there was like the “building of a fire on an iceberg.” Jones believed that because of the seminary and the strength of Lutheranism there, the town’s residents were “afraid” of a woman lecturer, and would “suffer not a woman to teach.” In 1846, Cyrus M. Burleigh, Charles’ brother, complained of a similar reception in Gettysburg – no one invited him to stay, not even Professor Reynolds of Pennsylvania College, and only a few helped pay his meeting expenses. He did rejoice that toleration of kidnappers seemed to be waning, based on the recent conviction of one in Adams County court.

All of these visits seemed inspired by the agenda of the national and state antislavery societies; Adams County abolitionists seemed more interested in shifting away from controversial public meetings to alternative tactics such as the petition and the use of the legal system to win freedom for African Americans. Both of these techniques have been described by Richard S. Newman as part of an older, more deferential

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3 [Letter from Charles C. Burleigh], The Pennsylvania Freeman, April 2, 1840, p. 3 c. 3-5.
5 “Letter from B. S. Jones,” Pennsylvania Freeman, May 8, 1845, p. 1 c. 2; Benjamin S. Jones to Adam Wert, Gettysburg, April 7, 1845, J. Howard Wert Gettysburg Collection, G. Craig Caba, curator.
6 “Letter from C. M. Burleigh,” Pennsylvania Freeman, October 1, 1846, p. 1 c. 2-4. The case of Thomas Finnegan is discussed in the next chapter.
antislavery tradition, but they were also consistent with south-central Pennsylvania’s abolitionists’ engagement with the political system, and, in their hands, they resulted in significant changes to both the letter of the law and the legal environment.  

For south central Pennsylvanians, then, petitioning, even during the mass campaigns of the 1830s, was not a radical new tactic but had important continuities with the past. In fact, Pennsylvania had played a leading role in the first national petition campaign, from 1827-1829, and petitioning was the first strategy employed by Adams County antislavery activists when it became clear that antislavery lecturers had not won sizable converts to the cause in southern Pennsylvania.

Because of its widespread use by Garrisonians, the petition is sometimes considered solely as an instrument of moral suasion, aimed primarily at changing public opinion. Reformer and abolitionist Angelina Grimke defined it as such, as do modern historians such as James Brewer Stewart. What historians sometimes miss, in the light of the later reluctance of some Garrisonians to vote or join antislavery political parties, is that this moral suasion was fundamentally political in intent. Petitioning a legislative body is a political act, which is why many female abolitionists, denied the suffrage, eagerly embraced it.

Adams County abolitionists began petitioning even before their society was formed. Daniel Sheffer’s response to the new society’s interrogatories indicates that petitions from Adams County were being sent to Congress during the “Gag Rule”

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controversy of 1835-36, when antislavery societies across the country flooded the Congress with petitions, so Southern Congressmen passed a rule forbidding their reception. This was actually before the Adams County society’s first meeting.

The Gag Rule had to be renewed every year, and abolitionists, including those from Adams County, continued to petition Congress to force its repeal, or at least to illustrate the Southern repression of the rights of petition and free expression. The minutes of the Adams County Antislavery Society show that a committee to “circulate petitions” was established in December 1837. Members of the society had already been actively petitioning; on January 30, 1837, Pennsylvania Congressman George Chambers wrote to county abolitionist Adam Wert to tell him that his petition on the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia had been presented to Congress. Although agreeing with Wert that “trafficking in human beings” was abominable, Chambers informed him that nothing would be done by the current Congress. This did not discourage the society; later that year, Joel Wierman told Wert that he had a stack of petitions to forward to Congress. In 1838, the new Adams County Congressman Daniel Sheffer, a Democrat, told Wert that his petition had not yet been presented, because it would not be received with favor by “the Southrons.”

9 The Gag Rule controversy has been extensively covered in the historiography of the antislavery movement. Perhaps the best account remains that of Gilbert Hobbs Barnes in *The Antislavery Impulse*, pp. 109-145. The sheer volume of this campaign, and the fact that the petitions are uncataloged, make using the antislavery petitions from 1835-1840 extremely difficult. Although abolitionist claims of tall stacks of petitions lining the hallways of the House of Representatives may be exaggerated, in the U.S. House of Representative’s archives there are twelve linear feet of the paper-thin petitions for 1835 alone.

10 Minutes of the Adams Co. Anti-Slavery Society, December 1, 1837, p. 23, J. Howard Wert Gettysburg Collection, G. Craig Caba, curator.

11 George Chambers to Adam Wert, Washington, January 30, 1837; Joel Wierman to Adam Wert, August 6, 1837; Daniel Sheffer to Adam Wert, Washington, May 14, 1838; all three in the J. Howard Wert Gettysburg Collection, G. Craig Caba, curator.
Quakers and other minority political and religious groups in Pennsylvania especially treasured the right to petition. These groups were often far too small to elect a candidate or amass a legislative majority, but they could still appeal to law and morality through the petition. For political and religious groups whose members chose not to exercise the right to vote – which included some Quakers, some members of other peace sects, and some abolitionists – petitioning was a particularly vital right.

Pennsylvania’s Quakers had petitioned the national government on slavery topics many times, beginning in 1783 with a petition from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to abolish the slave trade. This petitioning activity was at the leading edge of a national and global reaction against slavery in the era of the U.S. and French Revolutions. Similar anti-slave trade petitions were received through the 1790s, when they were joined by petitions from Quakers in Philadelphia protesting kidnapping in the wake of the passage of the 1793 fugitive slave law. These early petitioning efforts by Quakers and Pennsylvania Abolition Society, have been criticized as elitist or ineffective, yet they kept the slavery issue before the government in the early years of the Republic. At first, the memorials were referred to Congressional committees, which generally developed replies about how it was inexpedient to pursue them at the time. In the case of the slave trade, however, sometimes the petitions won attention from Congressional committees and in 1808, Congress did reconsider the trade, as it had pledged to do during the Constitutional Convention, and outlawed it.

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12 “1783 Quaker Anti-Slavery Petition,” [http://www.rootsweb.com/~quakers/petition.htm](http://www.rootsweb.com/~quakers/petition.htm);
That action, however, did not lead to the extinction of slavery, as that institution’s opponents had hoped, and during the 1820s, Baltimore Quaker Benjamin Lundy organized a significant antislavery petition campaign, arguably the first such national campaign. Lundy’s campaign was one of the first mass petition campaign; the PAS often preferred to submit petitions with the names of a few politically prominent individuals. Lundy’s three-year campaign ultimately attracted thousands of signatures, and was an important precursor to the massive flow of petitions in the mid-1830s which initiated and sustained the Gag Rule debate. South central Pennsylvania was on the leading edge of this campaign.

Since Congress had declared that slavery in the states lay outside of its jurisdiction, Lundy’s drive focused on slavery in the District of Columbia, which Congress did control. In 1826, Lundy’s newspaper, The Genius of Universal Emancipation, urged Charles Miner, the Federalist Congressman from West Chester, Pennsylvania, to advocate in Congress the abolition of slavery in D.C. Miner held a membership in the Pennsylvania Abolition Society when he was not in office, and he did as Lundy requested, but his resolution for gradual abolition was shelved. In 1827, Lundy turned to a petition campaign.

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The petitions were based on a memorial drafted by Lundy and Daniel Raymond, and published in Lundy’s *Genius of Universal Emancipation* and his Baltimore *American*. This memorial became a model for abolitionists, and in 1827, the American Convention of Antislavery Organizations meeting in Philadelphia asked Lundy to chair a committee to distribute the petition to every antislavery society in the country.17

In addition to the petition Lundy sent in from Baltimore, Pennsylvania antislavery activists also submitted a petition in 1827 decrying the presence of slavery in the District of Columbia. This document, based on Lundy’s form, did not narrowly criticize slavery in the federal jurisdiction, as a cautious, conservative petition might. It also did not use restrained rhetoric – as historians suggest marks white antislavery protest before the rise of Garrison. Instead, the document sharply critiqued the institution. The Pennsylvania petitioners deplored the growth of slavery and identified it as a threat to the Republic. As the slave trade had been declared piracy and a heinous crime, why not slavery itself? If it was illegal and immoral to enslave someone on the coasts of Africa and ship them to the Western Hemisphere, the petitioners contended that enslaving people born in the land of liberty, “natural born citizens” of the United States, was even worse. They argued that every African American born in America, slave or free, was a U.S. citizen, basing this expansive concept of citizenship on the Constitution’s “no attainder” clause (Article 3, Section 2). Constitutionally, the taint or stigma of a parent could not work “corruption of blood” – it could not be passed down to their children, who thus should be free. The

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petitioners argued that this should be applied to slavery: if the parents were enslaved, the children should be free.\footnote{18 “Memorial of the undersigned, Citizens of Pennsylvania,” February 5, 1827, Committee on the District of Columbia, Slavery in the District of Columbia, HR 19A-G4.2, National Archives.}

While opposing slavery generally, the petition specifically called for abolition in D.C. because it was the “exclusive jurisdiction of Congress” and because the Capitol was the “Temple of Liberty.” Slavery there mocked the country’s claim to be dedicated to freedom. Using their “no attainder” logic, the petitioners asked that Congress establish that children of slaves born in the District would be free. Since such law only applied to persons not yet born, they believed that no slaveholder could feel defrauded as a result.\footnote{19 “Memorial of the undersigned…,” February 5, 1827. In an even closer corollary to Pennsylvania’s law, a later version of the petition recommended that children be freed only after reaching a certain age.}

In 1828, Representative Miner joined Lundy in appealing directly for increased petitioning; eighteen petitions followed. These petitions had identical language to the 1827 petitions, sharply condemning slavery and asking for its abolition in the District of Columbia, through freeing the children of slaves. It contained the signatures of more than twelve hundred Pennsylvania abolitionists. One of the first petitions submitted in 1828 was from Adams County antislavery activist Joel Wierman, his father William, and a number of other south-central Pennsylvanians. (This petition is included in Appendix B).\footnote{20 Why south central Pennsylvania was involved on the leading edge of this petition campaign is not completely clear. It likely was because of Lundy and the Wierman family. Lundy who had several children living in Adams County into the 1830s; one daughter married a Wierman. William Wierman also moved to Baltimore in this period.} Subsequent petitions included the signatures of individuals from Cumberland County, including Samuel Taylor, Mahlon Linton, and several members of the Linn
family. These petitions were all apparently circulated with at least the consent of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.

Lundy was not content with this limited campaign, however, and the next year it was expanded again. Meanwhile, Lundy supported the petition campaign with trips through the Northeastern states – what one historian has called “one of the epic journeys of the time.” In December 1828, his half sister, Lydia, reported seeing him circulate a petition in western New Jersey. In Massachusetts, he recruited a young William Lloyd Garrison to the cause.

The trips paid off; in 1829, antislavery societies from across the North joined the crusade, making this the first sectional antislavery petition campaign. Pennsylvania’s activists submitted the most petitions, followed by those in Vermont. Other petitions came from Indiana, Ohio, New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts. A new organization, the Anti-slavery Society of Western Pennsylvania, submitted numerous petitions. This society was led by the charismatic organizer, Theodore Dwight Weld. Weld had converted to evangelical Christianity in the revivals of Charles Finney and to antislavery activism under the influence of Charles Stuart, and he was able to mobilize support in the Christian churches, which Garrison would largely antagonize. Lying just west of the Susquehanna, south central Pennsylvania abolitionists were influenced by his western Pennsylvania group as well as by Lundy in Baltimore and the PAS in

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22 Dillon, Lundy, p. 126, 133-137; Newman, Transformation of American Abolitionism, p. 152; Lydia Lundy to W. Hicks, 12 Month 7, 1828, Halliday Jackson Papers, Letterbook 3, No. 25, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore University.
Philadelphia. Several south central Pennsylvanians signed these “western Pennsylvania” petitions, including Samuel Taylor and a Samuel Wright.23

The petition campaign crested in 1829. With the retirement of Charles Miner from Congress that year, the effort ebbed after that. Pennsylvania abolitionists continued to send in petitions, however. In 1831, when former President John Quincy Adams returned to Washington as a Congressman from Massachusetts, his first speech was on slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia, and he presented fifteen petitions on the subject from Pennsylvania Quakers. Adams made it clear he did not personally favor abolition in the District, but he thought that the selling of slaves there might fall under Congressional jurisdiction. This protest was Adams’ first step towards becoming abolitionism’s reluctant political champion in the 1830s and 1840s. The petitions which he used to introduce the topic were not an anomalous set of memorials, but a continuation of the earlier campaign in the late 1820s.24

This extensive, but overlooked petition campaign came years before the mid-1830s petition initiatives that sparked the Congressional “gag rule.” Richard Newman has characterized the Pennsylvania Abolition Society’s petitioning during the 1820s as a “conservative petitioning strategy,” as he argues that the contentious debates over the Missouri Compromise persuaded PAS leaders to test the political waters before submitting petitions to Congress. Merton Dillon, Lundy’s early biographer, admits that some Philadelphia Quakers were reluctant to endorse the petition campaign at first, but outside of the Pennsylvania metropolis, other Quakers willingly followed the lead of

Lundy. Still, through the American Convention, an umbrella group of antislavery organizations, the PAS implicitly endorsed Lundy’s broadly scoped, strongly worded petition campaign against slavery in D.C., even if some of the leadership did so reluctantly. Whatever scruples some PAS leaders may have had against mass petitioning did not prevent hundreds of Pennsylvania abolitionists from sending strongly worded petitions and memorials to Congress. Newman aims to contrast PAS “elite” “conservative” petitioning with the mass petitioning tactics of later Massachusetts activists, but the signers in the 1828-1829 campaign were not elite, and the language they used harshly denounced slavery and declared it incompatible with Christianity.

This suggests that there is not a sharp break between the petition tactics of Pennsylvanians and those used later in Massachusetts, but rather an evolution; in fact, the 1820s Maryland - Pennsylvania campaign, which became sectional, likely influenced later petitioning in Massachusetts. This could have occurred through the national efforts of Lundy and the person of Theodore Dwight Weld, whose Western Pennsylvania Antislavery Society was strongly involved in the 1829 petitioning, and who became a leading figure in the organizing and petition campaigns in Massachusetts in the mid-1830s. The transformation in petition strategy Newman identifies appears to have had its genesis in Pennsylvania in the late 1820s, not Massachusetts nearly a decade later, and south central Pennsylvania activists were involved from the beginning.

Lundy’s campaign focused attention on slavery in the District of Columbia. A special Congressional committee was formed. While they reported that it was

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25 Citing Acting Committee Minutes, c. 1822 and c. 1828, PAS Papers, Reel 2, Newman maintains that the PAS refused to join this petition campaign. Newman, Transformation of American Abolitionism, p. 55 and 203 n. 63. Yet many members of the PAS had relationships with Benjamin Lundy, and the American Convention would have been unlikely to support the campaign without the acquiescence of the PAS.

“inexpedient” to consider abolition in the District, the debate in the committee rooms was contentious at times. The stage had been set for the petition debates of the 1830s and the accompanying Gag Rule controversy - years before Garrison proclaimed that slavery in the District was the “first citadel to be taken,” and John C. Calhoun declared that securing the right to not receive antislavery petitions would be the South’s “Thermopylae.”27

Many historians consider the 1835-1844 petition controversies in Congress as critical to the expansion of antislavery sentiment. Abolitionists from across the country flooded Congress with controversial petitions on the issues of abolition, slavery in the nation’s capital, and the slave trade. The refusal to accept the petitions generated Northern sympathy for the abolitionists, amid fears that the “Gag Rule” and the restriction of abolitionist mail to the South could lead to broad curtailment of Northern civil liberties. One historian believes that the campaign rescued the antislavery movement from the stigma of Garrisonian immediatism; another believes it was a vital step in the politicization of antislavery. If these historians are correct, then Benjamin Lundy and abolitionists in Pennsylvania, including south central Pennsylvania, deserve credit for pioneering the militant petitioning tactic in 1828-1829.28

Petitions to the Pennsylvania Legislature

Even though many historians believe that the petition campaigns were critical to the development of Northern antislavery sentiment, most still believe that the petitions

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themselves were ineffectual in achieving their stated goals. It was the Southern political response to the petitions that was significant, not the petitions themselves.

Such a focus on the national government, however, only reveals part of the petition story. Pennsylvania antislavery activists, men and women, also regularly petitioned the state government in Harrisburg on slavery. They were urged to do so by the antislavery press. Frequently, these were the same petitions that went to Congress, decrying slavery in the District of Columbia, the annexation of Texas, or other national issues. Such issues were not always directly relevant to Pennsylvania, and while some antislavery activists hoped that Pennsylvania’s Congressional delegations would be instructed to vote for such measures in Congress, such tactics almost always failed. For the instruction of a Congressional delegation to succeed, legislation on the issue would need to be pending before Congress, and the Congressmen and Senators would have to abide by the instructions. “Instruction” was a highly controversial political tactic, seen by some as anti-democratic, and was used very rarely by the Pennsylvania legislature.29

Duplicating petitions to the national government was ineffective; what did have an impact, however, were petitions seeking to influence Pennsylvania’s own legislation on African Americans and slavery, particularly relative to the fugitive slave issue. In this way, the petitioners could urge substantive legal changes without appearing to interfere with the laws of Southern states, as immediate abolition would do. In fact, the significant legal changes which occurred in 1847 strengthening Pennsylvania’s personal liberty laws may have been initiated by petitions from south central Pennsylvania, and unmistakably

29 “Petitioning,” National Enquirer, December 24, 1836, p. 62 c. 4-5. Technically, most antebellum politicians believed that U.S. Senators could be instructed by the state legislature on how to vote, since the legislature had chosen them, but U.S. Representatives could only be urged to vote in certain ways.
were supported by a range of southern Pennsylvanians, including Gettysburg’s African Americans, during the critical 1847 political battle for the law’s passage.

Unfortunately, the holdings of petitions to the Pennsylvania state legislature in Harrisburg are not complete, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions from the number of petitions submitted in a given year. Newspapers, minutes of antislavery societies, and even the House and Senate journals sometimes claim the submission of many more petitions than can be found in the files in the twenty-first century. In some cases, it appears as if only petitions from a specific area have been retained; in other cases, petitions may have been returned at the end of the session or given away to visitors. This militates against attaching too much importance to an analysis of the numbers of petitions or numbers of signers. However, the surviving petitions are still valuable resources. During the last antebellum decades, the federal census was just beginning to collect useful demographic information on wealth, occupation, place of birth, and education. Using this to analyze petition signers allow us to profile demographically those abolitionists who signed petitions in south central Pennsylvania.

Abolitionists were not the only citizens petitioning the state legislature and the 1837-38 Constitutional Convention regarding African Americans. Supporters of colonization also petitioned. Petitions were also received asking the commonwealth to restrict the immigration of African Americans. The colonization movement received

31 A number of works have attempted to characterize, in various areas, the demographic makeup of antislavery supporters through analyzing antislavery petitions, subscription lists to antislavery newspapers, or membership records of antislavery societies. Perhaps the best monograph using petitions to analyze the demographic makeup of an antislavery community remains Edward Magdol, The Antislavery Rank and File: Profile of the Abolitionists’ Constituency (New York, 1986).
support from Gettysburg’s press, and some residents of Gettysburg signed a petition urging restricted immigration of African Americans in 1832.32

A detailed analysis of colonization petitions will be considered in Chapter 7. In general, however, a demographic analysis of the signers of these two types of petitions shows that these groups varied significantly in occupation, sex, and geographic location. In south central Pennsylvania, many colonizationists were professionals and artisans and lived or worked in the major towns and county seats, while most active white abolitionists came from rural townships, although there was also a core group in Gettysburg at the seminary and college and among some of the graduates of Thaddeus Stevens “law school,” the legal training he performed from his office. In addition, many of the abolitionists were somewhat older than the colonization supporters. If their numbers were not replenished by a substantial influx of new supporters – and the evidence suggests that they may not have been – the core of the abolition petitioners would be at an advanced age by the start of the Civil War. Indeed, a demographic analysis of these petitions suggests that the rural middle class abolitionists were ill-placed to repel the colonization supporters who belonged to the elites controlling the region’s towns. This did not bode well for the treatment of area African Americans during the Civil War and Reconstruction period and beyond.

In addition, what little evidence exists suggests that the antislavery movement in south central Pennsylvania was divided. The core was in the northeastern part of the county, around York Springs, where there were numerous Quakers. There was, however, a second group in Gettysburg who sent in a sarcastic petition in 1845 urging

Congress to annex Africa to provide a supply of slaves for the South. Their petition was in response to Southern interest in annexing Texas, and their opposition appeared limited to restricting the expansion of slavery. These petitioners deplored the Southern insistence that slavery was a blessing which should be extended. They did not appear to coordinate their petition activities with the northern Adams County abolitionists, nor, it seems, did Gettysburg’s African Americans, who sent in an important petition in 1847 during the campaign that successfully advocated a strengthened personal liberty law.33

South-Central Pennsylvania Abolitionists

Petitioning by south central Pennsylvania antislavery activists to the state legislature offer an opportunity to glimpse into the rank and file support for antislavery in the region.34 Noteworthy petition campaigns related to African Americans and fugitive slaves occurred in 1847, and 1861, during the secession crisis.35 In 1847, a petition campaign brought fifty-four petitions to the legislature from the eastern counties of Pennsylvania. This was a highly unusual outburst of antislavery petition activity, with important links to south central Pennsylvania’s abolitionists.

33 Photocopy of February 18, 1845 petition, “Taken from Carl Swisher Papers,” Box 21, National Archives Record Group 233, from the “Negroes-Slavery” file at the Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg, PA.

34 The unsorted petitions to the Congress during the Gag Rule controversy are too daunting for this kind of work; in 1835 alone, there were 12 linear feet of paper thin petitions from all over the North.

35 There was a third flurry of petitions in 1837-1838, but almost all of these went to the state constitutional convention, not the legislature. In addition, a satirical petition was sent from Gettysburg, asking that Congress annex all of Africa to provide a source of slaves for the South. It mocked the Southern interest in annexing Texas. It was sent by some of Gettysburg’s professionals, and did not include town abolitionists like William Reynolds or Samuel Schmucker, or, apparently, any members of the Adams County Anti-Slavery Society. Photocopy of February 18, 1845 petition, “Taken from Carl Swisher Papers,” Box 21, National Archives Record Group 233, from the “Negroes-Slavery” file at the Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg, PA.
The campaign revolved around the fugitive slave issue. Pennsylvania abolitionist J. Miller McKim was at the heart of the campaign, and he was intimately connected with south central Pennsylvania. He had been born in Carlisle in 1810, graduated from Dickinson College there in 1828, and completed his studies for the ministry under the direction of Carlisle minister Reverend George Duffield. Duffield was an antislavery conservative who became a leading Northern clerical proponent of colonization at his various parishes in Carlisle, Philadelphia, and Detroit, but his younger student chose a different path. Reading Garrison’s *Thoughts on African Colonization* in 1832 made him a committed abolitionist. In 1833 he was the youngest delegate to attend the inaugural convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) in Philadelphia. Two years later, McKim was appointed as one of the original “Seventy” lecturers for the American Anti-Slavery Society, inspired by the leadership of Theodore Weld. Later he became the secretary of the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society and the publisher of the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, serving briefly as its editor after John Greenleaf Whittier resigned.36

McKim’s advocacy of immediate emancipation and Garrisonianism made him a hated figure in parts of Pennsylvania. A small, handwritten poster labeled him the “advocate of amalgamation, negro equality and subversion of the constitution.” McKim took an increasing interest in fugitive slaves over his career, and was particularly active in the Underground Railroad in the late 1840s and 1850s. Nationally, McKim achieved notoriety for opening the shipping crate in which escaping slave Henry “Box” Brown had

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sent himself to the antislavery office in Philadelphia. McKim’s future, however, when he became the recipient for the fifty-four petitions in 1847.

McKim was an active proponent of the Pennsylvania Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS), and about half of the petitions included the signatures of women. The petitions asked that the Pennsylvania legislature ban the holding of slaves, even by short-term Southern visitors, and repeal all laws that authorized state officials to be involved in the capture or rendition of fugitive slaves. This petition, because it focused solely on modifying Pennsylvania’s laws, could be strongly antislavery in tone while avoiding criticism for meddling in the institutions of other states.

This petition campaign met with unusual success. Combined with pressure from influential Quakers, the drive saw Pennsylvania pass a stringent personal liberty law in 1847. The law significantly increased the difficulty of recovering fugitive slaves in the state. Not only were all state officials forbidden from assisting in the return of fugitive slaves, but also county jails could not be used to hold fugitives; the involvement of constables and jails had been a staple of fugitive slave renditions in southern Pennsylvania for decades. Both prohibitions were enabled by the tangled reasoning of the 1842 Supreme Court decision Prigg v. Pennsylvania. In that Supreme Court decision, based on a case arising in adjacent York County, Justice Joseph Story had ruled that states had no jurisdiction whatsoever over fugitives. Story was attempting to limit state interference with the recovery of fugitive slaves, but several states, beginning with Massachusetts and quickly followed by Pennsylvania, wrote personal liberty laws

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38 Williams, “Religion, race and gender,” p. 181; Records of the General Assembly, RG-7, Senate File 1847, Box 19, Folder 26, petition 74 (this number includes many petitions), Pennsylvania State Archives.
forbidding the involvement of any of their judges, law enforcement personnel, or facilities in the rendition of fugitive slaves. In Pennsylvania’s legislation, the abolitionists’ long-standing concern with kidnapping was also addressed: stiff penalties were levied on individuals who seized free blacks instead of runaways. Even a legitimate recapture of a fugitive could be punished if it led to riot or disorder. In addition, one clause explicitly permitted the application of habeas corpus to fugitive slave cases. This law would profoundly irritate Southern politicians until the Civil War.39

This 1847 petition campaign was supported by only one petition from south-central Pennsylvania, and it was not from the York Springs (Adams County) antislavery society or the Gettysburg critics of slavery and Southern political power. Instead, the petition claimed to be from the entire African American population of Gettysburg. It had been organized by Aaron Constant, a fence-maker, and bore 110 signatures, almost all signed in an identical hand, indicating that most of Gettysburg’s African American population could not write.40 The name of at least one African American resident of the borough was not included, however: Eden Devan. Devan would later be excluded from the A.M.E. church, and area white abolitionists would claim he was in league with area kidnappers.41


40 “To The Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Pennsylvania,”[Petition of inhabitants of Adams County], January 15, 1847, Petition no. 54, Senate File, Pennsylvania State Archives [this number includes many petitions]. See Appendix C.

41 “Extract From the Quarterly Conference of the A.M.E. L. Church, Gettysburg, commenced June 20th, and closed July 11th, 1857,” Adams Sentinel, July 10, 1857, p. 3 e. 3. “Letter of S. R. McAllister Furnishing Data on the Underground Railroad,” (S. R. McAllister to J. Howard Wert, December 2, 1904), in G. Craig Caba, ed., Episodes of Gettysburg and the Underground Railroad (Gettysburg, 1998), p 59. Several other members of the Devan family were included as signers, however.
The petition, using the form widely circulated by proponents of the personal liberty law, stated that the signers were “earnestly desirous to free this Commonwealth from all connection with Slavery,” and made three requests: first, the repeal of all laws permitting the holding of slaves for any period of time within the state, meaning the exemption for visitors who stayed less than six months would be revoked; second, “that you will repeal all laws of this Commonwealth which direct or authorize our judges, magistrates, sheriffs, constables, jailors, or other officers, to aid in the capture and removal from this State of persons claimed as fugitive slaves.” Third, that the legislature would propose measures to the U.S. Congress to abolish slavery in the U.S., “or release this Commonwealth from the legal obligation to aid in its continuance” – which would include returning escaped fugitive slaves (See Appendix C).

Petitions from African Americans are rare in antebellum Pennsylvania, although there are some memorials and remonstrances from Philadelphia and a few from Pittsburgh, the two urban centers with substantial African American populations. Petitions from African Americans living in rural counties are almost unknown: this petition from Gettysburg may be the only one. Submitting such a petition makes a bold statement about the aspirations of the town’s African Americans to equality, citizenship, and a political voice. It, and the absence of any petitions on other subjects, indicates that of all the subjects which came before the legislature, Gettysburg’s African Americans felt particularly qualified to speak on the fugitive slave issue.

42 “A Petition of the Inhabitants of Adams County…., Jan 15 ’47,” Petition File, Petition No. 54, Senate File, Pennsylvania Archives, RG-7. Different Northern states had varying policies on how long slaves could be brought into the state by Southern visitors; it was in large part an effort to retain business by Southern tourists. In the late antebellum period, several other states, like Pennsylvania, adopted legislation that slaves would be freed immediately if brought to the state; New Hampshire even passed a law that said that fugitive slaves would be freed immediately by setting foot on that state’s soil.
There were no comparable petitions from the white abolitionist community of south central Pennsylvania supporting this important legal initiative in 1847. Some of this may have stemmed from jurisdictional issues. J. Miller McKim was the executive secretary of the Eastern District of the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society, and the Eastern District appears to have extended just to the Susquehanna River, although the PFASS was active in the 33 counties of Pennsylvania that lay west of the Alleghenies. The Anti-Slavery Society of Western Pennsylvania, which had been organized by the followers of Theodore Dwight Weld, was essentially independent and did not always coordinate activities with the Eastern District.\textsuperscript{43} South-central Pennsylvania apparently fell in a “no man’s land” between the two. Even during the 1828-1829 petition campaign on slavery in the District of Columbia, some south-central Pennsylvania abolitionists signed petitions from eastern Pennsylvania one year, and from western Pennsylvania the next.

There may have been another reason, however, why the York Springs abolitionists did not send a petition to the state legislature in 1847. The effective 1847 campaign was preceded, and may even have been initiated, by an 1846 petition, signed primarily by white residents of northern and eastern Adams County, asking that the state’s laws be changed to make aiding in the recovery of a fugitive slave a penal offense. Consequently, these abolitionists may have believed that, having petitioned the legislature on the same topic in 1846, they did not need to join in the petition campaign of the following year. The 1846 petition was apparently circulated by noted abolitionist

\textsuperscript{43} Barnes, \textit{Anti-Slavery Impulse}, p. 84.
William Wright of Adams County and his family. Wright was the first signer, and his wife, one of his sons, and two of his daughters also signed.44

Of the sixty signatories to this petition, thirty-seven could be identified in the 1850 Adams County census (see Appendix D). Most of these signers were from Huntingdon, Menallen, and Latimore townships, all distant from the county seat at Gettysburg. At least eight and probably ten women signed this petition (some of the petitioners, especially the women, signed with only their initial and last name). Of the male signers, thirteen were listed as farmers, three as laborers, three carpenters, two merchants, two wheelwrights, one doctor, one trader, one tanner, one teacher, and one may have worked in lumbering. Another was retired by 1850. No woman was listed with an occupation, but at least seven of them lived with farmers or laborers, apparently as spouses or children, and would be considered farmers today. The location of the signers and their occupations identify them as rural citizens of Adams County. In short, the signers of this petition were farmers and agricultural laborers, joined by some small town and village tradesmen and merchants.

The rural background of many Northern abolitionists has been noted by historians for several generations. Gilbert Hobbs Barnes noted it in one of the first important monographs on the antislavery movement; David Donald argued that many of the key abolitionists were descended from distinguished Northeastern families who were concerned about the transfer of social and economic leadership from rural to urban areas.

44 William Wierman Wright was William Wright’s 22-year old son. He would move from Adams County in the next year, became a trusted aide of General Sherman’s during the Civil War, and eventually rose to the rank of general in the engineers. He assisted the International Technical Commission in investigating potential canal routes across Panama, before dying in a Philadelphia prison in 1882 from complications of alcoholism. William W. Wright Collection description, Georgetown Library Special Collections, http://www.library.georgetown.edu/dept/speccoll/cl178.htm.
Indeed, some abolitionists like Theodore Dwight Weld deliberately appealed to rural areas, believing progress would occur swifter there and the “back fires” would overtake the cities. The fundamental observation, however, that much support of abolitionism was rooted in rural areas, appears to have validity when applied to southern Pennsylvania. ⁴⁵

The appeal of antislavery to some rural border residents while many in the towns were opposed may be explained by economic factors. Along the border, many artisans and workers in towns and cities feared competition from free blacks or fugitives. Even if a black slave could not displace an artisan from his trade, he might drive down what the market would pay, or economic pressures might force the two to work together, which was closer than many border Pennsylvanians wanted to associate with African Americans. Columbia, Pennsylvania was wracked by a series of riots in the 1830s when laborers feared social and economic competition from black fugitives. In contrast, farming required land, placing a barrier to entry to many African Americans. Fugitives with farming skills might form a body of laborers who could help with farming short-term or at harvest time, but would not be considered equals. Indeed, antislavery leaders such as the Wrights and the Wiermans frequently used fugitive slave labor, even though there was some risk of recapture for the fugitives.

Information on religious affiliation is not in the census, but many signers were Quakers. Using the Menallen Meeting minutes as a source, the names of twenty-two

signers could be identified as Friends, and eleven others shared a surname (Garretson, Pearson, etc.) with a family belonging to the meeting, and also may have been Quakers.\textsuperscript{46}

The average age of the Adams County petitioners, about 42 years old, may have been as significant as their agrarian background. Many of the older signers had come of age politically during the Missouri crisis and the late 1820s petition campaigns. While still in their political prime of life in 1846, during the secession crisis and outbreak of the American Civil War fifteen years later, many would have retired from public life, left the area, or died. In 1861, when over one hundred petitions relating to African Americans and fugitive slaves poured into the Pennsylvania legislature, the highest total for such petitions ever, none were received from abolitionists in Franklin, Adams or Cumberland Counties, suggesting that they had become enervated or discouraged. In addition, if William and Phebe Wright (who would have been in their seventies then) and many of the other signers of this petition were not replaced by younger activists, this aged population of rural abolitionists in south-central Pennsylvania might have had even less energy after the war ended, when freedmen settled there and African Americans struggled not just for freedom, but full political rights.\textsuperscript{47}

This petition, when compared with colonization petitions, indicates that south central Pennsylvania abolitionist petitioners may have been older and more rural than their colonizationist counterparts, who tended to work in trades and professions, often at the county seat. An analysis of petitions in 1860 reveals a similar divide. As the rural areas lost power and influence statewide, so did this rurally based abolitionism.

\textsuperscript{46} Margaret B. Walmer, \textit{Menallen Minutes, Marriages, and Miscellaneous} (Bowie, MD, 1992). Some of the signers were identifiable in the meeting minutes only and not the census records.

\textsuperscript{47} Aging of the abolitionist community is likely one reason why antislavery petitions from this area were not sent to the state legislature in 1861. The fact that south-central Pennsylvania would have lain (and, events proved, did lie) on a major invasion route from the South was probably another. See chapter 7.
These Adams County results are very different from those uncovered by Edward Magdol in his analysis of antislavery petition signers in upstate New York and Massachusetts. Magdol examined county seats, manufacturing towns, and cities. Few of his antislavery petitioners were farmers. He also found that anti-abolitionists tended to be nearly five years older than abolitionists. Massachusetts and upstate New York were far enough away from the South that there were fewer fears of competition from emancipated black laborers. In their labor struggle against factory owners, the rhetoric of “wage slavery” created, among some, a sense of solidarity with enslaved African Americans. Finally, and prosaically, Magdol suggests that for Massachusetts shoe manufacturers and laborers, there was always the chance that liberated African Americans would be good for business, demanding higher quality footwear.48

Conclusion

Even if the abolitionists in eastern Adams County did not submit a petition in 1847, they rejoiced over the new personal liberty law. The York Springs Anti-Slavery Society passed resolutions proclaiming it as a “triumphant refutation” of the charges that antislavery efforts, “by petition and otherwise, are vain.” The group celebrated that the “Slave Laws” of Pennsylvania had been abolished, and legal protections enacted for

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48 Magdol, Antislavery Rank and File, p. 88. In Table 6-5, Magdol cites an occupational average of 6.3% as farmers among the fifteen hundred petitioners he analyzed from seven Massachusetts and New York cities. This figure, however, does not appear to be consistent with Table 6-3, Occupational Categories by age group, or Table 6-14, occupations in Lynn. Magdol, Anti-slavery Rank and File, pp. 68, 65, 87. Regardless, in terms of numbers of petition signers, farmers are not as significant as workers among the petitions he examined.
fugitives who sought refuge in the state. Clearly, they believed that their petition work in 1846 was vindicated. This was, however, the last published mention of the society.49

Thomas Morris, in his study of personal liberty laws, has stated that the cause of the 1847 petition flurry and the near unanimous passage of the new personal liberty law is “unknown.” It is likely, as Morris suggests elsewhere, that the confluence of concerns about Prigg v. Pa. and about the acquisition of Texas played a role. If this 1846 petition was significant, however, it was likely also rooted in an important 1845 Adams County kidnapping case, the trial of Thomas Finnegan.

As a result of the 1846 Adams County petition, the 1847 petition campaign, and the cooperation of friendly legislators, the friends of the fugitive won a significant legal victory in 1847. The protections for accused fugitives and Pennsylvania’s free black population had been greatly strengthened. Pennsylvania’s legislation now posed significant barriers to the recovery of fugitive slaves. Like all new legislation, though, it would be tested when the courts applied the law and interpreted its bounds. That test, like so much else concerning fugitive slaves in Pennsylvania, came in the south central portion, when the state’s legal protections and federal provisions for the return of escaped fugitives came to trial.

49 “Communicated,” Star, July 16, 1847, p. 3 c. 3. A manuscript letter indicates that the last meeting of the antislavery society was in 1847. Charles W. Griest to Friend David, February 1884. Copy courtesy of Debra S. McCauslin.
Stymied by entrenched opposition to their grassroots recruitment efforts, the abolitionists in south-central Pennsylvania turned to another time-tested refuge of a minority groups seeking change: the court system. The courts offered an opportunity to circumvent the accommodationist perspectives of so many border citizens. In a legal case, only a small jury had to be persuaded, or possibly just one individual who could deadlock it. If a case was tried without a jury, only the judge had to be convinced of a legal point of view, not an entire community. There were enough pockets of sympathy for fugitives that a jury might rule for a fugitive slave or against a kidnapper if the case were properly framed. Appeal to the legal system also offered the possibility of marshaling the power of the state behind the antislavery effort, and of levying punishments more effective than moral condemnation or public censure. The courts also offered a “bully pulpit” and gave prosecutors and litigants a way to further define the relationship of the state to slavery. The decision of Pennsylvania’s antislavery opposition, particularly in southern Pennsylvania, to turn to an aggressive legal strategy prosecuting kidnappers helped lead directly to Pennsylvania’s 1847 personal liberty law, which laid the groundwork for ongoing controversy in the next decade over the fugitive slave issue. This legal engagement, along with the petition campaigns and continuing partisan involvement, characterized south central Pennsylvania’s abolition movement.

1 The U.S. court system would serve a similar role one hundred years later for civil rights advocates, as in Brown v. Board of Education (1954).
This mid-1840s turn to the court system occurred at an important moment in the development of antislavery ideology. With the controversies over the annexation of Texas and the Mexican War looming, concerns over the expansion of slavery into new territory resurfaced in a vital way for abolitionists. The courts also allowed abolitionist lawyers to present emerging “free soil” doctrines and to contest their claim that Pennsylvania was a historic land of liberty. Despite significant numbers of slaves living in southern Pennsylvania just thirty years previously, lawyers reached back to the Revolutionary period to persuade judges and the public – inaccurately – that Pennsylvania’s blacks had been essentially free from the moment of passage of the 1780 Abolition act. This evolution overlooked the state’s legacy of slavery and racism, but it helped define Pennsylvania as part of a “free” North set against the slave South, including its neighbors across the Mason Dixon line. In this way, these legal cases helped support a political movement to place Pennsylvania against the states of the South, rather than with them, as it had voted in most Presidential elections since 1800.²

Emphasizing legal action was not new for Pennsylvania’s abolitionists. South central Pennsylvania abolitionists were revisiting the older legal strategies of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) as it sought to put teeth into Pennsylvania’s abolition acts, and protect free blacks from kidnapping and enslavement. Recent scholarship has portrayed a sharp distinction between the legalistic PAS and Garrisonian

² Thomas Morris has argued that resistance to the rendition of fugitive slaves and resistance to slavery extension into the territories were two sides of the same coin. One opposed the expansion of slavery into western territories, the other into the North. Regardless of whether this provocative point is completely true, Northerners who were concerned about the aggrandizement of the Slave Power in the West were also concerned about its ability to effect law and practice in the North. Through these “free soil” arguments in Adams County’s courts, these two issues could be linked in the minds of the judge, jury, and an attentive local populace. Thomas D. Morris, Free Men All! The Personal Liberty Laws of the North (Baltimore, 1974).
abolitionism. PAS attorneys, while personally courageous and dedicated, have been characterized as largely ineffectual, and the state organization as too determined not to upset southern sensibilities to be effective. The PAS has been portrayed as the sort of abolition society that Southerners could tolerate, while the Garrisonians, adopting African American strategies of protest and organization, became the next wave of abolitionism.3

This interpretation has merit, because the PAS leadership was less confrontational than the Garrisonians in the 1830s and 1840s, but it underestimates the impact of the Pennsylvania organization before Garrison’s rise. It also understates the degree to which some Southerners saw the PAS as a threat. In the mid-1830s controversies over immediate abolitionism, PAS president William Rawle would claim that his organization had always favored moderate, gradual approaches and had limited itself to activities within Pennsylvania.4 That was not strictly true, however. At times, the rhetoric used by the PAS could be every bit as heated and stark as that of the Garrisonians. Part of the problem with understanding the PAS is that its title was misleading. Its influence was not limited to Pennsylvania; in many ways, it was the republic’s first national antislavery society. Pushed by Benjamin Lundy and others, its agents actively supported emancipation societies in Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and North Carolina. PAS agents also tried to persuade Southern slaveowners to voluntarily manumit their slaves in Maryland, Virginia, and elsewhere. They even purchased and freed slaves in South


Carolina, the cradle of Southern slavery. As a committee of the society put it, “they feel a strong solicitude that the abolition of slavery in every part of the United States should be favored & promoted by this Society in every practicable manner [emphasis added].”

From the beginning of the sectional disputes over the Missouri Compromise onward, Southerners frequently complained that abolitionists were not content to work merely in the North, but actively promoted abolitionism in the South. This was not an entirely unfounded allegation, and the activities of the PAS gave ammunition to any suspicious Southern slaveholder looking for evidence of a Northern conspiracy against slavery. The society’s tactics might have been more genteel than the American Antislavery Society, but to southern slaveholders, many of its aims were as alarming.

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As threatening as these activities could be, the PAS was primarily focused Pennsylvania, and the legal legacy established by early PAS court cases laid the groundwork for later effective activity in south central Pennsylvania. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, PAS lawyers strove to expand Pennsylvania’s definition of freedom by getting judges to rule “for freedom” in doubtful cases, redefining the state’s mixed legacy towards slavery. Their success and experience in the courtroom made an appeal to law an effective tactic for abolitionists and friends of the fugitive throughout the antebellum

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5 “{J.G. Blount] To The Sheriff or Jailer of the County of Beaufort [S.C.],” June 17, 1822, in “Documents Concerning cases in which slaves were awarded freedom, 1773-1833,” Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Reel 24; also in Appendix A, pt. 3, Papers of the PAS.


period, particularly in the 1840s, when a U.S. Supreme Court decision created an opportunity to divorce Pennsylvania from enforcement of the fugitive slave law.

The same reasons that the courtroom appealed to abolitionists, however – the reliance on a potentially supportive body of law, the small number of people needing to be convinced (judge or jury), the publicity, and the fact that such action would send a message to others in the area engaged in the activity – also appealed to the abolitionists’ opponents, who struck back beginning in 1847. The decade of the 1840s alone saw the important case *Prigg vs. Pennsylvania* (1842), the Finnegan/Payne kidnapping case, *Oliver v. Kaufman*, the McClintock riot case, and the Martin C. Auld kidnapping case, all with ties to south-central Pennsylvania. These legal disputes and the underlying activity they represented contributed to the general dissatisfaction among Southerners with rendition of fugitives, leading to a new federal fugitive slave law was passed in 1850. Armed with this law, the Southern legal counterattack against abolitionism and the Underground Railroad in southern Pennsylvania culminated in the Christiana treason trials of 1851. The net effect of this legal struggle on both sides was to raise the prominence of the fugitive slave issue and to make involvement in fugitive slave cases more dangerous for both those who captured fugitives and those who helped them.

The fact that fugitive slaves had to be brought before a local magistrate to be legally removed from the state was a critical bottleneck to the rendition of fugitive slaves and represented an opportunity for friends of the fugitive. Prior to 1826, Southerners could legally seize a slave without legal process and take him back South, the so-called “right of recaption.” In the 1820s, Pennsylvania’s law was changed to require a hearing before a judge. A Northern judge was susceptible to local community sentiment within a
Northern community just as much as his Southern counterpart who had issued a writ for recovery of a fugitive. If judges could be convinced to rule in favor of the fugitives rather than the owners in doubtful cases, the tide of remanded fugitives could be checked. Moreover, this approach would do so legally, without tumultuous antislavery lecturing, resistance to or outright violation of the law. Open resistance was anathema for many Northerners who favored law and order. In addition, because of the _stare decisis_ basis of the Anglo-American court system, decisions by one judge served as precedents for successful arguments in another courtroom. One favorable ruling could protect many African Americans. The publicity generated by such cases could also spread the abolitionists’ message.

Pennsylvania’s abolitionists recognized the power of the court early on, and litigation and trials had always been a part of Pennsylvania’s complicated legacy of slavery and abolitionism. In fact, Pennsylvania’s gradual abolition law almost guaranteed abolitionists would turn to legal action. After the passage of the law and its corollary in 1788, individuals working for the Pennsylvania Abolition Society devoted substantial time to “freedom suits” and fugitive slave cases. In southern Pennsylvania, Benjamin Wright and Samuel B. Wright were often involved. They were the uncle and cousin, respectively, of one of the area’s leading 1840s abolitionists, William Wright.8

A number of legal avenues existed for African Americans to prove their right to freedom. The 1780 gradual abolition act had mandated that all slaves living at the time of the act be registered, and all children of slaves born after November 1, 1780, be freed at age 28. The 1788 act mandated that this registry should include the name and

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occupation of the slave owner, the county, township, district, or ward where they lived, and the age, name and sex of every slave child. Such information could only be omitted “under pain and penalty of forfeiting and losing all right to every such child… and of him, her, or them immediately becoming free.” The registration was on oath and copies were to be kept at the courthouse. If slave children were born after 1780, and their birth had been registered improperly, they could win freedom. If slaves were brought to Pennsylvania by a Southerner who intended to reside permanently in the state, they too had grounds to sue for freedom. If they belonged to a Southern owner who was in Pennsylvania temporarily, but had stayed in the state for longer than six months, they were entitled to their freedom as well. This was the very issue Thaddeus Stevens had litigated in the Charity Butler case, in which he successfully argued that the sojourn had to be continuous to free the slave.

In Philadelphia, Isaac Hopper and others were involved in some high profile prosecutions, such as an attempt to force southern Congressman Langdon Cheves to free his slaves after they resided in Philadelphia when that city served as a temporary capital during the War of 1812. South central Pennsylvania, however, was nearly as important a location as Philadelphia in defining the rights of Pennsylvania’s slaves and free blacks, and its importance increased over time. With the relatively rapid disappearance of slavery east of the Susquehanna River, this region was one of the state’s few remaining districts where substantial slaveholding remained – and where masters were determined to hold on to their property. Many of the cases which helped define the legal limits of the emancipation laws occurred there, because that was where much of Pennsylvania’s

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slavery was concentrated after 1810. In 1810, nearly 60 percent of the state’s slaves were in south central Pennsylvania; as late as 1840, nearly 40 percent of the state’s rapidly diminishing population of slaves resided there.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>South Central Penn.%</th>
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Table 4.1 Slaveholding in South Central Pennsylvania as a Proportion of the total slave population of Pennsylvania (1810 peak year)

The numbers reported for 1830 appear anomalous compared with the previous trend. In many counties, census takers began enumerating slaves differently; perhaps they began including some indentured servants in this category. It is not clear whether these new enumeration categories extended to 1840 or not, but the numbers for Cumberland County certainly appear anomalous compared with the previous trend.

In the aftermath of the eighteenth century gradual abolition legislation, Pennsylvania’s Circuit and Supreme Court generally ruled for the slaveholder, despite defects in the slave registry. This was the case in three south central Pennsylvania cases, *Respublica v. William Findlay* (1801), *Cook v. Neaff* (1801), and *Commonwealth v. Blaine* (1811). These setbacks did not mean that antislavery efforts were in vain.

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Arguments for the freedom of slaves were being entered into the court record, able to be called upon if sentiment changed. Eventually C. J. Gibson, advocate for a slave in *Commonwealth v. Blaine*, was selected to Pennsylvania’s Supreme Court. Here he was at times able to forge a new majority against chief justice William Tilghman. Tilghman had been a native of Maryland before he moved to Philadelphia to practice law, and he still owned slaves in Maryland when he became Pennsylvania’s Chief Justice in 1806, gradually emancipating them over several years. Gibson’s elevation to the three-man bench, however, and the gradual diminution of slavery in Pennsylvania, led to an increasing number of rulings for the slave in doubtful cases. For instance, in *Wilson v. Belinda*, argued in Chambersburg in 1817, a failure to record Belinda’s sex at her registration resulted in freedom for her and her children.²

By 1820, fewer south central Pennsylvanians owned slaves, so the courts’ rulings on slaveholding did not attract as much attention. Kidnapping cases, however, could stir up reactions in the local community. The seizure of free blacks as fugitives or to be sold as slaves was labeled by Pennsylvania’s abolitionists with the volatile – and accurate – description of kidnapping. As American slavery was defined by skin color, as long as the institution existed, there was a strong possibility that free African Americans would be wrongfully seized and enslaved. Although little noted at the time, Pennsylvania’s gradual abolition law created a presumption of freedom for African Americans in the state whose names had not been registered, while Southern jurisprudence assumed that African Americans were slaves unless it could be proven otherwise.

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In fact, the national 1793 Fugitive Slave Act grew out of a kidnapping incident that occurred in Pennsylvania. Three Virginians had captured a free black man in Pennsylvania and carried him back to the Old Dominion. A flurry of correspondence resulted as the governor of Pennsylvania tried to have the three men extradited for kidnapping. The governor of Virginia refused to hand over the men on the grounds that the Constitutional clause regarding fugitives from justice had not yet been codified. The result was the 1793 Congressional act, the first two sections of which related to fugitives from justice, the last two to fugitive slaves. Just as in the Constitution, these clauses concerning the renditions of criminals and escaped slaves were placed next to each other, complicating kidnapping and fugitive slave cases in the future.12

The new law did little to mollify concerns about kidnapping. Near the Mason-Dixon line, it was easy for black Pennsylvanians to be seized and carried into the South.13 During the 1820s, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society took the lead in condemning kidnapping at the biannual American Convention of Antislavery Societies, when many other societies were content merely to report their efforts to encourage voluntary manumissions and membership and correspondence activities.14

14 See, for example, “Address of the Chester Co. Society for Preventing Kidnapping, &c. (1823),” and “To the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Affairs of the African Race,” Pennsylvania Abolition Society (1825). In addition, William Rawle of the PAS was president of the Convention in 1825, and was the signer of “To the Abolition and Manumission Societies of the United States of America,” which complained, “We fear the practice of kidnapping free people of colour, is still continued in our country.” *The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery...* (New York, 1969), p. 819-822, 878, 841.
The 1840s and the Adoption of a New Legal Strategy

By the 1840s, the legal situation had changed significantly. Antislavery lawyers had previously emphasized enforcing Pennsylvania’s laws to free the state’s own African Americans; now the focus was exclusively on using Pennsylvania’s code to protect fugitives or free blacks. For abolitionists, fugitive slave and kidnapping cases could also be used to dramatize the injustice of slavery and the humanity of the slave, and to strike at Southern political power.

Even among some antislavery activists, sympathies were often more readily on the side of free African Americans than for southern fugitives. For example, Samuel Taylor was a Cumberland County resident described by a contemporary as an “original” abolitionist, and he had signed two petitions in 1828 urging the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. In the 1840s he once he noticed an African American headed down the road past his house, pursued, shortly afterwards, by two white men. Mounting a horse, he rode ahead and overtook the man, demanding to see his “free papers.” The man refused to produce them until a bystander assured him Taylor was trustworthy. Then, in an account that may be slightly romanticized – although it is recorded in two separate manuscript accounts – Taylor and the man fought off attempts to capture the man by three different slave catchers. They included Taylor’s brother and J. Thompson Rippey, who would later become the sheriff of Shippensburg. Easy to overlook in this dramatic account, however, is the fact that Samuel Taylor demanded to examine the traveler’s “free papers” first. What would have happened if he had not carried any is unclear.15

As this incident indicates, the legal basis for recapturing genuine fugitive slaves was clear and even reluctantly accepted by many opponents of slavery. If south central Pennsylvania’s abolitionists hoped to prevail legally, they needed to argue that the individuals in the dispute were free, not fugitives. Consequently, Quakers and pro-abolition attorneys brought kidnapping cases forward in the 1840s. These cases served not only to protect free blacks but also to discourage the capture of African Americans in general, including fugitive slaves.

As a result, the fugitive slave issue was genuinely “on trial” in south-central Pennsylvania in the 1840s. Antislavery activists deliberately turned to the courts to discourage the seizure of fugitives by vigorously prosecuting as kidnappers individuals who seized African Americans. In response, slave owners and those sympathetic to them also decided to use the courts to punish those who helped fugitive slaves escape.

Although the legal legacy of this period is mixed – both slaveholders and abolitionists prevailed in some of the cases - it clearly became more dangerous for slaveholders and slave catchers to try to recapture fugitives after the 1840s than before, and it was legally hazardous for those who aided fugitives as well. The risk was at the margins, for both those who tried to recover fugitives and those who tried to help them.

*Prigg v. Pennsylvania (1842)*

The case of *Edward Prigg v. Pennsylvania* laid the groundwork for a new crop of Northern personal liberty laws, and, through them, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. This U.S. Supreme Court case vitally affected the progression of the fugitive slave issue in the

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County Historical Society. O.P.M. letter to Jeremiah Zeamer, Sep. 25, 1901, typescript, “Underground Railroad” file, Zeamer Papers [original indicated as in Zeamer Papers, Container 40, folder 9]. O.P.M. chose not to sign his letter to Zeamer; I believe he and J.P.M. may be the same person.
antebellum North. Although a titular victory for those recovering the slaves, the decision significantly changed the balance of federal and state responsibilities regarding fugitives, enabling Northern states to essentially refuse to cooperate in the process.

In 1828, a prosperous farmer in central Maryland died after giving most of his property to his daughter and son-in-law, Susanna and Nathan Bemis. His slaves, however, remained under the control of his widow, Margaret Ashmore. One of the slaves, also named Margaret, had lived for years in “virtual freedom” and had married a free black, Jerry Morgan. She was even listed as free in the 1830 census, although she apparently did not have any emancipation papers. In 1832, they moved to York, Pennsylvania; shortly afterwards, she had her second child.16

This convoluted story of Margaret illustrates the risks faced by African Americans living near the Mason-Dixon line, and larger trends in the upper South. As previously rich soils became depleted from tobacco farming, much of central Maryland and Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley switched to grain cultivation. Tobacco required labor throughout the growing season, while raising grain could often be managed by a farm family, requiring extra labor only at the harvest. This conversion made slave labor less essential, and significantly contributed to Maryland and Virginia switching from states which imported slaves to states which exported slaves to the Deep South.17

slave labor required to run farms, slaves were seen as more of an investment or a source of capital.

Both trends affected Margaret Morgan and her family. Legal historian Louis M. Waddell believes that if Morgan was really free, the Ashmores may have released her because of the changes in Maryland’s agricultural economy. Ashmore’s heirs, however, were mainly interested in Margaret and her children as saleable assets.18

When those heirs decided to recover Margaret and her family, she, like many other manumitted or fugitive slaves from central Maryland, was living in southern Pennsylvania.19 In 1837, Margaret Ashmore authorized her son-in-law, Nathan Bemis, and three neighboring slaveholders (Jacob Forwood, Stephen Lewis, and Edward Prigg) to recover Margaret and her children. It is likely that Bemis had finally impressed on Ashmore the financial value of the departed slaves, even if their labor was unnecessary. He would sell Margaret as soon as she was recovered.20

Bemis obtained a warrant for Margaret from a Maryland magistrate and, accompanied by his neighbors and a constable, seized her in York. When they went before a local justice of the peace, however, he refused to hear the case. He cited Pennsylvania’s 1826 law which forbade lower judges from becoming involved unless the slave catchers followed a distinctive Pennsylvania practice of going to the magistrate both before and after the seizure of the fugitive. With no other court meeting nearby – the nearest federal court was in Philadelphia – Bemis and the party took Margaret back to Maryland without legal sanction, exercising the so-called “right of recaption.” They were

18 Waddell, “Governmental Powers,” p. 3.
indicted for kidnapping by a Pennsylvania court and the state began the extradition process with Maryland.\textsuperscript{21}

It was difficult for Maryland to refuse Pennsylvania’s request for the slave catchers. In both Article IV, section 2 of the US Constitution and the 1793 fugitive law, the fugitive slave clause lies directly adjacent to the clause enabling interstate extradition of “fugitives from justice.”\textsuperscript{22} This juxtaposition made it difficult for Southern states to ignore these requests to extradite kidnappers. Spurning them would give abolitionists implicit justification to ignore the fugitive slave clause. Maryland Governor Thomas Veazey prevailed on Bemis to return Margaret Morgan to York. Special legislation was passed so Bemis and his party would appear before a York County Grand Jury. Rather than render a verdict, the jury summarized Pennsylvania’s emancipation and anti-kidnapping legislation, and asked the judge to determine guilt or innocence. After some discussion between Prigg’s counsel and Ovid Johnson, Pennsylvania’s attorney general, and the passage of another act by the Pennsylvania General Assembly, Prigg was convicted (the other defendants had been dropped), so that the case could function as a test in the federal courts. He appealed and the case reached U.S. Supreme Court in 1842, where the Court upheld the 1793 federal fugitive slave law statute and found that Pennsylvania’s 1826 law unconstitutionally interfered with it.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} Waddell, “Governmental Powers,” p. 6.
\textsuperscript{22} The relevant portion of Article 4, Section 2, reads: “A person charged in any State with Treason, Felony, or other Crime, who shall flee from Justice, and be found in another State, shall on Demand of the executive Authority of the State from which he fled, be delivered up, to be removed to the State having Jurisdiction of the Crime. No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.”
The decision was a reverse to the friends of the fugitive; the wording of the opinion, however, gave ammunition to both supporters and opponents of slavery. The Court was unusually divided on the constitutional basis for overturning the lower court rulings. Illustrating their diverging perspective on the fugitive slave issue, six of the nine justices delivered separate opinions. The opinion of the court was written by Justice Joseph Story of Massachusetts, author of the widely cited *Commentaries on the Constitution* (1833), and one of the country’s most respected legal theorists. He did not want to write the majority opinion in *Prigg*, but the other justices persuaded him to, probably because they wanted his authority behind any ruling on the contentious fugitive slave issue. Story opposed slavery and the slave trade, but he despised the fanaticism of abolitionists. In the opinion, Story stated that Pennsylvania’s 1826 statute was unconstitutional because the power to regulate the return of fugitive slaves lay exclusively with the federal government. Since the recovery of fugitive slaves was a federal matter, however, Story granted that states could pass laws prohibiting their judges, officials, and facilities from being involved. In addition, he wrote that states could prosecute slaveholders if the recovery, even if legally justified, resulted in riot or violence. Only two other justices agreed completely with Story’s argument. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney and other Southern justices in particular took issue with Story’s contention that states needed to render no assistance to the capture and return of fugitives.

Although Story would later claim to colleagues in Massachusetts that his opinion was a “triumph of freedom,” his biographer believes that the *Prigg* opinion was motivated more by Story’s hatred of abolitionism than a desire to free fugitive slaves. It was, however, a vital step to nationalization of the fugitive slave issue. According to R. Kent Newmyer, “*Prigg* set in motion forces that led directly to the [Fugitive Slave] act of 1850 and beyond it to *Dred Scott*.27

In the *Prigg* decision, the Court had ruled portions of Pennsylvania’s 1826 personal liberty law unconstitutional. At the same time, the Supreme Court had opened the door for abolitionists to hold that the rendition of fugitive slaves was exclusively a federal matter, in which state courts and law enforcement agencies did not have a role.28 Story’s intention may have been to shield the recovery of fugitive slaves from interfering state legislation, but the result was exactly the opposite. The *Prigg* case stood as the active federal guidance on the fugitive slave issue until the Civil War.

Pennsylvania’s 1847 personal liberty law was passed in response to *Prigg*. Through that law, abolitionists were able to forbid the participation of Pennsylvania law enforcement personnel, or the use of state legal facilities, in capturing, holding, or returning fugitive slaves. As there was no national police force to enforce the fugitive slave laws, slave owners depended upon local law enforcement officials to help them recover their slaves.29 They in turn often received part of the reward money. As in this

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28 Story based this logic on Chief Justice John Marshall’s opinion in *Sturgis v. Crowninshield* (1819) that certain grants of power to Congress were intended to exclude any state interference whatsoever.
29 As early as 1789, Benjamin Franklin, then president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, proposed a national police force to, in part, police emancipated African Americans. Stephen J. Hartnett, *Democratic Dissent & the Cultural Fictions of Antebellum America* (Urbana, 2002), pp. 41-42.
case, it had been common for local constables in south-central Pennsylvania to capture suspected fugitive slaves.

The 1847 law hampered fugitive slave recovery efforts by prohibiting slave owners from relying on constables who carried legal authority and knew the local landscape. Forbidding masters to use Pennsylvania jails and judges may have been even more significant, however. Regardless of whether a captured runaway had been arrested by a constable or was brought to town by a slave hunting party, it was typical for a fugitive slave to be lodged in the local jail while the master was notified to come and claim him or her. Fugitive slave advertisements from the 1820s from this area frequently mention the amount of reward if the fugitive is lodged in the Gettysburg or Carlisle jail. In addition, while Pennsylvania’s 1826 act had imposed penalties for kidnapping, it had also made the state’s judges an integral part of regularized fugitive slave renditions. Now Pennsylvania’s constables, alderman, and judges and jails were forbidden to slave hunters.

In sum, the Prigg ruling and Pennsylvania’s 1847 personal liberty law passed as a result of it made legal recovery of fugitives much more difficult. Rather than rely on an agent, local helpers, and a constable to capture fugitive slaves and lodge them in a jail until they could be reclaimed, now in many instances a slave owner himself had to become involved in the dangerous business of recovery. With little practical recourse to federal officials in this area until the 1850s - the federal fugitive slave commissioner was an innovation of the 1850 law - those capturing runaways had to carry them back to Maryland or Virginia themselves, often passing watchful local abolitionists. The whole

slave catching party, engaged in what they believed to be a constitutionally sanctioned activity, could be placed in legal jeopardy under Pennsylvania’s anti-kidnapping law. Pennsylvania’s legislation was considered so onerous and obstructive that it was specifically cited as inflammatory by the Nashville Convention of 1850, which sought a unified Southern political movement. Even Southern moderates despised the law: Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, no friend of John C. Calhoun and the radical Southern proslavery activists, blamed Pennsylvania in particular for exacerbating the sectional crisis, through her response to the fugitive slave issue, embodied in the 1847 personal liberty law.31

Before even the full ramifications of *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* were understood and that new law was passed, Quakers and abolitionists in south-central Pennsylvania determined to make recovering fugitive slaves more dangerous by zealous prosecutions under the existing anti-kidnapping laws. Despite being willing to disobey certain laws which conflicted with their conscience, through helping fugitive slaves or refusing to pay militia dues, Quakers also believed that the legal system could be a tool for the oppressed. The colony’s own founder, William Penn, had triumphed in a landmark English case establishing the right to impartial trial by jury, and since the colony’s founding, Pennsylvania courts had more protections for defendants than most colonies.32 In the mid- to late-1840s, several kidnapping cases were brought in south central

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Pennsylvania: one in Adams, and one in Cumberland, and one in Franklin County. The “Kitty Payne” case in Adams County case is the best documented and most influential.

The “Kitty Payne” Case (1846)

This dramatic case, involving the kidnapping of an African American woman and her three children, illustrated the shift in antislavery tactics to emphasizing prosecution of kidnappers. Prior to that point, there has been dispute over the extent to which fugitive slaves received legal protection, but there were few prosecutions involved in Adams County.33 This was not as true in York County, where there had been a failed attempt to prosecute a kidnapper in 1822, and in 1826, some citizens had attempted to impeach a judge for freeing a fugitive. In 1833, however, a case in the eastern part of the state, Johnson v. Tompkins, received some attention. There Quakers prosecuted several individuals as kidnappers who had seized African Americans alleged to be slaves in New Jersey and tried to carry them back there under the “right of recaption.” The U.S. Circuit Court ruled for the accused slave catchers. Supreme Court Justice Baldwin’s charge to the jury made it clear that the primary consideration was maintaining the Union, and not Pennsylvania’s law, which mandated a legal hearing at least.

Justice Baldwin may have ruled that slave catchers did not need a hearing in Pennsylvania to seize their fugitives, but by 1834, in at least one instance, an Adams County court case (The State v. Negro Jim and Ephraim Valentine) enters the record where a simple writ of removal would have appeared earlier. This is suggestive of legal

barriers being erected to the return of slaves in the county, but only that. That is not
equivalent to prosecuting those who seized fugitives or free blacks. While Underground
Railroad operatives aided fleeing fugitives, it seems few had used the courts to punish the
seizure of African Americans.34

The Payne case changed that. Catherine “Kitty” Payne and her three children
were seized early one morning in 1845 by white men, and carried to Maryland and later
Virginia. The kidnapping party traveled south along the roads of Adams County, passing
before houses and through villages, and observed by local residents, unsure of how to
react. The Whig paper, the Adams Sentinel, characterized the seizure as a “gross
outrage” perpetrated by “citizens of a neighboring state assisted by others residing in the
county of Franklin.”35

Even more than Adams County, Franklin County was a roaming ground for slave
catchers. One of them, Thomas Finnegan, a member of a group of slave hunters from
around Hagerstown, played a key role, because he had knowledge of local geography. A
warrant for his arrest was sworn out the day after the seizure. When he traveled through
Gettysburg in disguise months later, he was arrested after a lengthy chase. Once accused
in this case, he was implicated in others.36 The Republican Compiler reported that even
while awaiting trial, he was involved in a thwarted kidnapping attempt in Emmitsburg.

34 “The Case of Johnson v. Tompkins, and others,” Wilbur H. Siebert Papers, Ohio Historical Society,
Columbus, Ohio, Roll 12. “The State vs. Negro Jim and Ephraim Valentine,” Miscellaneous Court
Records, Adams County Office of the Prothonotary (records pulled for Larry Bolin and Debra McCauslin).
35 “Gross Outrage,” Adams Sentinel, August 11, 1845, p. 3 c. 2. See also “Great Outrage – Man Stealing,”
(Reprint from Gettysburg Star), Chambersburg Times, August 11, 1845, p. 2 c. 2, Kittochtinny Historical
Society, and “Kidnapping,” (Reprint from Star), Compiler, August 18, 1845.
36 “Finnegan Arrested,” Adams Sentinel, May 25, 1849, p. 2 c. 1. Mary (Goins) Gandy, Guide My Feet,
Hold My Hand (Privately published, 1987), p. 21 (copy in the Adams County Historical Society). Gandy,
in her highly valuable and generally accurate family history on the case, maintains that Finnegan was a
slave catcher from Virginia. Most other local historians hold that he lived in Hagerstown; reading
newspaper accounts of the court case, I had believed he was from Franklin County, Pennsylvania.
The *Compiler* was a Democratic paper that traditionally was no friend to the fugitive, Thaddeus Stevens, or to African Americans. During the 1820s, it had engaged in a running battle with Stevens, and even printed veiled hints that Stevens had impregnated an African American girl and then had her murdered. In the 1830s, there was lengthy legal battle between the paper and Stevens, as Stevens had sued the editor, Jacob Lefever, for libel, and used the occasion to link Lefever to Masonry. That it would publish additional information that could have bearing on the Payne case shows a possible hardening of opinion in Adams County against kidnapping.37

The seizure of the Paynes, like the *Prigg* case, stemmed from generational conflicts in border slaveholding. Aging owners had long relationships with their slaves, but younger heirs saw primarily the wealth potential of their family’s human property. Payne and her children had belonged to Samuel Maddox, Sr., of Rappahannock County, Virginia. Upon his death in November 1837, he had willed Catherine and her children to his wife, Mary Maddox, during her lifetime. Afterward his entire estate, including the slaves, was to revert to his nephew, Samuel Maddox, Jr. In May of 1843, Mary Maddox had moved from Virginia to Adams County, where she had rented a house. She and the Paynes lived there until March 1844, when she returned to her Virginia residence.38 Payne and her children remained in Adams County, living near Bendersville until July

38 “Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” *Star and Republican Banner (S&RB)*, August 28, 1846, p. 2 c. 1. Local historian Debra McCauslin maintains that Samuel Maddox Jr. was heavily indebted and had already used the slaves – which he did not yet own – as collateral on loans. Debra S. McCauslin, “Yellow Hill and the Quaker Valley,” Adams County Historical Society Meeting, March 7, 2006.
24, 1845, when they were seized, bound and gagged by Samuel Maddox, Jr., Thomas Finnegan, and four others.³⁹

Kitty Payne had been seized from the middle of a Quaker settlement in northern Adams County. The Quakers pursued her kidnappers down to Rappahannock County, Virginia after her, visiting her where she was incarcerated. They were determined to see her freed, and her kidnappers punished.

Under one straightforward reading of Pennsylvania law, Kitty Payne and her children were already entitled to their freedom. According to the 1780 abolition act, visitors to the state could retain their slaves for only up to six months – and slaves being brought by someone intending to become a permanent resident were freed immediately. Mary Maddox had stayed in Pennsylvania for nearly a year. In addition, in January 1844, before she returned to Virginia, Mary Maddox had executed deeds of manumission for Catherine Payne, her two children, and several other African American slaves she had brought to Pennsylvania.

When Finnegan came to trial August 1846, the prosecution argued that he had played a leading role in the kidnapping. He had “hunted up” the family and acted as a guide to the slave hunting party. Perhaps because of the existence of ample witnesses to the slave hunters carrying the family from the state, the defense did not deny Finnegan’s involvement completely. Instead, they claimed that he was not implicated in the capture of the slaves; he had only driven the wagon that transported them.⁴⁰

Finnegan had an unusually distinguished defense team to make this argument.

Cases involving slavery usually attracted top legal talent on the border, with abolitionists

³⁹ “Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” Star and Republican Banner, August 28, 1846, p. 2 c. 1; “Gross Outrage,” Adams Sentinel, August 11, 1845, p. 3 c. 2. Gandy, Guide My Feet, pp. 18-19.
⁴⁰ “Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” Star and Republican Banner, August 28, 1846, p. 2 c. 1
anxious to establish a new precedent and other area lawyers, often Democrats, wanting to reassure their southern neighbors that they would uphold the laws securing their property. Finnegan’s lawyers were John Reed and Thomas McKaig. Reed had lived in Gettysburg, had founded the School of Law at Dickinson College, and was a lawyer and judge in Cumberland County. McKaig was a Maryland lawyer and legislator.

Despite the debate about the extent of Finnegan’s involvement, the principal legal issue debated at the trial was whether Mary Maddox could free the Paynes – whether she had received an absolute estate in the slaves or an estate for life only. Virginia’s laws stated that any legatee who had slaves bequeathed to them for life forfeited them to the next owner if they were removed from the state.41

The defense counsel argued that Maddox had been willed only a life estate in the slaves. John Reed, Finnegan’s lead attorney, argued for his innocence based strongly on property rights and Virginia’s limitations on when a slave could be manumitted. Like Thaddeus Stevens in the Charity Butler case twenty-four years previously, Reed contended that an individual who was not the slave owner could not take the actions to free a slave under Pennsylvania law. He argued that the slaves were Mrs. Maddox’s for life only, and so, under Virginia law, she had ceased to own them when she left the state. As a result, the slaves were brought into Pennsylvania as the slaves of Samuel Maddox, not Mary Maddox. The act of the Pennsylvania legislature only conferred freedom on slaves if they were brought there by their “owner” – in this case, when they were brought here by Mrs. Maddox, she was no longer the owner, so they were not freed. Therefore their recapture was legal, and his client, Finnegan, was “guilty of no crime, and must be

41 “Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” Star and Republican Banner, August 28, 1846, p. 2 c. 1
acquitted.” No kidnapping occurred if a man reclaimed his own property, even if he used force.42

Even Reed courted local opinion by condemning kidnapping. He stated that he had no objection to Finnegan’s conviction if it was proved that “Mrs. Maddox had an absolute estate.” With perhaps some disdain for his client, he said “It was the duty of the prisoner to look out before he seized on the persons of freemen,” but he still expressed confidence that the jury would acquit his client.

The defense did not confine itself to purely legal argument either. McKaig rose and described his fears that the area’s “prejudices against the system of slavery” would cause an injustice to his client. He stressed his local connections: he had lived in Adams County before he moved to Ohio and then Maryland. Now he had returned to “restore this man to family and wife.” McKaig argued that since Finnegan thought the Paynes were fugitives, he did not have the malicious motive necessary for kidnapping. Carefully currying favor, he complimented the Quakers who had brought the case. Although he owned five slaves in Maryland, he praised abolitionists, citing his belief that they lightened the burden of the slave, and that public pressure was necessary for “great reforms.”43

The attorneys for the commonwealth equaled the defense attorneys in distinction. The lead attorney, James Cooper was Adams County’s former Congressman and a future U. S. Senator. He was assisted by local lawyer and Stevens’ protégé Daniel Durkee. Cooper had also received training from Thaddeus Stevens, but he was born in Frederick

42 “Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” Star and Republican Banner, August 28, 1846, p. 2.
43 “Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” Star and Republican Banner, August 28, 1846, p. 2. McKaig realized, and alluded to, the fact that most Southerners saw Northern abolitionism as a force which worked against voluntary slave manumissions and any easing of the slave’s lot.
County, Maryland, and he and Stevens did not always agree on abolitionism. Later they would become significant political rivals.44

Cooper’s arguments reflected the development of antislavery and free soil concepts in border Pennsylvania. He began by reminding the jury that “every-day” saw “attempts of slaves to escape from bondage” along the border. He invoked, as the prosecution frequently would, America’s Revolutionary and Constitutional heritage. The Revolution was fought for freedom, which was now protected by the Constitution, Cooper maintained, except that “the slave interest” in the Constitutional Convention “inserted in it the article which authorized the reclamation of ‘fugitives from labor,’ escaping into the free States.” This fugitive slave law was part of the bargain Americans had made for domestic peace when the Constitution was ratified. While the fugitive slave clause must be obeyed, Pennsylvanians must aggressively protect the liberties of all free men, lest their own freedoms eventually be jeopardized.45 Cooper extolled Pennsylvania’s own history of emancipation; for him, the “chiefest glory” of the Pennsylvania statute book was “the [abolition] acts of 1780 and 1788.” These laws fulfilled the desire of the revolutionaries, after winning their own “redemption,” to ensure that the same blessings “might be extended to the whole brotherhood of man.” As a judge in Virginia had just declared the 1788 Pennsylvania statute unconstitutional,

44 In 1837, Cooper had opposed Jonathan Blanchard at the courthouse steps, but he had also helped Stevens pack the “Friends of the Integrity of the Union” meeting in Harrisburg, turning it away from making pro-Southern pronouncements.
45 This sort of “slippery slope” reasoning, used here to justify Pennsylvania’s laws protecting free blacks and punishing kidnapping, had been a staple of American political rhetoric since the colonial period. The premise was that the smallest infringement of the liberty of one held the risk of ultimate enslavement for all. See Bernard Bailyn, The Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, MA: 1967), pp. 94-160.
Cooper’s encomium to that law both supported his legal case and appealed to the jury’s pride.\(^{46}\)

Cooper was willing, however, to use that same Virginia’s judge’s arguments when it helped his case. The issue of the Paynes’ status had come before a Virginia court after their forcible return there. That Virginia judge, while believing that Pennsylvania’s 1826 legislation was unsupportable, had ruled that Mrs. Maddox had an absolute estate in the slaves, and could free them if she desired. Because property was involved, the matter was therefore not one for a court of law but a court of equity, where he had little doubt the Paynes would prevail. Citing his opinion, Cooper stated that “Mrs. Maddox did acquire an absolute title… to these slaves – a title full and ample for all purposes whatsoever – to sell, manumit, hire, or remove …”\(^{47}\)

“Removing” was the key action in Cooper’s conception of the case. He drew a distinction between the slave South and Pennsylvania’s laudable “free soil.” “[H]aving removed with them to this state,” Cooper declared, “the moment they placed foot upon our soil, the shackles fell from their limbs, and under the operation of this great and glorious law which swept slavery from our borders, these poor victims of a miserable Institution emerged from slavish degradation and stood forth erect – free – free men and free-women as long as life shall last!”\(^{48}\)

\(^{46}\) “Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” *Star and Republican Banner*, August 28, 1846, p. 2 c. 1. As a judge in Virginia had just declared the 1788 Pennsylvania emancipation statute unconstitutional, Cooper’s encomium to that law both supported his legal case but also appealed to the jury’s pride and emotion.

\(^{47}\) Kitty Payne and her children returned to Adams county in November of 1846. She died an early death, probably from tuberculosis. Before her death, she was married to Abraham Brien, a local African American who lived on what would come to be called Cemetery Ridge. Gandy, *Guide My Feet*, p. 38-39.

\(^{48}\) “Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” *S&RB*, August 28, 1846, p. 2 c. 1
Cooper emphasized immediate emancipation because of its rhetorical simplicity and because of Mrs. Maddox’s intention to live in Pennsylvania, not to sojourn less than six months. The argument played well to the nascent free soil sentiment in southern Pennsylvania. Cooper could portray Pennsylvania as sacred ground, where the shackles fell off the instant a slave crossed the line, even though that was not always true.

Cooper’s speech, in a local trial in border Adams County, Pennsylvania, reflects the expanding influence of what historians call “free soil” doctrines. Recent research shows that free soil ideas were arising relatively simultaneously in a number of different parts of the North, in response to local conditions. For instance, in New York, the precursors of free soil rhetoric emerged from the Anti-rent disputes against the large, absentee landlords of the state’s unique massive estates. In Pennsylvania, Cooper’s argument shows that the early development of free soil concepts there emerged at least in part from the fugitive slave issue and the conception that Pennsylvania’s earth did – or should - immediately unshackle bondsmen once they set foot on it.49

These concepts of free soil would continue to be developed in Pennsylvania politics, although James Cooper would not contribute to their maturation. After his election as Senator in 1849, Cooper moderated his position during the 1850 Congressional crisis, and he would be the northern Senator who most consistently supported the Compromise measures. Thaddeus Stevens, however, continued to develop the free soil concept, and in 1850, the floor of the House of Representatives would ring

with his fiery assertion that the instant escaping slaves touched free soil they would be free. In Stevens’ case, he was referring to the western territories, but his argument, like Cooper’s, had been forged from his experiences in border Pennsylvania.\(^{50}\)

In the Adams County courtroom, Cooper did reluctantly admit that had Payne and her children been fugitive slaves, they could have been legally taken back to Virginia. He stated:

If Mrs. Maddox had not such a right to these negroes as under the circumstances to entitle them to their freedom – if they were… ‘fugitives’, then the broad wing of the Constitution, much as it might be regretted, stretched over them to reclaim them into slavery.\(^{51}\)

“Would to God,” Cooper declared, the Constitution would have abolished “the shackles of servitude” and granted freedom to all – and then, he hinted, the South would have not fallen behind the North in economic development.

To win their case, however, the prosecutors did not rely solely on legalities. For the final summation of the opening argument, Cooper reemphasized the heritage of Pennsylvania’s Revolutionary War forefathers, and their most “glorious” achievement, the abolition law. This strategy was largely aimed at swaying the case’s presiding judge, Colonel William Irvine. Irvine was a Mercer County judge filling a temporary absence on the Adams County bench. Cooper and Durkee knew that Judge Irvine was the son of a Carlisle doctor who had been a Revolutionary War companion of George Washington. William Irvine himself had served as Pennsylvania’s acting Adjutant General during the


\(^{51}\) “Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” *Star and Republican Banner*, August 28, 1846, p. 2 c. 1
War of 1812.\footnote{“William Neill Irvine,” http://www.irvineclan.com/wni1782.htm; “William Irvine,” http://www.famousamericans.net/williamirvine/} In closing, Cooper again appealed to the example of the Revolutionary Fathers:

> Among all the laws of our ancestors, of those who fought the battles of the Revolution – there is no more humane, no more glorious law than that which strikes the manacles of the slave from his limbs as soon as he is brought upon our soil... I hope that this verdict may have the influence to deter men from attempting, upon our soil, to degrade the image of God into a hopeless bondage.

Despite the defense’s efforts, the prosecution’s appeals found their mark. Judge Irvine, the Revolutionary’s son, charged the jury that “Mary Maddox took an absolute estate under the will of her husband; and that if the fact of taking and carrying away the negroes had been proved, the defendant was guilty.” As that point had not been in dispute at the trial, his destroyed the defense’s case. Even the defendant’s chief counsel had stated that if Mrs. Maddox had an absolute estate, Finnegan should be convicted. After a short retirement, the jury returned a verdict of guilty, after which the defense immediately moved for a new trial. In November, this motion was denied, and Finnegan was sentenced to five years imprisonment at Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia. After a year and a half, he would be pardoned by the governor.\footnote{“Court of Quarter Sessions – August Term,” Star and Republican Banner, August 28, 1846, p. 2. “Finnegan Sentenced,” Star and Republican Banner, November 20, 1846, p. 3 c. 1.}

The Kitty Payne case in Pennsylvania was a victory for concepts of free soil and a hagiographic vision of the Pennsylvania’s Revolutionary leaders as egalitarians. Finnegan was convicted, and Payne and her children returned to Adams County after a
prolonged legal dispute in Virginia’s courts, in which she also received aid from Quakers in Pennsylvania and Virginia.  

The case did not end the efforts of area Quakers and abolitionists to prosecute kidnappings. Both Franklin and Cumberland Counties also had cases in the second half of the 1847 and 1850s - the Finnegan/Payne case appears to have been a forerunner in a larger legal initiative by Quakers and abolitionists to combat kidnappings in south central Pennsylvania.  

Cases like these allowed Quakers and abolitionists to focus attention on the fugitive slave issue and the related issue of kidnapping. Kidnapping could be even more volatile issue than the seizure of runaway slaves. A fugitive slave case concerned whether an African American would be sent back to the South, an issue about which many south-central Pennsylvanians did not really care. A kidnapping case, however, could not only result in liberty for a local African American family, it also could result in white perpetrators being sent to the penitentiary for extended periods of time, such as Thomas Finnegan or Martin Auld, the individual convicted in Cumberland County. This brought additional attention on the cases and made them topics of local debate.  

Consequently, kidnapping cases had the potential to strike a deeper chord with many Pennsylvanians than the fugitive slave issue. Only a few individuals outside of the African American community were willing to take the risks of regularly helping...
fugitives, but kidnapping threatened the rights of all, at least as the abolitionists portrayed it. While antislavery newspapers would try to whip up fears of white slavery and the kidnapping of sunburned white farm girls (an actual case briefly agitated in the 1850s), most south central Pennsylvanians were probably more concerned about Southern political power that could arbitrarily protect those who seized Pennsylvania citizens, even African Americans, and carried them south without trial. That same Southern political power could eventually encroach on their rights and liberties in Pennsylvania, or in the western territories where they or their children might desire to go.

*Fugitive Slaves, Hot Pursuit, and the “Tragedy of the Commons”*

Most area whites’ response to fugitive slaves was distinctly limited. While many might spontaneously offer food or directions, only a few sympathetic abolitionists cared enough to offer sustained help to fugitives. If a fugitive fled into south-central Pennsylvania and was rapidly recaptured and taken south, it generally caused little upset or reaction, except within the African American community, and only then in cases where they received ample warning.56

The Payne case, however, with its capture of individuals who had resided in the area for several years, is typical of many kidnapping cases in the North. Along the border, some slaves were recovered “in hot pursuit,” but in many cases it could be years before a fugitive was recaptured. This lag between escape and recapture permitted a broader base of sympathy to develop for a captured fugitive than might have been the

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56 The leader of the resistance at Christiana, William Parker, made a similar point about Lancaster County: “The whites of that region were generally such negro-haters, that it was a matter of no moment to them where fugitives were carried.” William Parker, “The Freedman’s Story,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, v. 17 (February & March, 1866), p. 162, cited in Jonathan Katz, *Resistance at Christiana* (New York, 1974), p. 25.
case for a newcomer. If Southerners had restricted themselves to trying to recover fugitives who had absconded for one year or less, then their image problems in the North might have been significantly less pronounced.\(^57\) Of course, most Southern slaveholders did not see it this way. They regarded escaped slaves as their property, whether they had been missing for six months or six years. This was due to Southern concepts of slaves as lifelong chattel property, but it also reflected the realities of Southern life. When a fugitive escaped, it might not be the best time to organize a pursuit. This was especially true since many fugitives fled during the December holidays, or at harvest time, when it might be difficult to spare men to pursue the slaves. It also could take time for northern informers to report where the fugitives might be.

When Southerners captured fugitives whose absence had been of a long duration, however, they were often seizing individuals who may have married, had children, and become part of a Northern community. In some cases, the captured fugitives were regarded as longstanding local citizens. The faceless fugitive had received an identity. It was the seizure of these individuals, such as the Paynes, which raised community ire beyond just a narrow circle of abolitionists. This reaction helped result in laws that made it more difficult for the recovery of all fugitive slaves.

Even if slaveholders had perceived that recovering a long-departed fugitive would turn Northern sentiment against them, it may not have changed their actions. In an innovative essay, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” Garrett Hardin wrote that in many situations where individuals profit from something open to all, harmful activities are not

\(^57\) The Senate committee which developed the original 1793 fugitive slave law had added a legislative proviso calling for African Americans who had lived in the area from which they were for a term of years to receive trial under the laws of that state instead of being seized under the federal law. It is not clear that the term of years was ever spelled out (“term of -----years immediately previous to such arrest”), and the proviso was dropped by amendment before the bill was passed. Thomas Morris, \textit{Free Men All!}, pp. 20-21.
significantly disincentivized. This is true whether the benefit in question is Hardin’s example of common grazing grounds, or the right to recover slaves under nineteenth century fugitive slave laws. While everyone benefits from the property held in common (the land or the law), the costs of deleterious events that damage it, such as overgrazing, are spread over all the users/owners; they do not all accrue to the individual taking the harmful action. In Hardin’s example, it was overgrazing; in this case, if an slave owner travels north and successfully recaptures his runaway slave, he has recovered his family’s investment, even if the resulting outcry turns the section of the country into which he traveled even more resolutely against the rendition of fugitive slaves. That cost is born by future slaveholders trying to recover their slaves; he has received what he wanted.58

In the Kitty Payne and other kidnapping cases, we see this principle at work. In this environment, the legal strategy pursued by area Quakers and abolitionists showed substantial promise. Probably adopted in part out because of the difficulty of building a mass antislavery organization along the border, this legal approach had seen Thomas Finnegan sentenced to the penitentiary, and his trial had generated significant publicity for antislavery opinions. This case almost certainly inspired the 1846 Adams County petition, which seems to have led to the successful 1847 petition campaign and the passage of the new personal liberty law. This law would then be upheld in a Cumberland County case, Pennsylvania v. Auld. It seemed as though support for the rights of Southern slave owners was declining. That was before the response, however, which would put the fugitive slave issue on trial in Pennsylvania into the 1850s.

The Fugitive Slave Issue on Trial: The Southern Response

With the ambiguous resolution of *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, and the conviction of kidnappers in the Payne case, the friends of the fugitive appeared to be gaining momentum in south central Pennsylvania. When the legislature, responding to pressure from Quakers and southern Pennsylvania abolitionists, passed a much stronger personal liberty law in 1847, it seemed as if Pennsylvania might become a true refuge for the fugitive slave. As the state lay just north of Virginia and Maryland, and shared a nearly three hundred mile border with its slave state neighbors, such an eventuality represented a threat to which Southern slave owners had to respond.

In this context, the law became a double-edged sword, which could be wielded by slave owners as much as the friends of the fugitive. In addition, the federated system of the American judiciary created an opportunity for the Southern counterresponse. The opponents of slavery had been working on a local and state basis, in the county and state courts of Pennsylvania and in the state legislature. If Southern slave owners and those who wanted to preserve sectional peace by easing recovery of fugitive slaves could successfully press their point in the higher state and national courts, then they could trump the gains made by Quakers and abolitionists.

This approach had several potential advantages. Advocates for the fugitive slave might be intimidated by court action. In addition, just as the courtroom gave abolitionists a prominent location to promote their free soil doctrines, it gave Southerners and their supporters an audience before which to argue that domestic slavery and the right to recover fugitive slaves was, and should be, protected by the national government. As the Constitution itself contained a fugitive slave cause (*Article 4, Section 2*), which had been
reinforced by 1793 enabling legislation, the slave owners were often able to prevail on legal grounds. The approach had risks, however, and the battle for public opinion was not as successful, as their successes sometimes helped turn public opinion in Pennsylvania against them, souring the future social, political and judicial environment.

Some of the first cases in this legal counteroffensive were in Cumberland County, which, like Adams and Franklin, had extensive economic and social ties to the South. Although not located on the border with Maryland as those two counties were, Cumberland County was linked to the South through its military and educational institutions. A number of future high-ranking Confederate officers were instructed at the U. S. Army’s Carlisle Barracks, a cavalry training school. Dickinson College attracted the children of elite Southerners and several future Confederate officers of its own. One historian has described it as a “favorite resort for young students from Virginia,” and stated that “the names of many prominent Virginia families appear in the Dickinson College records.”

Dickinson was also the alma mater of Marylander Roger Brooke Taney, the long-serving Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (1836-1864).

Although twenty miles from the border, Carlisle was in spirit a border town, with many residents anxious not to offend their Southern guests.

By 1847, however, the atmosphere was subtly changing. Dickinson was now a Methodist institution, after the disastrous disputes which had doomed its Presbyterian predecessor. Some of its faculty had been drawn into the 1840s controversy over slavery, which split the Methodist church into northern and southern wings. Because the early

Methodist church had banned slave owning entirely, Northerners felt justified on insisting on church officers not holding slaves. This was an implied criticism of slavery, however. When a Methodist bishop in Georgia refused to free slaves he received by inheritance, Southerners supported him. This dispute was particularly significant in the “borderlands,” where church jurisdictions spanned the boundaries of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. If a division occurred, an equitable way of parsing out church assets would have to be devised.61

The dispute slowly turned from church governance to the morality of slavery in general. The faculty at Dickinson College made an important contribution. John P. Durbin was Dickinson’s president until 1845, and the editor of the *Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York). He used the pages of that national journal to promote a plan of gradual, compensated emancipation. Durbin tried to play a pacific role between the sections of the church, but his writings stirred up Southern resentment.62 On the other hand, Dickinson Professor John McClintock strongly opposed slavery and supported the Northern side of the Methodist debate. Although not a Garrisonian, he was an influential Methodist intellectual. In early 1847, he had published a series of articles critical of slavery in the *Christian Advocate*. These provoked a strong reaction, particularly when McClintock compared Christian slave owners who sold their slaves to Judas, who sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. McClintock also stated that the life of the slave was

61 “The Fight for the Border Conferences,” in Emory Stevens Bucke, et. al., *The History of American Methodism*, v. 2 (New York, 1964), pp. 159-167. “Border Troubles,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York)[hereinafter referred to as *Christian Advocate*], March 17, 1847, p. 3 c. 4-5, is one of a number of similar examples appearing in the *Advocate* in this period. See also “Letter of Bishop Capers,” *Christian Advocate*, April 21, 1847, p. 3 c. 2-4.

inherently closer to Christ’s than that of the slaveholder. Controversy erupted, and the paper stopped printing McClintock’s series, although it did not entirely disavow his sentiments.63

Into this environment intruded a party of fugitive slaves and their owner, who was bent on their recapture. He found them in the house of an African American citizen in Carlisle and committed them to the county jail. When he brought them before a judge in Carlisle to authorize their removal, it resulted in tumult, escapes, and a near murder.

The area’s African American community initiated most of this activity, but Professor McClintock was arrested on charges of inciting the crowd to riot.64 The riot case was noteworthy, because McClintock was a man of prestige in the local community and of some prominence nationally. He was a nervous, excitable individual, but his colleagues regarded him as a genius. Some believed he was one of the most gifted preachers in the Methodist church.65 He corresponded extensively with European intellectuals, especially August Comte. Later in his career, he would become the first president of Drew University. At this point, however, he was young and ardent and the

64J.P.M., “Three Fugitive Slaves,” in William H. Burkhart, et. al., Shippensburg in the Civil War (Shippensburg, PA, 1964), pp. 8-11; McClintock appears to have been charged as “ringleader” for the same reason Castner Hanway would be for the Christiana Riot in 1851: a paternalistic assumption that African Americans could not organize for effective intervention without white assistance. See Thomas P. Slaughter, Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North (New York, 1991), p. 66, 92.
65McClintock’s personal letters contain numerous references to his ailments and conditions, and less charitable biographers have labeled him as a hypochondriac. John T. Cunningham and Regina Diverio, Drew University (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), p. 18. (Genius, best preacher) Sellers, Dickinson College (web version), ch. 9, p. 11.
riot prosecution gave Southern slave owners the opportunity to strike back at him and intimidate those who would help fugitives.\textsuperscript{66}

To convict McClintock of the charge of inciting to riot, the prosecution had to prove McClintock had urged the African Americans to organized, unlawful resistance. This added to the drama, because in this case, the facts were in dispute. Unlike the Finnegan case, where both defense and prosecution basically agreed on the sequence of events and merely debated whether the individuals seized were still legally slaves or not, in the McClintock riot case, the issue was whether – and how much – the professor had helped the fugitives escape.\textsuperscript{67}

McClintock was at the post office near the courthouse on June 2 when someone entered and told him that there was a party of fugitives in custody who were about to be remanded to the south. McClintock walked to the courthouse and entered while the proceedings were in session. He stationed himself near the defense table and conversed with one of the defense counsel. After a five minute proceeding, McClintock heard Judge Samuel Hepburn rule that the sheriff had to release the African Americans on writ of habeas corpus, but as the slave hunting party had certificates of removal, they could seize them and take them south. McClintock animatedly insisted to the judge that a new law, just passed by the General Assembly, was relevant to this case. This was the 1847 personal liberty law, which forbade the use of local constables from apprehending and


\textsuperscript{67} Thomas Slaughter, in his book on the Christiana riot, points out that riots by their very nature are “wild, confusing, and frightening” and it can be impossible, over a hundred years later, to sort out exactly what happened. Thomas P. Slaughter, \textit{Bloody Dawn}, p. 59
holding the fugitives. When the judge said he had never heard of such a law, McClintock left to get a copy from his office at Dickinson College a few blocks away. First, however, according to some accounts, he turned to the prisoners in the dock and told them they were free to go. A dispute broke out between McClintock and the claimants, and one of the fugitives then escaped out of the back of the courthouse.68

Meanwhile, members of Carlisle’s African American community had gathered outside, and when the other fugitives were brought out of the courthouse to put them in a carriage for conveyance south, an attempted to rescue them occurred, enabling more of the fugitives to escape. By now, McClintock had returned and was present at the scene, although he appeared as swept up in the events as everyone else. The slave owner, Thomas Kennedy, was knocked down and severely beaten. Kennedy seemed to recover after several weeks’ convalescence, but less than a month after the riot he expired after eating at a Carlisle hotel. It is possible he died from the lingering effects of undiagnosed internal injuries. If so, only the circumstances of his death being distant from his wounding, and the fact that the Federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 had not yet been passed, kept Carlisle from achieving as much fame in slave resistance as Christiana.69

At his trial, McClintock was represented by local counsel. Thaddeus Stevens had indicated a tentative willingness to defend McClintock, but withdrew when the administration of Dickinson issued an apology for the incident. Stevens had wanted to try the case on his traditional antislavery issues of the human rights and the Declaration of Independence; his letter to McClintock indicates his disappointment that the

69 Sellers, *Dickinson College* (web version), ch. 9, p. 28; Morgan, *Dickinson College*, p. 277.
administration of the college wanted to minimize the McClintock’s involvement rather than defend it.70 This reluctance on the part of the school had some justification. At a time when the state, due to budget constraints, was unable to support higher education at all, Robert Emory, the current president of Dickinson, was determined not to lose Dickinson’s Southern students, who had threatened to withdraw over the incident.71

McClintock predicted that ample false witnesses would be found among “miserable creatures” in town, including “kidnappers &c.” At the trial, many witnesses did appear against McClintock – “perjurer after perjurer” as Moncure Conway, then a sympathetic Dickinson student from Virginia, termed it - but their stories did not agree.72 Meanwhile the defense entered evidence that there was a deliberate effort being made to drive McClintock from the town. The jury acquitted McClintock, bringing a protest from the judge, Samuel Hepburn. Hepburn had been the judge in the Kennedy slave rendition hearing, and he vigorously objected to the jury’s verdict. Had it been a civil case, he said, he would have set the acquittal aside, but since it was a criminal trial, he did not. A transcript of the trial testimony can be found in the Jeremiah Zeamer papers in Carlisle and it is a welter of accusations and counter-accusations, of damning and exculpatory evidence together. The African Americans who participated in the riot were dealt with

70 Thaddeus Stevens to John McClintock, August 2, 1847, Thaddeus Stevens Papers (microfilm), Reel 1 (General Correspondence), item TS0361. Beverly Wilson Palmer and Holly Ochoa, The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens, v. 1 (Pittsburgh, 1997), pp. 88-89 In a subsequent letter to the anxious McClintock, Stevens accurately predicted, “I doubt not of your acquittal, but I fear for the colored Defts[defendants] – their skin testifies against them…” Stevens to McClintock, August 9, 1847, TS0362.
71 Sellers, Dickinson College (web version), ch. 9, p. 29-30; Morgan, Dickinson College, pp. 280-281.
72 A transcript of the trial testimony can be found in the Jeremiah Zeamer papers at the Cumberland County Historical Society, and it is a welter of accusations and counter-accusations, of damning and exculpatory evidence together.
harshly: ten were sentenced to the penitentiary. Many of these verdicts were later set aside or ameliorated on appeal, after McClintock had been exonerated.\textsuperscript{73}

Despite his acquittal, McClintock may have admitted there was a grain of truth behind the accusations the next year when it was rumored he would be offered the presidency of Dickinson College. McClintock demurred, insisting that the College needed someone older, less impetuous, and more sagacious. He soon left for a tour of Europe and then resigned from Dickinson and left the area, briefly returning when he purchased a house in the 1850s. If there had been a design behind the prosecutions, as some commentators allege, then the object may have been achieved by ultimately driving McClintock from the area. If the goal was to cow the local African American community from helping fugitive slaves, it is less clear if that was successful.\textsuperscript{74}

The case received widespread publicity in Pennsylvania and beyond. In the North, it was followed by papers throughout south central Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia. Reports of the case were also carried in leading New York papers; the \textit{New York Tribune} had even labeled the curtailment of McClintock’s \textit{Christian Advocate} series just a few days before the riot, the “Application of the Gag.”\textsuperscript{75}

Below the Mason-Dixon line, the case was labeled an “alarming riot” as far south as South Carolina. The case especially convulsed the border. Particular interest was shown in the subject by the newspapers from Baltimore, Richmond, and Kennedy’s

\textsuperscript{73} John McClintock to [Stephen Olin], Carlisle, June 26, 1847, p. [2], McClintock Papers, Drew University; Fristchler, “Art from the President’s House,” p. 17. Morgan, \textit{Dickinson College}, p. 279. James Henry Morgan believes that the African American defendants received harsh sentences because of Hepburn’s anger at the McClintock verdict, but it was more probably a result of their being black and being charged with a serious crime with sectional ramifications.

\textsuperscript{74} John McClintock to Stephen Olin, May 21, 1848, McClintock Papers, Emory University, cited by Sellers, \textit{History of Dickinson College}, ch. 9, p. 29 (web).

hometown of Hagerstown. In Baltimore, the Sun gave it extensive coverage, and reprinted from the Philadelphia Enquirer the transcript of the trial over three separate days.\textsuperscript{76} In Richmond, the incident caused strong reactions. The Richmond Whig struggled to have a measured response, but remarked that rather than assurances from the citizens of Carlisle that they condemned the “flagrant outrage,” they should have done more to “prevent” the crime in the first place. The paper declared that through the incident Southern “rights have been attacked in the person of the murdered Kennedy.”\textsuperscript{77} The Whig’s correspondents were even more agitated. One letter writer asked how long such “outrages” could be borne, and asked is “the South to be abandoned lest the North be offended?” Another correspondent, from Martinsburg, sent in the entire text of the 1847 personal liberty law, and announced that it had “the manifest design to defeat the recovery of an absconding slave.” He predicted that Virginia’s border counties would suffer the most from the legislation. A third correspondent urged the paper’s readers to boycott Northern products, and to press the legislature to exclude Northerners “from participation in our trade” through a high tariff on Northern goods.\textsuperscript{78} Papers in Richmond, Winchester and Hagerstown also urged Southern students not to attend Dickinson College.\textsuperscript{79}


\textsuperscript{77} “The Carlisle Riot,” Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, July 16, 1847, p. 2 c. 3.

The McClintock prosecution represented one attempt to use the legal system to strike back at those in south central Pennsylvania who would help fugitive slaves. Even though the professor was acquitted, with his refusal to be considered for Dickinson’s presidency and his departure soon afterwards, it can be argued that those who brought their prosecution achieved their goal. This desire to use the courts to cow area abolitionists is illustrated by a second notable case: the Kaufman case.

*The Kaufman Case (Oliver v. Kaufman; Oliver v. Weakly; 1847-1852)*

Prosecuting those involved in large-scale fugitive slave rescues, was not the only legal response to the heightened tensions in the area. Slaveholders and their allies retaliated against the Underground Railroad as well. The Daniel Kaufman case targeted another prominent resident of Cumberland County. Not only had Kaufman founded the little community of Boiling Springs southeast of Carlisle, but his brother David migrated to Mississippi and then became a leading Texas politician. After his election to Congress in 1851, he rose to become chairman of the powerful House Rules Committee. He was rumored to be next in line for a Senate seat from Texas, but for his untimely death in office.80 Like McClintock, Daniel Kaufman did not initiate the series of events which led to his arrest, and seems to have become wrapped up in his case almost by accident, although he was a known Underground Railroad worker. Despite this history, his legal counsel would claim at his trial that he was merely offering humanitarian assistance to destitute African American fugitives.

The Kaufman case unfolded several months before the McClintock case. One night in December 1846, Robert Cole, an African American resident of Chambersburg, set out to transport ten slaves towards Harrisburg. The slaves had fled from a widow in Washington County, Maryland; they feared being sold from their late master’s estate. This was a frequent occurrence for slaves, as accounts were reconciled, estates were divided, and debts were settled. This large a group of slaves, including children, were hard to move surreptitiously, and created danger for everyone involved. The slaves had first made their way to Chambersburg, where they stayed for a day or two, but that was too close to Washington County, where a pursuit was being organized. So Cole undertook to move them at night to the Ege iron works in Cumberland County, where there were hiding places for concealing fugitives. Then they would be transported further.81

The trip was dogged by difficulties from the beginning. Cole fell behind schedule immediately; then he had difficulty finding the right paths across the South Mountain at night. As morning approached, he was still some distance from the ford across Yellow Breeches Creek, which led to the iron works. Traffic on the road was increasing, as laborers began to travel to work. Cole faced a dilemma about how to avoid detection with his conspicuous cargo.82

With day breaking and Cole and the slaves not at their destination, he turned off onto a side road. He found Kaufman’s house and left the fugitives in his barn. It is

81 [Testimony of Robert Cole], Court records of Mary Oliver, et. al., vs. Daniel Kaufman, November Court of 1847, Papers No. 32 in file box November 1847-January 1848, p. 4-5, Office of the Prothonotary, Cumberland County Courthouse, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Hereinafter referred to as “Cole testimony.” Some historians believe that there were a series of limestone caves near the furnace where fugitives were sometimes hidden by African American workers.
82 Richard L. Tritt, At a Place Called Boiling Springs, p. 113; [Cross-examination of Robert Cole], Oliver v. Kaufman, Papers No. 32, loose, unnumbered sheet of paper.
unclear whether Cole or Kaufman had ever met previously, or if Cole only knew of Kaufman by reputation. Presumably they knew each other, but such a link was never admitted at trial. When Kaufman came outside, Cole told him what he had done. Kaufman went to the barn and saw the fugitives hidden there.

According to Cole – who testified at the trial in Kaufman’s defense – Kaufman several times expressed a firm wish that Cole would take them further. Cole said he could not, but promised to continue on to the furnace alone and see if he could find a hiding spot for them there. According to his testimony, he went to the furnace, ate a hearty meal, and then turned around and went back to Franklin County, after a perfunctory check on the fugitives.83

Kaufman did not seem overly concerned, however. He fed the fugitives and made them comfortable. During the day, groups of local residents came by to gawk at the slaves. Testimony at the trial established that Kaufman had loaded up his farm wagon that evening – presumably with the fugitives – and disappeared into the gloom, returning with the wagon empty. The fugitives were not seen again, and so, circumstantially, it was believed that Kaufman had carried them on.84

Cole and Kaufman’s lack of caution came back to haunt them. Slave catchers were in hot pursuit, led by John Stake, the widow’s cousin. They arrived in the area the next day, and were tipped off by locals that the slaves had been at Kaufman’s. When they traveled there, they did not find him, but they told his wife that both of them would be prosecuted for harboring the slaves. A suit was brought to recover the value of the

83 Cole testimony; Tritt, Boiling Springs, pp. 113-114.
84 Tritt, Boiling Springs, p. 114.
fugitives, which likely also had the purpose of intimidating the Underground Railroad in south central Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{85}

The suit was originally argued before a local Cumberland County jury. The key witness was Robert Cole, who testified that Kaufman had been very reluctant to receive the slaves. Kaufman’s defense team argued that he had done nothing more than give the poor creatures he had found in his barn food and drink, basic humanitarian actions enjoined by the Bible; he had not “harbored” them in any way. The judge’s instructions to the jury suggested that this aid did not constitute harboring fugitive slaves, and the verdict was acquittal.\textsuperscript{86}

The case was appealed to the state Supreme Court, which ruled that, because of \textit{Prigg v. Pennsylvania}, it was outside of the state’s jurisdiction and should have been a federal case from the beginning. \textit{Prigg} had been a victory for the Southerners who had seized Margaret Morgan and her children, but under Joseph Story’s majority ruling in \textit{Prigg} that states were not supposed to have any role in remanding fugitives, antislavery advocates appealed to it as well. By now, the Kaufman case was increasing in prominence, and Thaddeus Stevens joined Kaufman’s defense team. The case dragged on, finally being heard at federal district court in Philadelphia. Many of the original witnesses were subpoenaed again, but Robert Cole, at least, did not answer the subpoena. By now he had moved on, probably to safer parts north. Perhaps he was aided by the Underground Railroad himself.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{87} Although an individual named Cole was implicated in an attempted fugitive slave rescue in Lancaster in 1851.
Kaufman was found guilty in federal court and fined several thousand dollars. As in the McClintock case, the Kaufman case received substantial notoriety and newspaper coverage. Eventually Kaufman’s brother-in-law, Stephen Weakly, assumed the costs and liability.\(^{88}\) Abolitionists publicized the case, and handbills were circulated soliciting funds to pay the fine.\(^{89}\) Philadelphia supporters reportedly gave $25 each, and even abolitionists outside of Pennsylvania became involved. New York abolitionist Samuel May made two contributions to Stephen F. Weakly’s defense account, one for $200 and one for $77.98.\(^{90}\)

The trial drove Kaufman out of helping fugitive slaves, but other local Underground Railroad workers, including Weakly and Philip Brechbill, continued the operation. The Kaufman case had illustrated the risks of having fugitives inside houses or barns, so Weakly and Brechbill started hiding fugitives on a small island in a swampy part of Yellow Breeches Creek. This was an ideal location for all except the fugitives, who had to endure the mosquitoes and the damp. If the slaves were discovered in such a remote location, it would be harder to accuse local abolitionists of collusion and make them legally liable. Such a discovery would be difficult anyway – like with William Wright’s Plainfield home in Adams County, many of the surrounding property owners were sympathetic to anti-slavery.\(^{91}\)

\(^{88}\) As a result, the final legal documents at the federal level read *Oliver v. Weakly*, not *Oliver v. Kaufman*.

\(^{89}\) “A Statement of Facts,” Handbill, Cumberland County Historical Society, 1848 P-4-6.

\(^{90}\) “A Statement of Facts.” Receipt, “Received of Samuel May...”, March 31, 1854, and “Received of Samuel May...”, May 10, 1854, Ms B.1.6.v.5 no. 19 and no. 25, Miller-Mckim papers, Weston Sisters Collection, Rare Book Department, Boston Public Library. The odd figure in the last amount indicates that it was probably an accumulation of small contributions from a number of individuals.

Between the Kaufman case and the McClintock cases, substantial energy had been devoted by Southern slaveholders and their Pennsylvania allies to retaliating against aid to fugitives in south central Pennsylvania. Had Kennedy died sooner after receiving his wounds in Carlisle, no doubt the outcry would have been even greater. These cases were significant, and changed the approach of the area’s Underground Railroad. Possibly on the advice of Thaddeus Stevens, one of Kaufman’s counsel, south central Pennsylvania’s friends of the fugitive began to alter their tactics to minimize their legal exposure. By regularly keeping outbuildings unlocked, for instance, a farmer could plausibly claim that he did not know that fugitives had snuck in.92

Both the McClintock and Kaufman cases were prosecuted under the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act. Although this act was a piece of national legislation, the effect of these cases was still largely regional, of greatest interest where the escapes were actually occurring. While fugitive slave escapes were very troublesome to the South, most of the attention to the issue was from the border regions of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. Both major political parties supported the existing fugitive slave legislation, if reluctantly on the part of some Northerners.

This regional character of the fugitive slave issue would change with the passage of the 1850 federal Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. This law was part of a compromise package that was supposed to resolve sectional disputes left over from the Mexican War. To it were added sectional issues such as the abolition of the interstate slave trade in Washington, D.C., and the fugitive slave issue. The Fugitive Slave Act was one of the few concessions to the South in the compromise. Through it, Southerners gained a tool

which largely trumped the personal liberty laws of Pennsylvania and other northern states. It was a Pyrrhic victory, however. Any hopes for intersectional cooperation on the return of fugitive slaves were substantially thwarted, and by making the fugitive slave issue a vital part of compromise federal legislation, Southerners nationalized and politicized the fugitive slave issue to an unprecedented extent. Now federal officials would be involved in the process; now, the nation’s fugitive slave policies became an integral part of the debate on the wisdom of the Compromise, the rise of the Slave Power, and the sectional dispute between North and South. Northern newspapers that prior to 1850 might not have reported on a fugitive slave case in the next state or even the next county did so now because it was part of the national debate.

The Kaufman and McClintock cases, while significant, were about to be overshadowed by the most famous case of slave resistance in southern Pennsylvania: the Christiana Riot. This would be the ultimate case of Southern slave owners striking back at those who aided fugitive slaves, this time with charges of treason and the power of the federal government behind them. Before Christiana, however, came the Compromise of 1850 and the federal Fugitive Slave Act, setting the stage for that deadly confrontation.
Pennsylvania already had a long history of engagement with the fugitive slave issue when the 1850s opened. The state had just passed a new personal liberty law three years previously, largely superseding previous legislation in 1788, 1820, and 1826. The federal fugitive slave law of 1850, however, made new claims on the federal government and on the lives of ordinary citizens. In Pennsylvania, the fugitive slave issue immediately became a vital part of partisan conflict. Democrats put the Whigs on the defensive by pushing to repeal the state’s personal liberty law at the same time as the federal law was being debated in Congress and the press. In the state, both parties soon accepted the federal law as part of the 1850 Compromise, however, and, in south central Pennsylvania, even some antislavery newspapers grudgingly accepted a law and order position in support of the new law. While the law met resistance among some groups and in some communities, the early 1850s illustrated the difficulty of mobilizing a majority behind opposition to the fugitive slave law. At the same time, of course, fugitives continued to flee into Pennsylvania from southern states.

There was unrest over the new law almost immediately. In Pennsylvania, the most notable event of resistance occurred in September 1851, when fugitive slaves killed a slave owner in Christiana, Pennsylvania. This event shocked Southern slaveholders, thrilled some abolitionists, and electrified the state’s African American community. It
also had significant effects politically, occurring as the state’s Democrats were pushing to force acceptance of the fugitive slave law and repeal of the state’s personal liberty law. The consequences of the Christiana included the defeat of an incumbent Whig governor, but it ultimately proved just as frustrating to the Democrats when a Pennsylvania jury refused to convict white bystanders of treason for declining to aid in the capture of fugitive slaves. In the border environment, Democrats were able to put many antislavery politicians and activists on the defensive regarding the fugitive slave issue by appealing to “law and order” and the necessity of interstate relations. What they were unable to do was to get many Pennsylvanians to believe the law was just or moral.

In the 1850s, an important shift in source material takes place. The fugitive slave issue moved into the press much more regularly, and newspapers become increasingly important sources for examining local responses to the issue. Before 1850, most fugitive slave cases were local in nature, although a few, such as the McClintock riot and the Kaufman case, had regional significance. There had been perhaps only two fugitive slave cases of national importance, the 1790s dispute between Pennsylvania and Virginia which had led to the 1793 fugitive slave law, and *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* (1842), which the U.S. Supreme Court had used to further define the operation of that law. The old law, when allowed to operate, was adequate for the recovery of fugitive slaves, however, it left unclear the responsibility for its enforcement. The federal government also had no police force or adequate courts for fugitive slave cases; they relied on cooperation from Northern states. After a number of states passed enabling legislation or personal liberty laws, and the Supreme Court ruled in *Prigg* that states did not need to help the capture of
fugitive slaves with their courts, law officers, or facilities, many Southerners believed a new law was necessary.

The Compromise of 1850 essentially nationalized the fugitive slave issue. The Fugitive Slave Act was the only part of the Compromise which obligated the average Northerner, and it was the only part which Southerners saw as a concession to their section. The law also injected the federal legal system, through the fugitive slave commissioners, into many Northern communities. Consequently, both Northerners and Southerners were vitally interested in the operation of the law. A routine fugitive slave case, which before might have attracted little attention a county away, now might be carried in many newspapers nationwide, even if only in a brief mention. The fugitive slave issue received a new level of publicity.¹

Newspapers become increasingly important in the 1850s because several other sources were drying up. In the aftermath of the Kaufman case, south central Pennsylvania’s Underground Railroad was becoming more careful and secretive, with the result that there are no prominent court cases in the 1850s. In addition, the Adams County (York Springs) Anti-Slavery Society stopped meeting around 1847, ending pronouncements from that source as well. Newspaper coverage is one of the most consistent sources of information on events and responses in the area throughout the 1850s.²

¹ Antislavery activists and newspapers conducted campaigns to discourage Northerners from applying for the commissioner’s job, so those that were chosen were often particularly committed to the law’s execution. This was a new situation; before, a sympathetic local judge might listen to a novel or persuasive legal argument for freeing a fugitive.

Newspaper stories, of course, were both a source of information about events and part of the story of the fugitive slave issue themselves. How and why a newspaper reports a story is often as important as what it reports; newspapers both influence, and are influenced by, public opinion. In the case of the fugitive slave issue in south central Pennsylvania, newspapers were not only chroniclers of events, but historical actors, which shaped – and were shaped by – the region’s response to the controversial new law.

Newspapers had a hybrid identity in antebellum America, as sources of information and as partisan instruments. No paper was founded without a political purpose. The rhetoric of the press was critical to turning out supporters at important elections. Very few newspapers could survive solely on local revenue; most newspapers were subsidized by various political parties and prominent candidates to provide favorable coverage. The truly fortunate newspaper could hope for contracts to do the government’s printing if their candidates won. At the same time, circulation and advertising revenue remained important, and newspapers could not ignore local sentiment. This would have a moderating effect on all of Adams County’s newspapers, who for the most part avoided the extremes of abolitionism or pro-Southern sympathy.

Adams County had three significant newspapers. There was a strong Democratic paper, the Republican Compiler, with an important base among the county’s Germans; a moderate Whig paper, the Adams Sentinel; and a reform paper best described at the beginning of the decade as “Conscience Whig,” the Star and Banner. At different times, the Compiler and the Sentinel claimed to have the largest circulation of any paper in

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Adams County; the *Star* contented itself with claims that its circulation was increasing.

Table 5-1 summarizes these papers and their positions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Short Title</th>
<th>Editor</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Representative Political Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican Compiler</td>
<td>Compiler</td>
<td>Henry J. Stahle</td>
<td>Democrat 1850 - 1868</td>
<td>James Buchanan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Newspapers in Adams County, Pennsylvania, 1850-1868

All three newspapers were influenced by, and in turn reflected the border environment. The *Compiler* generally followed the tenor of the national and statewide Democratic parties, which in turn were influenced by the fact that the party’s domination of the Deep South meant that the ideological locus of the party lay south of the Mason-Dixon line. Still, the paper’s viewpoint was not uniformly “pro-slavery,” as its opponents would claim; occasionally the paper printed pieces critical of the increase or extension of slavery or the domestic slave trade. In the later 1850s, however, as the Democratic party grew more defensive regarding slavery, the *Compiler* adopted a harsh anti-black tone. It generally praised the execution of the fugitive slave law and downplayed or ignored criticisms of it or cases of kidnapping.

The *Adams Sentinel* was a moderate Whig newspaper which believed that the new Fugitive Slave Law was regrettable, yet supported its enforcement on a “law and order”

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4 In early 1850, the *Compiler* reprinted a piece from the *Harrisburg Keystone* which admitted that there was no doubt “the people of Pennsylvania are opposed to the extension of slavery into the territories.” “Slavery and Instructions,” *Compiler*, January 28, 1850, p. 2 c. 3.
basis. The paper and its editor, Robert G. Harper, did not brook “fanatical abolitionists” and condemned any suggestion of resisting the laws of the United States. Later in the decade, the paper would extensively publicize the disputes over Kansas, and Harper and the paper would eventually become Republican, but his support for antislavery was focused on wanting to keep the territories free.

The *Star and Republican Banner* was the most antislavery newspaper of the three. It had been founded in 1829 by Thaddeus Stevens, who made a substantial investment in it. The degree to which Stevens remained invested in the newspaper in the 1850s is unclear – he had passed through a financial crisis and near-bankruptcy early in the decade – but the paper clearly had a special relationship with him and praised him frequently. In 1850, the paper claimed that its major priorities were “the reform movements” especially “Slavery and Temperance.” Still, even the *Star* could not appear to be too militant. As a rhetorical strategy, it usually offered half-apologies for running pieces on local fugitive slave hunts, and it often differentiated its position from more extreme pieces it printed opposing slavery or the fugitive slave law. The *Star* usually printed the most information about fugitive slave cases, and was accused of agitating the issue for political purposes. There were periods, however, when the paper appeared disinterested, or grudgingly upheld the law on a “law and order” basis.

Why, in a bitterly disputed section of a critical electoral state, would an explosive issue like the fugitive slave issue at times be played down? Typically, antebellum newspapers ramped up the rhetoric in an effort to ensure party loyalty and high turnout on election day. Why would one of the most volatile issues be largely ignored?

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5 Untitled [New volume of the *Star*], *Star*, March 19, 1852, p. 2 c.3.
Usually, such neglect of a volatile topic was not an attempt to attract crossover voters from the other party. Party switching, while not unheard of, was relatively rare (although the mid-to-late 1850s would be unusually volatile with the collapse of the Whigs and a political realignment occurring). The answer, instead, appears to lie in the divisions in a border community over slavery. The Whig party, even in the North, was not an antislavery party; neither were the Know Nothings, briefly ascendant in the mid-1850s. For the Whig newspapers in Gettysburg to continually agitate the fugitive slave issue risked driving away from the polls Whig voters who supported the 1850 Compromise. This is particularly true after 1851, when the national and state Whig party had reluctantly accepted the Compromise, and even more so from 1852 on, after the resounding defeat of the antislavery Governor Johnston. The reform paper, the *Star*, would agitate the fugitive slave issue and slavery more than the moderate Whig paper the *Sentinel*, but even the *Star* would moderate its criticism at times. The Democrats were less divided, but there were still some in the party who opposed slavery or later became free soil Democrats, their opposition in part rooted in Democratic ideals of egalitarianism and Pennsylvania’s legacy of opposition to slavery.⁶ Even for Democrats, then, constant condemnation of the Whigs for their opposition to the fugitive slave law could be counterproductive along the border. Where the Democrats did benefit, was from their ability to portray acquiescence to the fugitive slave law both as a “law and order” issue, fulfilling the requirements of the Constitution, and as a balm for sectional peace, restoring comity, and avoiding conflict and war. This was also their basis for supporting the repeal of Pennsylvania’s personal liberty laws.

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The perspectives of south central Pennsylvania’s newspapers, and the influence of the border on them are important, because some historians have argued that the inflammatory rhetoric of newspapers, such as the New York Tribune, helped cause the Civil War.\(^7\) Along the border in the early 1850s, however, local newspapers often expressed moderate positions on issues which could cause sectional rift. South central Pennsylvania’s newspapers, although capable of biting invective, reflected both the increasing sectional tension and residents’ unease at the prospect of conflict or even war with their southern neighbors. Even with the toning down of criticism – often accounts of fugitive slave cases were printed without comment — the newspaper record still enables us to track the fugitive slave issue during the critical early years of the 1850s. At the beginning of January 1850, it seemed of minor importance; by year’s end, because of the controversy over the Compromise of 1850 and its Fugitive Slave Law, it had become a tempest.

1850: The Year of the Fugitive Slave Law

In early 1850, a tense, divided Congress confronted a sectional crisis brought on by the acquisition of territory from Mexico during the Mexican War and its aftermath. The fugitive slave issue was rapidly injected into this debate. After Virginia Senator James Mason submitted a new fugitive slave bill empowering all federal officials to hold rendition hearings, Henry Clay endorsed a new fugitive slave law as part of his package of Compromise proposals. He also argued that the fugitive slave issue had potential to

hold the Union together, since if Southern states seceded, the North would be under no obligation to return their fugitive slaves to them.8

Daniel Webster, in his famous Seventh of March speech, supported Clay’s proposals, particularly the proposed fugitive slave law. His support for the law ignited a firestorm of controversy in among his constituency in Massachusetts, but it did not have similar resonance in border Pennsylvania, where many, like Webster, supported the fugitive slave bill and sectional reconciliation.

The Adams County papers responded differently to the 1850 political crisis. The Compiler and the Sentinel both believed that the Union was safe, particularly if radicals from both sides could be silenced or exiled. The Star, however, believed that threats of secession were merely to wring unwarranted concessions from the North. It immediately criticized Mason’s bill: “The Senate… has been discussing the Fugitive Slave Bill, by which it is proposed to convert Postmasters, Deputy Marshals, and all other officers of the U. States, into supple tools of the Slave-dealers, and to compel them to assist in hunting up and sending back to chains and slavery the fugitives from oppression.”9

As the Compromise lay before Congress, Democratic-led “Union meetings” supporting it took place in Lancaster, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York. The fugitive slave issue was usually a critical point. A Tammany Hall meeting resolved that “the Constitution has been violated in regard to fugitive slaves,” a February 22nd gathering in Philadelphia, of the “most of the active Democrats in the city and county,” passed a resolution calling “upon our State Legislature to repeal all laws conflicting with

9 “Dissolution of the Union,” Compiler, January 21, 1850, p. 3 c. 2; Sentinel, May 6, 1850; “Slavery and Disunion,” Star, February 8, 1850, p. 2 c. 3. “Congressional,” Star, February 1, 1850, p. 2 c. 5.
[the fugitive slave clause] of the Constitution… so that the fundamental obligation binding upon every citizen of the Union… may no longer be set at defiance, and the rights of our Southern brethren trampled under foot.”\textsuperscript{10}

Another important indicator of both varied sentiment and the influence of state and national parties can be seen in south central Pennsylvania’s politicians. They quickly joined the debate, with their remarks being reported by the papers of their respective parties. On June 9\textsuperscript{th}, James McLanahan, the Democratic Congressman from Franklin County, spoke to the House of Representatives, supporting the Compromise but saying little about the proposed fugitive slave law.\textsuperscript{11} As McLanahan would later become a staunch supporter of the law and attempt to use it as a political weapon against the Whigs, his relative silence here indicates an unwillingness to buck local sentiment against returning fugitives until the new law had been passed.

One of Pennsylvania’s Senators, James Cooper, responded to these pressures slightly differently. Cooper was a freshman Senator who had left Adams County several years previously. He was a significant voice of moderate Whiggery from a powerful Northern border state, and he was the only Northern Whig Senator to consistently support the Compromise measures throughout the summer. Just two days after McLanahan’s speech, he addressed the U.S. Senate in support of the Compromise. Cooper ran out of


\textsuperscript{11} “Congress: The Slavery Question in the House,” Compiler, February 25, 1850, p. 2 c. 2; “Mr. McLanahan’s Speech,” Compiler, March 4, 1850, p. 2 c. 1.
time, perhaps deliberately, before commenting on the fugitive slave bill, but he implied that regardless of his sympathy for runaways, he did not object to the proposed law.12

Cooper has been portrayed as an antislavery politician who altered his stance during the critical year of 1850, but he was always a committed border moderate with ties on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line.13 He was born in Frederick, Maryland, and he would be buried there. Educated in border Pennsylvania, he lived in Adams County until the late 1840s. He returned to Maryland in 1860 and led a Union brigade during the Civil War. During election season, in abolitionist areas, his supporters celebrated his defense of fugitives in Adams County.14 Certainly, he was critical of slavery during the 1845 trial of Thomas Finnegan, and in his June 11th speech. Cooper, however, was nowhere near as radical as Thaddeus Stevens, an associate in Gettysburg, and increasingly was in opposition to him. During the Christiana trial in 1851, Cooper served as prosecutor, collecting pay from the state of Maryland, while Stevens helped lead the defense. Any opposition to slavery on his part had always been measured, and mingled with his savvy as a border politician.

In February 1850, Cooper damaged his standing among Pennsylvania abolitionists by criticizing disunion petitions from Quakers and abolitionists in Delaware and Pennsylvania.15 After his June 11 speech, Pennsylvania’s antislavery Whigs wondered if Cooper was insane, but his stock was rising nationally even as it declined in Pennsylvania.

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12 “Speech of Mr. Cooper of Pennsylvania on the Compromise Bill,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 4, 1850. Cooper’s speech was so long that none of the Adams County newspapers carried it in full.


15 “Congressional,” *Star*, February 15, 1850, p. 2 c. 5-6; *Star*, March 1, 1850, p. 2 c. 3; “Disunion Petition,” *Compiler*, February 18, 1850, p. 2 c. 2. The petitions advocated peaceable separation rather than continued entanglement between the free North and the slaveholding South, a position then held by some Quakers and some Garrisonian abolitionists.
antislavery circles. Henry Clay appointed Cooper to the Select Committee on California, the Territories, and Slavery (the Compromise Committee, or “Committee of Thirteen”). This was exalted status for a freshman Senator, and explains why one of the leading scholars of the 1850 Compromise considered Cooper one of the key Northern figures during the Compromise summer.

Both the Democrat McLanahan and the Whig Cooper had supported the compromise measures and had given important expressions of south central Pennsylvania sentiment on the Compromise and fugitive slave bill. The greatest controversy, however, was attached to the speech of the flamboyant Thaddeus Stevens, a former area resident now representing Lancaster in Congress.

On June 10, in a fiery explication of emerging Free Soil doctrine, Stevens argued that the territories were by nature free. The Constitution and its compromises did not extend to the territories, which were solely under the jurisdiction of the United States Congress. Moreover, existing fugitive slave law did not extend to these free territories; he based this expansive claim on the 1793 law, which only referenced “states” and not territories, and he opposed the 1850 Fugitive Slave Bill because it explicitly included the territories. In addition, he held that regarding the territories acquired from Mexico, only

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17 “Congress,” Star, April 26, 1850, p. 2 c. 5. Cooper had been one of the few Northern Whigs to support the committee. Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, pp. 495, 504, 506-9, 512-513.
18 Richard N. Current, Old Thad Stevens (Madison, 1942), p. 88. Stevens’ June 10th speech opposing the Compromise has been generally slighted by his biographers, undeservedly so. Current dismisses Stevens’ speech on the Compromise in a single sentence, and he misdates the speech as occurring on June 20. Fawn Brodie also only gives the speech passing notice and casts it primarily as an attack on Daniel Webster. Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, p. 113. However, Beverly Wilson Palmer and Holly Byers Ochoa are to be commended for including the entire speech in the Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens (Pittsburgh, 1997), pp. 110-130.
a treaty could extend U.S. jurisdiction to a territory that used to belong to a foreign power (Mexico); old laws remained in force until they were explicitly changed or revoked. This logic allowed him to argue that all the new western territories should be free, and that slaves escaping to the territories were immediately free.

His logic reflected his experiences as a border lawyer in Gettysburg and Lancaster. His legal experience in the Kaufman case and in representing fugitive slaves in Lancaster and, reportedly, in Gettysburg, made him familiar with the English 1773 *Somersett* case, where Lord Mansfield had ruled that by general law man was free and not property, and only by explicit, special law could he be enslaved. Consequently, Stevens maintained that common law mandated that a slave escaping from a slave state to a free state or territory was immediately free. In the states of the Union, Stevens explained, that legal principle was contravened by the fugitive slave clause of the U.S. Constitution, which required slaves to be delivered up if they escaped to a free state. But common law still extended to the territories, where the fugitive law did not extend. A slave taken to the territories “becomes a man,” with an immediate, “vested inalienable right to liberty.”

Stevens’ argument was based on the startling assertion that the U.S. Constitution was not law in federal territories. Although the *Somersett* case had been used for decades by antislavery lawyers to argue for the freedom of slaves, few had applied it to the territories in this way.

Stevens also warned that it was “more than my constituents would ever grant” to join in slave posses as called for in the Fugitive Slave Bill. As two Pennsylvania farmers, Daniel Kaufman and Robert Mitchell, had recently received harsh punishments for
harboring fugitive slaves, Stevens insisted that the 1793 law was not too mild, and predicted more “stringent laws to punish Northern men with a heart!”

The reaction to Stevens’ remarks was as intense as the speech itself. The Compiler reprinted a piece from the Lancaster Intelligencer, which suggested that more speeches like Stevens’ would “result in disunion.” The Star, conversely, expressed the hope that the new Fugitive Slave Law would be stricken from the compromise.

Many opponents to slavery extension would eventually adopt reasoning similar to that of Stevens, even if they could not swallow his boldest contentions about the common law. Stevens’ ideas were analogous to Ohio’s Salmon P. Chase’s conception of freedom as national, slavery as sectional. Stevens’ concept, however, was also firmly rooted in antislavery litigation and his experience as a border lawyer. He used his experience of the fugitive slave issue in border Pennsylvania to develop and articulate his conception of free soil. With Stevens’ speech, arguments developed along Pennsylvania’s “edge of freedom” were starting to influence debate in the halls of Congress.

**Pennsylvania: The Debate over Repeal of the 1847 Personal Liberty Law**

As controversy over the Fugitive Slave Bill was unfolding nationally, Pennsylvania’s Democrats jockeyed for political advantage by organizing to overturn the state’s 1847 personal liberty law. The repeal effort began after Governor Johnston militantly rejected resolutions by Maryland and Virginia’s legislatures asking that Pennsylvania improve its enforcement of the existing fugitive slave law. Johnston’s

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20 “Last Speech of Thaddeus Stevens,” *Compiler*, July 8, 1850, p. 2 c. 6. “Mr. Stevens’ Speech,” *Star*, June 28, 1850, p. 3 c. 2.
special message to the legislature complained that Virginia and Maryland had failed to deliver kidnapping suspects sought by Pennsylvania, and called for Congress to protect freemen from kidnapping. He favored admitting more evidence and requiring additional proof in fugitive slave cases. In a message ostensibly about fugitive slaves, Johnston also advocated slavery’s exclusion from the territories, the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and criticized the inflated size of Southern Congressional representation because of the Three-Fifths clause of the Constitution. Johnston’s statements were a bold proclamation of free soil principles by a border governor in 1850.

His message circulated widely in the antislavery press, including the most strongly antislavery paper in Adams County, the Star, which claimed Johnston had “vindicated” Pennsylvania. As for the repeal movement which started after the speech, by the end of April, the Star was reporting that the Pennsylvania Senate’s Judiciary Committee had recommended that the repeal effort be defeated. It expressed hope that this “settles the matter.”

It did not for the Democrats. A week later, James Buchanan was in Harrisburg, reportedly anxious about the fate of the “slave bill.” Buchanan, a recent U.S. Secretary of State (1845-1849), was probably the most powerful politician in the state of

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21 “Johnston’s Special Message,” Sentinel, April 1, 1850.
22 Untitled, Star, March 19, 1850, p. 2 c. 3; “Governor’s message,” Star, April 5, 1850, p. 2 c. 4.
Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{24} His interest shows that he, the state party, and possibly even the national party had a keen interest in repeal.\textsuperscript{25}

The repeal of portions of the 1847 law did pass, only to be vetoed, after some delay, by Johnston. Now the Democrats had grounds to attack Johnston and the Whigs for obstructing operation of the fugitive slave laws.

The Democrats were not the only party to tie the controversy over the state law to the national debate over fugitive slaves. Despite the fact that the 1847 bill had ostensibly been to forestall kidnapping, in its headlines the \textit{Star} repeatedly characterized the repeal effort as “the [state] fugitive slave bill” or as “the slavery compromise,” trying to tie the state’s Democrats to the national legislation under debate in Congress.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{Fugitive Slave Cases in the South Central Pennsylvania Press in 1850}

With the fugitive slave issue an important topic in both Congress and the state legislature, all of Gettysburg’s papers began reporting more frequently on fugitive slave cases. The \textit{Compiler} and the \textit{Sentinel}, though, did not start intensive coverage until September, when the fugitive slave law was passed. The \textit{Star} began detailed reporting of local cases earlier. Under the headline, “The Chase,” the paper described how a group of slaves had escaped in June from Carroll County, Maryland, and how the pursuit of one near Gettysburg was thwarted by a local African American, who, spotting a slave catcher


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{25} Thomas Morris confirms that Buchanan’s “partisans were at the back of the movement to repeal the state law.” Thomas Morris, \textit{Free Men All! The Personal Liberty Laws of the North 1780-1860} (Baltimore, 1974), p. 154.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{26} “The Fugitive Slave Bill [PLL repeal],” \textit{Star}, April 5, 1850, p. 2 c. 4; “The Fugitive Slave Bill [State PLL],” \textit{Star}, April 26, 1850, p. 2 c. 7.}
ordering a horse and carriage, rode off and warned the fugitive. The *Star* crowed, “the Slave was saved!” After giving this incident unusual publicity, the paper closed with a characteristic half-apology: “Thus ended the latest slave-hunt in these parts, which, as chroniclers of passing events, we have deemed it our duty to notice.”

In August, both the *Star* and the *Compiler* reported on a slave hunt in adjacent York County. Roughly eleven fugitive slaves fled north. As they hid in a farm just north of the border, a group of white Pennsylvanians accosted them and captured seven. When this group passed through Strasburg, two escaped, but the other five may have been duped into believing that they were being helped, not captured. Near Shrewsbury, they were loaded into a railroad car for Baltimore, and, recognizing their betrayal, they engaged in a shootout with their captors. Later, when this same group of slave catchers captured more fugitives, the *Star* complained, “The set of mercenary wretches around Shrewsbury are at it again…. Of all men, these negro catchers in free States… are the meanest, and they would coin their souls for dollars.”

Both parties and their newspapers were trying to figure out how to handle explosive issues like the Fugitive Slave Bill. When the agitation over the Compromise measures was approaching a fever height, the *Star* listed slavery as number seven on a list of troubles facing the country – after the need for tariff. The August letter from the Democratic State Central Committee had little to say about national issues or slavery. Similarly, when the “Address of the Whig Central Committee to the Freemen of Pennsylvania” appeared, it focused mainly on the tariff over issues of slavery, as did the

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27 “A Chase,” *Star*, June 14, 1850, p. 2 c. 6. Gettysburg had an African American-led Slave Rescue Society since 1841, but it was not clear if this individual was affiliated with it.


address of the Lancaster Whig Committee. Along the border, both major parties may have been avoiding a potential split in their organizations, and downplayed slavery issues while they waited to appraise the political landscape.30

Still, both the Compiler and the Star reported on an attempted rescue of fugitive slaves in Harrisburg. Three fugitive slaves had been charged with crime, having taken horses in their flight. Since they had eventually released the animals, Judge John J. Pearson decided that they were technically innocent of horse theft, but he told the masters they could claim the slaves. When they tried to do so, a melee erupted, and the Harrisburg militia was called out. The masters, the slaves, and several others were arrested on riot charges. Ultimately, the fugitives were remanded and the white captors acquitted of riot.31

The Harrisburg case illustrates the development of tactics to circumvent personal liberty laws. Pennsylvania’s 1847 law prohibited using state prisons and jails to hold fugitive slaves, and incarceration in a private home was very risky. Professional slave catchers, then, usually in concert with a constable, would seize a fugitive, charge him or her with a petty crime so that he or she could be imprisoned, and notify the owner to come and claim the slave. Charging fugitives with a crime also enabled state officials including constables and judges to become involved in the case.32

The disturbance in Harrisburg was not an anomaly; resistance to the operation of the fugitive slave law there was pronounced. In November, the Star reported on a

30 “Address of the Democratic State Committee,” Compiler, September 2, 1850, p. 2 c. 1.”Address f the Whig State Central Committee to the Freemen of Pennsylvania,” Star, September 12, 1850; “Address of the Lancaster County Whig Committee, To their Brother Whigs of Lancaster and Other Counties of Pennsylvania,” Star, October 4, 1850, p. 1 c. 3.
31 “Slave Excitement at Harrisburg,” Compiler, September 2, 1850, p. 2 c. 5; “Slave Excitement at Harrisburg,” Star, August 30, 1850, p. 2 c. 2; Untitled, Compiler, December 2, 1850, p. 3 c. 1.
32 Slave catchers would use similar tactics to evade Massachusetts’ personal liberty laws.
convention of Harrisburg African Americans opposing the Fugitive Slave Law. The group announced their determination to help fugitives:

Resolved, That we, as heretofore, will assist the flying bondmen to escape – that we will give them food and shelter – and if it be that we have to suffer, or drag out weary months in prison, and be subjected to cruel fines, for acting the part of the good Samaritan, we will cheerfully submit…

Resolved, That as R. S. McAllister, U.S. Commissioner for Dauphin County, one of the Vestrymen of the Episcopal Church of this place, is an aspiring man, we congratulate him on his fortunate elevation as CHIEF KIDNAPPER of this County.33

McAllister should have heeded this warning. His tenure as fugitive slave commissioner in Harrisburg would be highly controversial; several Harrisburg area deputies and marshals would be indicted for kidnapping; and McAllister himself would choose to join the train of emigrants heading west to Kansas, rather than remain in a town where he had become quite unpopular with significant segments of the population.34

The new law was having an impact on the Pennsylvania’s African American population, often emptying out entire neighborhoods. Three hundred African Americans reportedly made their way north from Pittsburgh. The Compiler claimed that forty-five had passed through Erie in just one day.35 This movement made locations in central and northern Pennsylvania critical junctions; the Star reported on thirteen fugitives overtaken at Wilkes-Barre, on their way to Canada. Their narrow escape was aided by a constable who had joined the slave

33 Untitled, Star, November 15, 1850, p. 2 c. 6.
catchers but then refused to get involved, saying that he had been deceived and told that they were a party of horse thieves.\textsuperscript{36}

To the east of south central Pennsylvania, in Lancaster County, some area African Americans determined to resist the law with force if necessary. Lancaster County’s abolitionists passed a resolution in October proclaiming that they would “harbor, feed and aid” escaping fugitives, and would “obey no such [fugitive slave] law.” William Parker and other local African Americans organized themselves into a self-protection society which forcibly resisted kidnappings and fugitive slave seizures, regardless of their legality.\textsuperscript{37}

Lancaster County, though, was the new home of Thaddeus Stevens, had a large population of militant African Americans, and was tied economically and socially to Philadelphia, the center for most of the state’s Quakers and for Pennsylvania abolitionism. No such determination to openly defy the law was evinced in south central Pennsylvania in 1850.

By the last quarter of the year, the two opposing newspapers had staked out differing positions on the fugitive slave law. The federal law appointed independent federal fugitive slave law commissioners to try fugitive slave cases, paid them double for ruling the individual was a slave ($10 vs. $5), established hefty penalties for interfering with the operation of the law, and put white Northerners at risk of being summoned to help capture a fugitive. The \textit{Star} opposed it, although its criticisms were sometimes muted, and the \textit{Compiler} favored it. The moderate Whig paper, the \textit{Adams Sentinel}, also

\textsuperscript{36} Untitled, \textit{Star}, October 25, 1850, p. 2 c. 2.
supported the law. Only the Star published the actual text of the entire fugitive slave law. Afterwards, the paper concluded:

Probably no law, enacted by the General Government for the last fifty years, has drawn forth a more general and decided... condemnation.... Passed as a part and parcel of the 'compromise' measures which were to quiet agitation and restore peace and harmony to the country, it has most signally failed.... Instead... it has increased the violence... and threatens to lash into greater fury than ever the waves of popular feeling...

With this editorial, the Star reprinted a detailed critique of the law from the National Era. The National Era was founded by the American and Foreign Antislavery Society run by Lewis Tappan, and would become famous two years later for publishing serially Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The Era bemoaned the lack of traditional protections like the writ of habeas corpus and the right to a jury trial. The paper predicted that the law would force the antislavery issue into every Northern election.38

The new Fugitive Slave Law further politicized ongoing legal proceedings related to fugitive slaves. In late October, the appeal of the Kaufman case was heard in federal court. The case was now called Oliver v. Weakly, as Stephen Weakly, Kaufman’s brother-in-law, had assumed the legal liability. Thaddeus Stevens, one of Weakly’s counsel, made a controversial closing argument. According to the Compiler, Stevens had denounced the compromises of the Constitution as “hateful,” and urged Pennsylvanians to follow higher law, a “detestable doctrine” to the paper. Even the Star thought that Stevens was too extreme in this case. (Stevens claimed to have been misquoted and

threatened libel actions.) The jury in the case ultimately split 10-2, and Judge Robert C. Grier dismissed them reluctantly. The case would be tried again.\(^{39}\)

At the same time, the U.S. government expressed its support of the fugitive slave law. The controversy over the fugitive slave law led President Millard Fillmore to uphold its constitutionality. Attorney General John Crittenden issued an opinion that the fugitive slave law was imperative to giving full force to the Constitution. In a bit of legal finessing, Crittenden argued that the law did not abrogate the right of habeas corpus, but it superseded it.\(^{40}\) Later in the year, Fillmore promised that the law would be “faithfully executed,” in a widely reprinted letter to a Georgia newspaper, announcing that he was staking the success of his administration on it.\(^{41}\)

Senator James Cooper was also clarifying his position on the Compromise. In his speech to the Senate on June 11\(^{th}\), Cooper had suggested that he could support the Fugitive Slave Bill. Because of Northern criticism of the new law, however, in September Cooper had voted against it in the Senate in September. His new position was that he supported the entire Compromise except the Fugitive Slave Law. Still, he was not taking a radical position. Cooper explained that while he, like most Pennsylvanians, was personally opposed to slavery, the Whigs were a law-abiding, national party, not a sectional one. If the

\(^{39}\) “Detestable Doctrine,” Compiler, October 28, 1850; Untitled, Star, October 25, 1850, p. 2 c. 7; See also Sentinel, October 28, 1850, claiming that Stevens had denounced the fugitive slave law and the compromises of the Constitution; Stevens denying the remarks, Sentinel, November 4, 1850.

\(^{40}\) “The Fugitive Slave Law – Opinion of Mr. Crittenden,” Compiler, October 28, 1850, p. 2 c. 1.

\(^{41}\) “President Fillmore and the Fugitive Slave Law,” Compiler, November 4, 1850, p. 2 c. 2; Sentinel, November 4, 1850; “Semi-Official Declaration,” Star, November 8, 1850, p. 2 c. 4. “Letter from President Fillmore Relative to the Fugitive Slave Law,” Compiler, November 25, 1850, p. 3 c. 1. “Letter from President Fillmore Relative to the Fugitive Slave Law,” Star, November 22, 1850, p. 2 c. 3. The letter responded to the Craft case in Boston, in which a slave catcher tried to seize the noted fugitives who had escaped the South in the disguise of master and servant.
fugitive slave law was flawed, Cooper said it should be amended rather than resisted. “However our sympathies are towards the fugitive,” Cooper maintained, “we cannot take him from his master’s service.”

The Challenge to South Central Pennsylvania’s Whigs

The *Star* had said little about Cooper for months – the paper had not even published his June 11th speech. Mentioning him now was significant. The paper probably published these pieces on the moderate Cooper in October and November because the Whigs were in trouble. They had lost ground in the November Congressional elections in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, New York and Massachusetts. Supporting this powerful, moderate Whig might unlock future patronage and funding.

Adams County’s Whigs were also in disarray. Daniel Smyser, a protégé of Stevens, had narrowly edged David Mellinger to become the party’s 1850 Congressional candidate. Mellinger came from the local Whig stronghold of York Springs. The county’s Whigs were unable to run an ally of a powerful regional politician without alienating support in their strongest region, and Smyser was defeated in November.

Statewide, the trouble had started several years before, with the development of a serious rivalry between two of the state’s leading Whigs. James Cooper, Adams County’s favorite son and the state’s Attorney General, had strongly lobbied for the Whig gubernatorial nomination in 1847. When it went to Centre County ironmaster James

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43 Untitled, *Star*, November 22, 1850, p. 2 c. 7.
44 “Whig County Ticket,” *Compiler*, August 5, 1850, p. 2 c. 4.
Irvin instead, Cooper expected to be nominated the next time. Irvin lost to Democratic
governor Francis Shunk. When Shunk resigned in 1848 because of illness, under
Pennsylvania’s unusual succession system, Speaker of the Senate William F. Johnston
became governor. Johnston called a special election, and, with Cooper’s backing,
secured the Whig nomination. He then defeated the Democrat Morris Longstreth by a
mere 302 votes, in the closest gubernatorial election in state history.\textsuperscript{45}

In exchange for his support for the governor’s nomination, Cooper expected that
Johnston would back him for the U.S. Senate seat coming vacant in March 1849. But
there were few simple Senatorial selections in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in
Pennsylvania. When the legislature did convene, a number of candidates were put
forward, including Thaddeus Stevens. The Philadelphia-based Native Americans, a key
constituency for Johnston, expressed concerns about Cooper. The governor declared his
neutrality. Cooper eventually won on the third ballot, but the rift between him and
Johnston would not be healed. The animosity became so bitter that several years later the
Democratic papers announced, inaccurately, that they would fight a duel.\textsuperscript{46}

Johnston and Cooper’s rivalry hamstrung Pennsylvania’s Whigs at a
critical moment. The party was struggling to define its positions on slavery and
the fugitive slave law, and the two politicians represented differing Whig
philosophies. Johnston had supported Zachary Taylor’s hard line toward the
South, while Cooper was a Henry Clay moderate. Both had numerous allies, and
this factionalization of Pennsylvania’s Whig party boosted the Democrats just
when their hegemony in state politics was being threatened. Johnston was a

created the office of lieutenant governor, which explains why the speaker of the Senate was next in line.
\textsuperscript{46} Coleman, \textit{Disruption of Pennsylvania Democracy}, p. 35. Compiler, February 2, 1852, p. 2 c. 3.
former Democrat who had become a free soil Whig. This switch was seen by many Democrats as a betrayal. They acidly satirized his elevation to the state’s highest office, calling him “his accidency” or “the accidental governor.” In Gettysburg, the Compiler crowed over the growing split between the Silver Grays (conservative Whigs), and the Wooly Heads, a derogatory, racist term for antislavery Whigs.47

State Responses to the Fugitive Slave Law

After the fugitive slave law passed Congress, the political initiative on the issue passed briefly to the states. Vermont’s state legislature passed a personal liberty law guaranteeing the writ of habeas corpus and essentially nullifying the fugitive slave law. Virginia’s governor John Floyd condemned the Vermont nullifiers and called for a Southern convention. In Georgia, a state convention warned that the preservation of the Union relied on the “faithful execution of the Fugitive Slave Bill.” While the Georgia convention’s action was in response to Vermont’s law, the resolution was quite similar to that passed by the Nashville Convention in the summer, which had specifically targeted Pennsylvania’s personal liberty law. That gathering’s address had queried what United States’ officers could do “in such a State as Pennsylvania to recover fugitive slaves?”48

47 Coleman, Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy, pp. 33-34. The terms had originated in New York, to indicate the split between the followers of William H. Seward and Martin Van Buren, but they were widely applied in Pennsylvania as well.
By the end of the year, the fugitive slave issue, little noticed when the year began, had become one of the most important political issues in border Pennsylvania. In this atmosphere, every fugitive slave case was potential news: the Compromise had essentially nationalized the fugitive slave issue. This was particularly true in Pennsylvania, where a case would explode into national and state politics in 1851.

1851: Preamble to Christiana

During 1850, the fugitive slave issue had reached prominence largely because of national developments – the introduction of Mason’s bill, the development of the compromise, and the long shadows cast by Calhoun, Webster, and Clay. Even events specific to Pennsylvania, such as the effort by Pennsylvania’s Democrats to repeal the state’s 1847 personal liberty law, had been sparked by the federal bill and by the appeal of Virginia and Maryland to Pennsylvania’s legislature. In 1851, the situation nearly reversed. The fugitive slave issue, and statewide newspaper coverage of it, would largely be influenced by considerations and events internal to Pennsylvania. In fact, regarding fugitive slaves, now it would be the events inside Pennsylvania that would influence the nation, instead of the other way around. Two significant and intersecting events contributed to this reversal: the Pennsylvania gubernatorial campaign, which heated up the controversy over the 1847 personal liberty law and over Governor Johnston’s positions on it; and the Christiana Riot in September 1851 and the state’s response to it, with the trial taking place in November and December. As the riot occurred in the midst of the hotly contested governor’s race, the two influences quickly merged. Other events,

49 The papers tracked important cases in Carlisle and Philadelphia at the year’s end.
like the Shadrach and Sims fugitive slave cases in Boston were also important, but this year, it was Pennsylvania politics that had the biggest effect on the course of the fugitive slave issue in the state.

All three Adams County newspapers gave as much or more coverage of the fugitive slave issue in this year than any other. Still, before the Christiana riot, Democrats and Whigs had gradually converged on supporting the 1850 Compromise, and this worked to mute criticism of the Fugitive Slave Law, even among antislavery papers like the *Star*. In fact, for the early part of the year, events in state government, Congress, and the response of the newspapers seemed to be pushing towards a grudging acceptance of the Fugitive Slave Law.

This convergence was foreshadowed by Governor Johnston’s annual message in January, in which he devoted thirteen full paragraphs to a discussion of the fugitive slave issue. With both parties believing that a majority of the state’s populace supported the Compromise, Johnston’s rhetoric had mellowed. The governor maintained that the new federal law must be obeyed completely. He argued that while the 1847 personal liberty law did not interfere with fugitive slave renditions, Pennsylvanians would always choose duty to the federal law over their private sympathy for the slave. He reiterated, however, that states had no role in the return of fugitives – had the Founders intended that, they would have made it explicit in the Constitution. He also desired that the proceedings of the fugitive slave hearings be fully recorded; that a judge and not a commissioner be in charge of the proceedings, because a judge could be impeached; and that those who falsely accused fugitives could be charged with kidnapping. In short, Johnston was
trying to have it both ways, simultaneously supporting both the Federal law and Pennsylvania’s right not to assist in the rendition of fugitives.\footnote{
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Nationally, there was also increasing pressure to support the Fugitive Slave Law. In December 1850, President Millard Fillmore had labeled the Compromise a “final settlement” of slavery issues, and when Congress convened, various resolutions were advanced, particularly by Democrats, to label the last session’s compromise as a permanent settlement of sectional issues. This was an effort to force Northerners to drop political resistance to the fugitive slave law. McLanahan, the Democratic Congressman from Chambersburg, introduced a resolution declaring that repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law was inexpedient.\footnote{
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In the Senate, James Cooper was involved in a sectional contretemps involving southern Pennsylvania’s loyalty to the fugitive slave law. When Cooper, in response to a petition urging modification of the Fugitive Slave Law, said that most Pennsylvanians wanted to follow the law, he attracted the attention of one of the South’s leading legislators. South Carolina’s Robert Barnwell Rhett asked Cooper “if he understood him to say that Pennsylvania was satisfied with the fugitive slave law,” and inquired whether the state’s personal liberty law had been repealed. Cooper said that while the majority of his constituents favored carrying out the law, the personal liberty law not been repealed, he said, “because of local politics, not necessary to be explained.” Rhett pounced on this and declared, “The laws of Pennsylvania had not been repealed, nor would they be. The mercantile interests of Pennsylvania and New York might be in favor of executing the
law, but the interior counties would never execute it.\textsuperscript{52} This 1851 comment by a leading Southern fire-eater is telling. Pennsylvania’s south central counties were perceived as part of a region where execution of the fugitive slave law was very difficult.\textsuperscript{53}

The ferment in Congress led to more “Union meetings” in York, Philadelphia, and other locations, typically organized by Democrats. In March, the \textit{Star} reported on a Union meeting for once – only this was a Union meeting of Whigs. In a sign of the deep divisions in the Whig party over the Compromise of 1850, antislavery, and the fugitive slave issue, “a large meeting” of Whigs from the city and county of Philadelphia met at the Chinese Museum on February 27. They passed resolutions expressing their support of the Compromise of 1850 and instructing their representatives to “use all possible diligence to secure the passage of a bill repealing the obnoxious sections of the Act of Assembly of the 3d of March, 1847.” The \textit{Star} had campaigned in 1850 against the repeal of the personal liberty law; now, in a sign of shifting sentiment on the fugitive slave issue, it let stand, without comment, the “obnoxious” reference.\textsuperscript{54}

In addition to public meetings, Congressional speeches continued to provide commentary on the fugitive slave law. In February, the \textit{Star} prominently published a militant speech by Ohio Representative Joshua Giddings on the Fugitive Slave Law. Again, the reform newspaper engaged in a little judicious border region hedging, cautioning that it only printed the piece at the request of an eminent local antislavery supporter “whose Anti-Slavery views are somewhat more ultra than our own.” The \textit{Star} did not agree that the Fugitive Slave Law should be violently resisted, or that dissolution

\textsuperscript{52} “Congressional,” \textit{Star}, February 21, 1851, p. 3 c. 3-5.
\textsuperscript{54} “Union Meeting at York,” \textit{Compiler}, January 20, 1851, p. 2 c. 2; “Another Union Meeting,” \textit{Star}, March 7, 1851, p. 2 c. 4.
of the Union should ever be contemplated, but claimed to print the speech to show the
depth of feeling on the issue. Later, the Star would also publish statements by Ben Wade
of Ohio and Cassius Clay of Kentucky hostile to the fugitive slave law.55

At the same time that the Star slowly distanced itself from harsh criticism of the
fugitive slave law, it started publishing pieces about colonization again. One item
claimed that colonization was far more effective than the Underground Railroad. The
paper also reported on a large party of “colored persons” preparing to emigrate to Liberia
from Baltimore; it also carried a report on the Pennsylvania Colonization Society’s
Address to the Clergy of All Denominations. An annual address, this was the first time
the Star had noted it in years.56

In late February, the coverage of all three Adams County papers was dominated
by the Shadrach case in Boston. Shadrach Wilkins, a waiter, had been seized as a
fugitive slave and then rescued by a mob from a private house where he was being held.
(The mob was aided by the fact that Massachusetts’ laws, like Pennsylvania’s, forbade
the use of jails to house fugitives.)57 The rescue forced President Fillmore, under
substantial Southern pressure, to reiterate his determination to enforce the fugitive slave
law. The Star used this occasion to declare its moderation on the issue. Rather than
support the rescuers of Shadrach, the editors agreed with the President’s proclamation,

55 “Speech of Hon. Joshua R. Giddings,” Star, February 28, 1851, p. 1 c. 2; Untitled [Comment on
Giddings’ Speech], Star, February 28, 1851, p. 3 c. 1; “Position of Judge Wade,” Star, April 25, 1851, p. 2
 c. 5; “Prospects in Kentucky,” Star, April 11, 1851, p. 2 c. 5.
56 “African Colonization and the Recognition of Liberia,” Star, January 31, 1851, p. 3 c. 2; “American
1851, p. 2 c. 2; “Emigration to Liberia,” Star, May 16, 1851, p. 2 c. 5; “Penn’a Colonization Society,” Star,
May 23, 1851. The paper did not print the address, but rather reprinted a discussion of it from the Miners’
Journal.
57 “Another Fugitive Slave Case – Rescue by a Boston Mob,” Compiler, February 24, 1851, p. 2 c. 2.
“Another Arrest of a Fugitive Slave” and “The Affair at Boston,” Star, February 15, 1851, p. 2 c.3;
decried mob law, and expressed the belief that while the fugitive slave law was flawed, it must be amended or repealed using lawful means. 58

This shift to emphasizing obedience to the law occurred as many of the fugitive slave and kidnapping cases reported in the papers were becoming increasingly violent. In an attempted seizure of a fugitive slave near Coatesville, the slave catchers forced their way into a house at two in the morning, on the pretext that they needed a light to repair their vehicle. The house’s residents fought them off the attempt using guns and axes. 59

In Pottsville, a group of African Americans surrounded a fugitive’s house, preventing her capture by two Maryland officers. Apparently reflecting its more conservative position, the Star commented inaccurately, “The matter elicited little excitement, and few white persons have cared to trouble themselves about it.” 60

In Columbia, abolitionist lecturer C. C. Burleigh was forcibly prevented from speaking on the Fugitive Slave Law. Noted African American entrepreneur William Whipper was stoned during an attack on his house. 61

The Star’s more temperate stance regarding the fugitive slave law did not lessen its criticism of kidnapping, which represented a way to criticize the capture of African Americans without advocating breaking the law. The paper reported that “kidnapping outrages” were increasing in eastern Pennsylvania and Delaware. In one case, a man was

58 “The Boston Slave Case – Proclamation of the President” and “Important Document,” Compiler, February 24, 1851, p. 2 c. 4.; “Boston Mob- Proclamation of the President” and “A Proclamation,” Star, February 21, 1851, p. 3 c. 2. “The Boston Slave Case – Proclamation of the President” and “Important Document,” Compiler, February 24, 1851, p. 2 c. 4.
59 “A Fugitive Slave Case,” Star, January 3, 1851, p. 2 c. 6-7; “Fugitive Slave Case,” Compiler, January 6, 1851, p. 2 c. 3.; “Conflict with Fugitive Slaves,” Star, January 10, 1851, p. 3 c. 2.
60 “Fugitive Slave Case in Pottsville,” Star, March 7, 1851, p. 3 c. 3.
61 “Riot at Columbia, Pa.,” Star, February 21, 1851, p. 3 c. 2.
subdued by clubs. An advertisement inadvertently dropped at the scene indicated that the kidnappers might be from Emmitsburg, Maryland, just thirteen miles from Gettysburg.62

The Star also publicized the judge’s remarks at the sentencing of George Alberti and James F. Pierce, who had been convicted of kidnapping a mother and boy taken from New Jersey through Pennsylvania to Maryland. Maryland’s Governor E. Louis Lowe refused to surrender the slave owner involved, but the two slave catchers were prosecuted. Judge John J. Pearson, highly exercised by the case, said that the kidnapping was a “revolting” crime was “second only to homicide.” He called the case atrocious and “the most aggravated… of any kind that has ever been presented to the American Court of Justice.” Both defendants received a $700 fine and a ten-year sentence to the penitentiary – sentences that Pearson said might err on the side of leniency.63

In April, another fugitive slave case in Boston erupted into the news and stoked controversy over the fugitive slave issue. Anthony Sims was arrested and despite strenuous efforts by Boston area abolitionists, tried, ruled a fugitive slave, and ordered returned to his master. This fugitive was eventually marched down to the dock under U.S. military guard and sent back by ship to Georgia. There he was publicly flogged.64

All of the Adams County newspapers and the Harrisburg papers reported extensively on the case. The papers from Harrisburg were frequently read in south central Pennsylvania, and sometimes their pieces were reprinted verbatim in the local

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64 “Boston Fugitive Slave Case,” Star, April 11, 1851, p. 3 c. 4; “The Boston Fugitive Slave Case,” Star, April 18, 1851, p. 2 c. 1; “The Fugitive Slave Simms,” Star, May 2, 1851, p. 2 c. 5. “More Trouble in Boston,” Compiler, April 7, 1851, p. 2 c. 2; Untitled [cost], Compiler, April 7, 1851, p. 3 c. 2; “Great Excitement in Boston,” Compiler, April 14, 1851, p. 2 c. 6; “Interesting from Boston,” Compiler, April 21, 1851, p. 2 c. 2.
papers. One of the papers which stirred up the Boston fugitive slave cases the most was the *Daily American*, where a young antislavery editor named Edward McPherson was working. He had served an informal apprenticeship in the offices of the *Sentinel*, and he was the son of John B. McPherson, the cashier of the Gettysburg bank for more than thirty years and a long-time business associate of Thaddeus Stevens. Some local sources claim that the McPherson farm was a station on the Adams County underground railroad. As an editor, McPherson actually favored abiding by the law, but because he ran a daily paper, he could publicize cases to a greater extent than Adams County’s weeklies. Edward McPherson would later become Congressman from the area, and the Sims case may have been an important part of his early political education.65

Locally, some Pennsylvania juries, like some Pennsylvania newspapers, were trying to find a middle ground in fugitive slave and kidnapping cases. In Lebanon County, two Harrisburg men – one a constable – were charged with trying to abduct African Americans to Maryland. The jury acquitted them of the kidnapping, but found them guilty of assault and battery. As this charge was not part of the indictment, it was noted that the conviction would be set aside at the next court. The jury’s actions probably represented a backlash against the harsh punishments of the 1847 law. Rather than find these men guilty of kidnapping, the crime “second only to homicide,” this jury

chose to convict them of lesser crimes with lighter punishments than years in the penitentiary.\textsuperscript{66}

Renewed efforts to repeal the state’s personal liberty law ensured that the issue stayed before the state legislature as well. The \textit{Compiler} also noted approvingly that this session’s bill to repeal the 1847 law had passed the Senate and would “doubtless” also pass the House.\textsuperscript{67}

The \textit{Star} also reported on the progress of the bill to repeal the 1847 personal liberty law, but from a different perspective. When the House bill, a sweeping repeal of the legislation, reached the Senate, all of the repealing clauses were stripped from it except for the one dealing with the sixth section, which prohibited the state’s jails from being used to house fugitives. Even though seven Whig Senators voted against that bill, the \textit{Star} tried to deflect Democratic criticisms that Whigs opposed the bill, claiming (based on a unanimous Whig vote to limit the repeal to just the section on jails) that all Whigs had voted for the one section that passed.\textsuperscript{68} This was a misleading account of what had happened and is a testimony to the strength of the repeal movement. Many Pennsylvanians were anxious to preserve sectional peace by removing any legal barriers to implementing the fugitive slave law. In the end, the final decision was deferred, because Governor Johnston pocketed the bill, angering Gettysburg’s \textit{Compiler}.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{66} “Lebanon Kidnapping Case,” \textit{Star}, April 25, 1851, p. 2 c. 2.
\textsuperscript{67} “Wooly Heads and Silver Grays,” \textit{Compiler}, March 17, 1851, p. 2; “Kidnapping Law,” \textit{Compiler}, March 31, 1851, p. 2 c. 2.
\textsuperscript{68} “The Anti-Kidnapping Law,” \textit{Star}, April 4, 1851, p. 3 c. 1; “From Harrisburg,” \textit{Star}, April 4, 1851, p. 3 c. 2; “From Harrisburg,” \textit{Star}, April 18, 1851, p. 3 c. 2. “The Next Presidency – Pennsylvania,” \textit{Compiler}, May 5, 1851. The \textit{Star} claimed that all Whigs had voted for the one section that passed. This was not technically correct – all of the Whigs had voted to eviscerate the House bill and limit it to one section. Then seven Whig Senators refused to vote for even that.
\textsuperscript{69} In Pennsylvania, the governor could keep a bill passed late in the session “in his pocket” and refuse to sign it until three days after the next legislative session convened in December.
This temporizing by the *Star* tracked with its movement towards accepting the fugitive slave law on the basis of maintaining law and order, as illustrated by its remarks on a Harrisburg fugitive slave case. A man, a woman, and a child had been arrested as fugitives – the man belonged to one Maryland slave owner, the woman and child to another. Despite the presence of a large group of African Americans “at every corner, in the jail, in the Court House, and in front of McAllister’s office,” the commissioner was not intimidated, and he “proceeded to the discharge of his onerous duty, in the most fearless and impartial manner.” While commenting that the slaves were objects of “universal sympathy,” the paper did not object to McAllister fulfilling his duties.\(^{70}\)

The *Star* was clearly struggling with the law. Despite now leaning toward a more conservative position, the paper reprinted a piece from the *Louisville Journal*, a major Whig border newspaper, suggesting that objectionable sections of the Fugitive Slave Law could be modified. The *Star* contrasted this flexibility by some Kentuckians with the rigidity of certain Northerners who wanted to make the law as it currently stood “a test of political orthodoxy.” According to the paper, this was despite the fact that many recognized that the law had “repulsive” aspects and “must either be essentially modified, or become a dead-letter.” The *Star* was also encouraged by Massachusetts’ State Senate, which had protested the law as unchristian, and unenforceable.\(^{71}\)

The *Star* also still highlighted provocative local cases. Under the headline “Nigger Catching,” it intimated that a Gettysburg constable had become involved in slave catching. According to the paper, the officer had lured an African American woman out of town in order to seize her as a fugitive. The paper gave few details, but the officer’s \(^{70}\) Untitled [Harrisburg case], *Star*, May 2, 1851, p. 3 c. 1; \(^{71}\) “Fugitive Slave Law in the South,” *Star*, May 23, 1851, p. 3 c. 1; “The Fugitive Slave Law in Massachusetts,” *Star*, May 23, 1851, p. 3 c. 3.
action may have been so that the woman could be captured as a fugitive in a remote place, away from Gettysburg’s watchful African American community. The paper expressed the hope that this would be Constable White’s last foray into slave catching, as “there is no calling so meanly despicable as that of the professional Slave-hunter in the Free States.” A subsequent story suggested that White had been duped by people who did not want to do the “dirty business” themselves, and the Star expressed hope that he would realize his error. Meanwhile, the fugitive slave had been sent to Carroll County, Maryland, where she reportedly pledged never to leave her masters again. The Star fumed that the whole episode violated the sacred right defined by Mr. Jefferson, “PERSONAL LIBERTY.”

If the allegation was true, White continued a long tradition of slave catching by south central Pennsylvania constables. In the early 1820s, a member of York County’s vigilance committee, Samuel Mairs, had lamented the presence of “negro hunting constables” there. In 1837, when a Franklin County constable tried to capture a runaway, the fugitive dispatched him with a hastily grabbed scythe. In 1844, a Gettysburg constable had received a reward for helping to capture a fugitive and earned the ire of Washington, D.C. underground railroad worker Charles Torrey. In the 1863, the constable of Shippensburg was a former slave catcher who, perhaps ironically, was roughly handled by the invading Confederate army.

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72 “Nigger Catching,” Star, May 30, 1851, p. 3 c. 3.
73 “Orful [Awful],” Star, June 13, 1851, p. 3 c. 2.
By June, the coverage of the fugitive slave issue in all of the Adams County papers was increasingly influenced by the approaching gubernatorial campaign. At the state Democratic convention in Reading, the party had resolved: “That whatever may be the opinion of individuals as to the wisdom of the details of the Fugitive Slave law, it is the duty of all good citizens to conform to its requisitions, and carry out in good faith…” The Democrats labeled the fugitive slave law and the compromises as “coeval with the Federal Government.” The Star charged that even though the people rejected the Fugitive Slave Law, the Democrats were endorsing it. At the same time, the Star tried to deflect criticism from Johnston for failing to sign the repeal of the 1847 act by pointing out that the Democratic candidate for governor, William F. Bigler, had voted for it in 1847, and the Democratic governor, Francis Shunk, had signed it.75 The Compiler tried to excuse the two politicians’ support by portraying the bill as passing in a fever of excitement. They maintained that a fatal attempt to recover fugitive slaves in Carlisle in 1847 had resulted in excitement and a push for the bill. Shunk had signed it for that reason, the paper maintained, but the bill as a whole was a mistake, especially in light of the sectional agitation of the previous two years.76

If the Star tried to stir up trouble over the resolution supporting the fugitive slave law in the Democrat’s Reading Convention, the Whigs faced an even greater problem over platform resolutions at their state convention. Only some Northern Whigs espoused antislavery. Disobedience to the fugitive slave law had the potential to split the Whig party, and the Democrats exploited this. They tried to pull the conservative Whigs

76 It is not clear to what fatal fugitive slave riot the Compiler is referring. In all probability, it is the McClintock riot case, but that occurred after the passage of the 1847 law, not before.
(“Silver Greys”) away from antislavery Whigs by attacking Governor Johnston and taking the offensive on the fugitive slave issue. During the Whig State Convention, Huntingdon County delegate John Scott offered a resolution explicitly pledging the Whig party to support the fugitive slave law. Scott lived in a central county, but he had a border perspective, having been educated at Chambersburg’s Marshall College. His proposed plank was somewhat superfluous, as the sixth resolution of the platform committee pledged the party to support the “adjustment” of the late Congress. Scott’s motion was defeated 71-48, and the existing resolutions were passed 93-27. His initiative, however, allowed the Compiler to claim that Whigs had declined a clear-cut opportunity to declare their support for the fugitive slave law. The Compiler even labeled the resolutions that did pass as “treasonous,” despite the fact that they endorsed the Compromise of 1850! 77

In his speech to the Whig convention, Johnston had tried to repair the damage. First, he claimed that since the 1847 law had been on the books for four years and the Union had not dissolved, it could not be as grave a threat as its opponents portrayed it to be. He complained that the repeal had been deliberately passed in the session’s last hour, in an attempt to limit his response. Regarding the national law, Johnston maintained that while the rest of the Compromise of 1850 was unable to be repealed or modified, the Fugitive Slave Act was still within the reach of modification. It must be modified, he declared, but until then, it must be obeyed.78

In this period of struggle within the Whig party, the Star continued to back both the moderate and free soil Whig leaders. At the end of the month, when it announced that

Governor Johnston would be making a campaign stop in Gettysburg, it also printed a letter from Senator Cooper to Whigs at Easton, deplo sing any attempts at sectional agitation or resistance to the fugitive slave law.79

As the summer commenced, the Democrats, sensing an advantage over the divided Whigs, had begun effectively chipping away at Johnston’s conservative support. The Compiler maintained that the 1847 personal liberty law had originated in error, and now that sectional tension and agitation had convulsed the country for two years, it was essential for the act to be repealed. Repeal had passed the legislature, but Governor Johnston refusal to act it meant that he was thwarting the wishes of “99%” of his constituents. It accused him of placing the Commonwealth in jeopardy to appeal to the votes of a few abolitionists.80

Johnston was an effective stump speaker, and as he had in 1848, he decided to tour the state to campaign. In September, he visited Gettysburg, Chambersburg, Fayetteville, Caledonia Furnace, and Hanover. In Gettysburg he would be greeted by a large reception committee, and he gave a standard stump speech.81

The stop at Gettysburg was one of Johnston’s last “before the deluge.” The governor’s race was about to be transformed by dramatic events at Christiana. During the summer, the campaign was marked by debate over fugitive slave laws; in the fall, the campaign’s direction would be largely determined by the actions of fugitives themselves.

79.“Governor Johnston will be with us in September,” Star, July 25, 1851, p. 2 c. 5; “The Fourth at Easton,” Star, July 25, 1851, p. 1 c. 6-7.
81.“The Welcome to Governor Johnston,” Star, September 5, 1851, p. 2 c. 5. “Governor Johnston’s Visit to Gettysburg,” Star, September 12, 1851, p. 2 c. 4. “Governor Johnston’s Visit to Gettysburg – A Humiliating Spectacle,” Compiler, September 8, 1851, p. 2 c. 2-3.
The Christiana Riot and Its Aftermath

In Baltimore County, Maryland, Edward Gorsuch, a farmer who tantalized his slaves with vague assurances of future freedom, was angered when four of them fled after a theft of grain from his farm. Four male slaves in the prime of their working lives were a valuable investment, and Gorsuch was determined to get them back.82

Once the runaways arrived in Pennsylvania, they settled near William Parker, a determined fugitive who led Lancaster’s self-protection society. Parker took his leadership role seriously, and organized several slave rescues as well as efforts to punish African American informers. He tried to kill one, and he organized the gang that tried to burn down the house of another suspected. When the fugitive slave act was passed, Parker took part in a meeting denouncing it, and he determined that he was not going to flee to Canada. Instead, he was going to stand and fight, and he persuaded other local African Americans to arm themselves for resistance.83 In September 1851, Gorsuch’s resolve to recover his slaves would collide with Parker’s determination to stand for their freedom.

At first, Gorsuch tried to get his slaves extradited legally, but Governor Johnston denied the request. Then the slave owner was tipped off to the whereabouts of his slaves by an informant, apparently a day laborer who belonged to a gang of slave catchers who based their operations around Clemson’s Tavern in the border town of Gap,

83 Katz, Resistance at Christiana, p. 28, 35-43; Slaughter, Bloody Dawn, p. 51.
Pennsylvania. He advised Gorsuch to travel to Philadelphia first to obtain constables, slave catchers, and warrants from Edward Ingraham, the fugitive slave commissioner. Gorsuch did so, hiring several deputies and constables, including Marshal Henry H. Kline, who frequently aided in the capture of fugitive slaves.84

The Parkers were warned about Gorsuch’s approach, but there had been so many false alarms about slave catchers that there was no mass mobilization the night before. Seven African Americans did stay in the Parker house that night, including two of Gorsuch’s fugitives and one of their free black associates from Baltimore County. The rest of the neighborhood was in a state of readiness.85

On the morning of September 11, the Gorsuch party was guided to Parker’s house, probably by the informant. As they moved up the lane, they encountered one of Gorsuch’s fugitives heading to work. He ran back into the house with a warning. Kline and Gorsuch followed him inside, but the Parker group was upstairs. After a tense confrontation and a reading of the warrant, Kline proposed burning the fugitives out.86

It is unclear what would have happened had the standoff continued. Despite Parker’s determination to fight to the death, several other African Americans were weakening in their resolve. Jonathan Katz, a historian of the riot, believes that the slave catchers were being reinforced by kidnappers determined to take or kill Parker after Gorsuch recovered his slaves. Parker’s wife, Eliza, however, blew a horn as a prearranged signal to local African Americans to rally. Accounts are inconsistent, but it appears that Gorsuch or Kline directed some of the men in the party to fire on her. This

84 Katz, *Resistance at Christiana*, p. 72-73. In another case of how interlocked these individuals’ stories were, Padgett later complained to J. Miller McKim, the editor of the *Anti-Slavery Standard*, for publishing his name in connection with the Christiana case. Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn*, pp. 44-45, 52.
likely started the gunfire at Christiana; it did not silence Eliza Parker, who retreated to a position below the windowsill of the stone house and continued to blow the horn.\textsuperscript{87}

Gorsuch’s son, Dickinson, smelled danger and urged his father to let the fugitives go, but Edward Gorsuch was resolute. What turned the tide was the arrival of reinforcements for Parker. The horn blasts had raised the alarm. Armed with scythes, hoes, and firearms, area African Americans converged on the Parker house, accompanied by several white observers who had learned that slave catchers were there. When Marshal Kline spotted these men, he tried to deputize them under the fugitive slave law. They refused, and one, Castner Hanway, was later charged with inciting the riot.

With the new arrivals, the slave catching party faced the possibility of being caught in a crossfire or surrounded. Kline ordered his men to pull back. Because of the legal legacy of the Kaufman case, he apparently believed that Hanway and his companion could be sued for the value of the slaves if the fugitives escaped. Gorsuch lingered, determined to recapture his slaves. When Kline’s men began to withdraw, the defenders broke out and Edward Gorsuch was assaulted and killed. His son Dickinson was severely wounded by a shotgun blast as he tried to defend his father. Joshua Gorsuch, a nephew, was beaten nearly senseless.\textsuperscript{88} The African Americans fled, but many were soon arrested on suspicion of being involved in the riot.

The Christiana riot clearly challenged the fugitive slave law. The fate of the tenuous sectional truce depended on the government’s reaction. It came at a critical time: just previously, in response to a Boston fugitive slave case, Millard Fillmore had


\textsuperscript{88} Katz, Resistance at Christiana, pp. 92-109; Slaughter, Bloody Dawn, pp. 63-75.
reiterated his determination to see the law enforced, so his presidential prestige rested upon his response. For those politicians who believed that the law was all that was holding the country together – 1850 had seen several southern states threaten to secede - attacks on it could jeopardize the nation. Newspapers from Boston to Florida carried articles or editorials about the violence. As historian Katz aptly termed it, “Christiana… became propaganda” as Southerners and Northerners sought to use the unrest for political ends. In South Carolina, there were renewed calls for secession, and denouncements of the 1850 compromise and its seemingly ineffective fugitive slave law. A newspaper in Florida hinted that any new Christianas would bring civil war. More ominously, Maryland’s governor wrote an open letter to Fillmore, suggesting that if secession occurred, Maryland itself would lead it.89

In Pennsylvania, the Christiania riot was the perfect tool for Democrats to use to split the conservative Silver Greys from the antislavery Whigs and force the campaign for Pennsylvania’s governorship to turn on the fugitive slave law. Johnston did not help his cause: when he passed through Lancaster by train in the evening of September 11th; unlike some of the other passengers, he did not get out to see the mangled body of Gorsuch. He also did not call out the militia to put down “insurrection.” Moreover, he did not issue a proclamation offering a reward for the Christiana rioters until four days later. The Whigs claimed, accurately, that most of the rioters had already been arrested by then, but the Democrats seized on this supposed dilatory response. One of Gorsuch’s sons wrote a widely published letter in which he accused the governor of reacting tardily. The Rev. J. S. Gorsuch claimed to be a Whig, but his letter read like the best Democratic

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propaganda. The Whigs fought back: a mass meeting in Philadelphia lauded Johnston for issuing his proclamation and quoted his last annual message which had stated that “the recently enacted fugitive slave law, while it remains a statute, demands the support of all the citizens.” They also cast aspersions on J. S. Gorsuch, hinting that he was neither Edward Gorsuch’s son nor a minister, and tried to deflect his charges against Johnston.90

Christiana destroyed any lingering ability for Pennsylvania Whig politicians to mask their sentiments on the fugitive slave law. Until the riot, the dichotomy between Pennsylvania’s 1847 personal liberty law and the Fugitive Slave Law had offered political refuge. Whig politicians could proclaim their support for the federal Fugitive Slave Law, grudgingly or otherwise, knowing that Pennsylvania’s state legislation made the rendition of fugitives cumbersome. The Democrats, by forcing the repeal issue, made such subterfuge difficult. By combining their attempted repeal of the 1847 law with proclamations that the Union was in danger, they split the Whig party between abolitionists who generally condemned the fugitive slave law and Silver Grays who wanted to maintain sectional harmony and good business relations with the South. As Katz points out, the Christiana riot and the resulting firestorm of publicity pushed the Silver Grays over the edge.91 In Gettysburg, the Star tried to ensure that blame for the riot was attached to the national Fugitive Slave Law, passed mainly by Democrats, and not Pennsylvania’s 1847 personal liberty law, passed by state Whigs. It did not work.


91 Jonathan Katz, Resistance at Christiana, pp. 156-161. Of the two recent, able chroniclers of Christiana, Katz believes that Johnston’s response was appropriate, while Thomas Slaughter believes he dragged his feet in responding to avoid alienating his abolitionist constituency. Slaughter, Bloody Dawn, pp. 94-104.
Johnston, who had carried the state by 300 votes in the 1848 election, was soundly defeated by William Bigler in 1851.92

The Christiana riot thrust the fugitive slave issue, and, by extension, issues of race into the forefront of the governor’s campaign. The state’s Democrats exploited those issues in south central Pennsylvania in particular. After the Johnston’s visit in September, one of the major events of that region’s electoral campaign was a pro-Bigler rally in Hanover, a town just east of the Adams County line. One of the speakers was Reah Frazer, the “War-Horse” of the Democracy, a prominent Lancaster lawyer who had prosecuted Samuel and Daniel Gibbons for harboring fugitive slaves in 1830.93

According to the unfriendly Star, Frazer had declared that the United States was for white people and not blacks, maintaining that “niggers had no rights to be in the country except as slaves.” While many border states banned or tried to ban the immigration of African Americans, Frazer went further, suggesting that if Bigler were elected, legislation should be passed driving all African Americans out of the state, and then a “big wall” should be erected to prevent communication between the Slave and Free States. The Star, while admitting that it was not completely certain that Frazer’s remarks were serious, remarked drily that a few more such meetings and the election would be theirs. Frazer’s remarks were a harbinger of the future: Pennsylvania’s Democrats would exploit racial rhetoric in political campaigns for at least the next fifteen years.94

93 Reah Frazer Papers, Folder 13 (Runaway Slave Case), MG-53, Pennsylvania State Archives.
94 “Meeting at Hanover on Friday Last,” Star, October 3, 1851, p. 2 c. 1-3; “Good Riddance,” [at Frazer leaving Democratic party], Compiler, November 6, 1854, p. 3 c. 2; “Libel,” Adams Sentinel, January 20, 1845, p. 3 c. 2.
Frazer’s speech was not the only sign that the 1851 election in south central Pennsylvania was becoming racially charged. In Gettysburg, the Star complained that Daniel Durkee, the defeated Whig candidate for local presiding judge, had been unfairly labeled an abolitionist and a “friend of the Niggers.” The paper admitted, however, that it was the charge that Durkee favored temperance that had likely damaged him the most.95

Meanwhile the Star continued to report on fugitive slave cases and riots in Baltimore, Syracuse (the Jerry case), and Virginia. The paper also reprinted a letter from Frederick Douglass in which he remarked:

I do not believe that slave-catching is… a Christian duty…. I do not believe that he who breaks the arm of the kidnapper, or wrests the trembling captive from his grasp, is a “traitor.” I do not believe that Daniel Webster is the Savior of the Union, or that the Union stands in need of such a Savior. I do not believe that human enactments are to be obeyed when they are point blank against the law of the living God.

Perhaps tellingly, however, immediately after the election ended with the defeat of Johnston and Durkee, the paper published a sizable piece on the colonization of African Americans to Africa.96

The Trial of The Christiania Rioters

What southern Pennsylvanians concerning resisting the fugitive slave law, as opposed to Frederick Douglass or abolitionists in upstate New York or Massachusetts, would be put to the test in the trial of the Christiana rioters. Adams County had significant ties to the case: former residents Thaddeus Stevens and James Cooper were

counsel for the defense and the prosecution, respectively; and three Adams County
residents were chosen for the jury, including William R. Sadler, who had led a Whig
meeting in June. The Star accurately predicted that the treason charges would not stick,
but it was widely recognized that if those charges were not sustained, the defendants
would be tried in state court for the murder of Edward Gorsuch; if that also failed, they
would be charged again in federal court, this time with obstructing the operation of the
federal Fugitive Slave Law.

With such grim prospects before them, the defendants needed good legal counsel,
and they received it from Thaddeus Stevens, the former Gettysburg lawyer, assisted by
John M. Read, a Democrat. The first trial was that of Castner Hanway, the white miller
accused of masterminding the riot. Stevens did not take the lead in the defense, perhaps
because he recognized how controversial he was, or perhaps because he knew he might
have to be absent for the opening of Congress. He did take a strong role in cross-
examination, legal motions, and courtroom arguments and strategy. In his cross-
examination of Henry Kline, he appeared to almost mock the U.S. Marshal and
questioned his ability to identify who had been present at the Parker house on September
11th. The prosecution called rebuttal witnesses to testify to Kline’s character, while the
defense emphasized that several kidnapping cases had occurred in the area recently,
implying that the rioters had a reason for concern and a right to defend themselves.

97 With three selected jurors, Adams County matched Lancaster County for the most residents on the jury.
98 “The Christiana Rioters,” Star, November 21, 1851, p. 2 c. 5; “The Treason Trials,” Star, November 28,
1851, p. 2 c. 6; “Trial of the Christiana Rioters,” Compiler, December 1, 1851, p. 2 c. 2; “The Christiana
Trials,” Star, November 14, 1851, p. 2 c. 3; “Indictments in the Christiana Outrage, &c.” Compiler,
November 3, 1851, p. 2 c. 1; “The Christiana Trials,” Compiler, November 17, 1851, p. 2 c. 6.
99 “The Treason Trials,” Star, December 4, 1851, p. 2 c. 4; “The Treason Trials,” Star, December 12, 1851,
p. 2 c. 4; “The Christiana Trials,” Compiler, December 4, 1851, p. 3 c. 3.
The final arguments illustrated the divergent opinions on both sides of the border. Maryland’s Attorney General Robert J. Brent, one of the prosecutors, blasted Northerners and abolitionists and stated that they were bound by the Constitution to assist in the recapture of fugitive slaves. John M. Read summed up for the defense and maintained that Pennsylvania would not tolerate kidnappings of its citizens. Senator James Cooper gave the closing argument for the prosecution, arguing that since fugitive slaves were not ready for freedom, the U.S. confederacy should not be torn apart to grant them an abstract right. After the closing arguments, Judge Robert Grier suggested in his charge to the jury that the treason charge was unsustainable. Grier pointed out that what was considered treason in older law was now considered aggravated or felonious riot. Proving treason required an intent to overthrow the government or to completely nullify its laws. Simply breaking laws, like a smuggler’s evasion of the revenue acts, did not constitute treason.100

In the end, the treason charges turned out to be an overreach. The jury returned “a verdict in accordance with its instructions” and acquitted the defendant. Soon the cases against the other defendants also lost momentum.101 The government may have mollified Southern anger, but the charge implied that any one involved in helping fugitive slaves, or even just a critic of the new federal law, was disloyal.

This helped contribute to a shifting of mood in the border North. Public opinion had initially been sympathetic to the Gorsuch family after the tragedy, but it turned as the trial continued. The able arguments of Hanway’s counsel spread the realization that widespread kidnappings were occurring in Lancaster County, that those who helped

fugitives could be charged with treason (a capital crime), and that almost any innocent bystander could be swept up by the law. Simultaneous with this realization by Northerners of the onerous extent of the law, in the aftermath of Christiana, the Southern press from Florida to Maryland demanded full and energetic enforcement of the fugitive slave law. In the end the Christiana trial had helped shift public opinion in the North.

Still, Pennsylvania’s Democratic party had used the fugitive slave issue very effectively in the first year since its passage. It split the Whig party and the Democrats were able to use the issue to defeat a sitting Whig governor in Pennsylvania. Even the border antislavery Whig press, such as the *Star*, had moderated its criticisms and admitted that the law must be enforced. With a national election looming, and with Pennsylvania – the “maker of Presidents” – firmly in their hands, Democrats had every right to be a little optimistic.

The party appeared to be on the winning side of the fugitive slave question, at least in south central Pennsylvania. After protests in 1850, both the Whig and Democratic parties declared acceptance of the Compromise of 1850, but the Democratic support was firmer. With diminishing opportunities to protest the law itself either politically or physically as in the case of Christiana, opponents of the fugitive slave law would resort to new tactics to increase outrage over the issue.
Chapter 6

Kidnapping, Comity, Kansas, and the Rise of Race-Based Partisanship:
The Fugitive Slave Issue in South Central Pennsylvania, 1852-1857

With the Christiana riot, the defeat of Johnston, and the trial of the rioters, it seemed as if the fugitive slave issue might usher in significant political change, possibly even a split in the Union. Perhaps foreseeing this eventuality, most Pennsylvanians pulled back from the precipice. In 1852, abolitionists tried to repeat the formula which won acquittal for Hanway: emphasizing the innocents, white and black, who seemed to be swept up by arbitrary Southern efforts to recover fugitives. The convergence of most border politicians on supporting the Compromise of 1850, combined with the decline of the Whig party and the rise of the nativist Know Nothings, contributed to the decline of the fugitive slave issue. It was the Kansas issue, however, that truly eclipsed the fugitive slave issue until John Brown’s raid and secession would bring it back to center stage at the end of the decade. Diminished interest in the fugitive slave issue, however, did not mean less attention to issues of race; in fact, the Democratic party responded to the rise of the Republicans by beginning a race-based attack that would last for decades and have a profound impact on area African Americans during the Civil War and Reconstruction.

The years 1850 and 1851 had seen turbulence and discord over the fugitive slave issue in south central Pennsylvania, but had yielded no effective way for opponents of the law to focus their anger politically. While the Whig party and to a lesser extent the Democrats contained individuals with varying opinions about the law, opposing it carried
particular political risks. After a storm of outrage in some quarters over the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, both major political parties had decided to support it – the Whigs with some reluctance. Even antislavery newspapers like the Gettysburg Star, moderated their criticism of the law and grudgingly supported its execution on the grounds of “law and order.”

For abolitionists, this led to shift toward emphasizing kidnapping – the capture and carrying south of free blacks – rather than just intervention in fugitive slave cases. This tactical shift allowed them to resist the capture of African Americans while maintaining the moral high ground. In kidnapping cases, Southerners who seized African Americans could be charged with not just violating the community mores, but actually breaking the law. In response, Democrats, joined by many Pennsylvania judges and juries, reemphasized considerations of law and order through a renewed concern for comity – the principle of cooperation between states on legal matters and friendly relations in general. Along the border, in fugitive slave and kidnapping cases, politicians, and lawyers searched for a middle ground resolution that residents, or at least Democrats, on both sides of the Mason Dixon line could accept. Pennsylvania politicians, judges and juries often arrived at Solomonic quid pro quo compromises akin to splitting the baby in half. For example, charges against a kidnapper might be dropped, in exchange for receiving back a kidnap victim.

These elaborate maneuvers illustrate how important comity and good interstate relations were and how citizens on both sides of the line tried to preserve it. Comity is the legal recognition by one state of the laws of another, and, the principle was an important part of the rendition of fugitives, either from justice (criminals) or labor
South central Pennsylvania was a border region, dependent on Southern business and trade. Cooperation between law enforcement officials was often required to arrest horse thieves, counterfeaters, and other criminals who operated across state lines. This simple legal principle became convoluted in fugitive slave and kidnapping cases. Antislavery Pennsylvanians resented Southern states demanding the rendition of fugitive slaves when those same states refused to hand over individuals indicted for kidnapping. Conversely, Southerners were angered when fugitive slaves were not turned over and indictments were issued for kidnapping, and argued that slave hunting parties had either seized an actual fugitive slave or believed that they had, thereby showing a lack of criminal intent. Interruptions on either side of the Mason-Dixon line of the rendition of fugitives of either type brought an outcry that a state was not living up to its interstate and intersectional responsibilities. Despite diligent efforts to preserve this comity in the case of fugitive slaves, Southern states would perceive Pennsylvania as failing in this regard. Calls for improved rendition and respect for comity would be renewed during the nation’s secession crisis of 1860-1861.

Neither kidnapping nor comity concerns, however, could maintain the fugitive slave issue as one of paramount importance when the more compelling issue of Kansas and the extension of slavery to the western territories arose. In addition, the rise of nativism contributed to an environment where the fugitive slave issue was in steep decline in the middle years of the 1850s. Table 6.1 shows the flurry of newspaper attention paid to the issue in the aftermath of the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, and then surrounding the Shadrach, Sims, and Christiana cases. After 1851, however, the
frequency of mentions of the fugitive slave issue declines sharply, only to revive, briefly, at the end of the decade.

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LEGEND:  
-- = Data not taken  
XX = Extant continuous newspaper files not available for those years.  
† = To May 8, 1857 only  
* = Issues from January 1, 1861 – April 15, 1861 only.

Table 6.1  Mentions Of Fugitive Slaves, Fugitive Slave Issue Or Kidnapping In Adams County Newspapers, 1849 – April 15, 1861

Kidnapping and Comity

The sympathy of the Christiana jury for Castner Hanway, a seemingly innocent man swept up in a fugitive slave case and riot, suggested a new model for agitation against the fugitive slave law, just when the growing political consensus behind the Compromise of 1850 necessitated the development of new tactics. Now, through kidnapping cases, Pennsylvania’s abolitionists, antislavery politicians and journalists would concentrate on violations of Pennsylvania law, and the seemingly innocent people entangled in the rigorous new federal law. If some of those people were white, like Hanway, so much the better. This was essentially a return to the tactic of publicized legal prosecutions that had worked in the mid- to-late 1840s. As a result, for border antislavery activists, 1852 became the year of the kidnapper.

Controversy over the fugitive slave law alone had proven insufficient to drive political change, but antislavery activists hoped that kidnapping cases held the potential
to emotionally involve more Pennsylvanians. While newspaper readers might cluck sympathetically at the news that a male fugitive, now the head of a household, had been taken from Pennsylvania to Virginia after fifteen years’ residence in a “free” state, most would do little else. They wanted to protect their reputations or family, they feared legal consequences, and, for some, jeopardizing the 1850 Compromise. If they wavered, Democratic calls for sectional unity might sway them back. Antislavery Pennsylvanians hoped, however, that the same reader might be outraged by news that a free black of Pennsylvania had been kidnapped south into slavery, or that a white man had been lynched for trying to rescue him or her. Such cases achieved prominence in 1852. By making the seizure of African Americans in Pennsylvania more dangerous, prosecutions for kidnapping, even if it was determined at trial that the slave catcher had legal authority, could discourage the seizure of free blacks and fugitive slaves. They generated considerable publicity over the crime itself, the extradition of suspects, the trial and any appeals, and any attempts to win gubernatorial pardons.

The Parker/Miller Case and Other 1852 Kidnapping Cases

The emphasis on kidnapping began almost immediately in 1852 with a spectacular, fatal case. Thomas McCreary was a mail contractor who was described in the antislavery press as “a professional slavehunter.” In January, he seized a young black woman, Rachel Parker, from the home of a Chester County farmer, and carried her south in a wagon. The farmer, Joseph C. Miller, immediately started in pursuit, accompanied by several others. They found Parker at a slave pen in Baltimore and swore out a complaint before the magistrate. After boarding the train to Pennsylvania that night,
Miller got out to smoke a cigarette. He disappeared and his body was found several days later, hanging from a tree near a train station. Maryland officials immediately claimed that Miller had committed suicide.\(^1\)

At the initial inquiry held in Baltimore, though, the suspected slave catchers seemed more intent on implicating Miller in the seizure than proving his suicide. One testified that Miller had known that Parker was a fugitive, and had consented to her capture, hoping to pocket some of the reward; another maintained that Miller had planned to turn Parker in on his own, but McCreary had beaten him to it by seizing her. After this testimony, the Maryland judge dismissed charges of kidnapping, released McCreary, and ruled that Parker was a slave to be returned to her owner.\(^2\)

As Rachel Parker had lived with Miller for over a year, it seems unlikely that Miller would have betrayed her at that late date. The fact that such a claim could be used as a plausible cover story for a likely murder, however, reflects the dangerous circumstances of the border, where it was known that the enemies of the fugitive sometimes posed as their friends.

Occurring just after the Christiana riots, and at the beginning of both state’s legislative sessions, the Parker kidnapping case became politicized immediately. Even as the case was unfolding, Maryland Governor E. Louis Lowe stoked border tensions in his annual message to the Maryland legislature. He criticized Pennsylvania’s judges and

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juries for their “faithlessness” to the fugitive slave law, labeling the 1851 kidnapping convictions of two Marylanders the “unconstitutional decisions of the Court of Pennsylvania,” and calling the Christiana treason trial a “farce.” He was also angered by the failure to prosecute the Christiana rioters for murder. (In characteristic display of border evenhandedness, the Lancaster grand jury had dropped all the murder charges against the defendants and a charge of perjury against the U.S. Marshal, Henry Kline).3

In this environment, neither the governor nor the legislature was inclined to respond to requests from Pennsylvania to free Rachel Parker or extradite McCreary for the murder of Miller.

Stung by this criticism from a fellow Democrat, Pennsylvania’s new governor, William Bigler, threw his prestige behind the effort to repeal the greater part of the 1847 personal liberty law. In his inaugural address, Bigler maintained that no state law could be permitted to interfere with the operation of the Constitution, and he pledged to “suppress all attempts to resist the execution of the laws of Congress,” alluding to the “fatal consequences” of a recent attempt to do that within the state.4

Bigler stirred up the kidnapping pot immediately. Almost as soon as he had taken office, he pardoned one of the Maryland kidnappers convicted in 1851. George Alberti had been sentenced to ten years in Eastern Penitentiary for capturing a fugitive slave and her son in New Jersey. Because they had been transported through Philadelphia, Pennsylvania’s anti-kidnapping laws came into play. By pardoning Alberti, Bigler essentially commuted his sentence to time served and responded to Lowe’s criticism.


4 “Inaugural Address of William Bigler,” Compiler, January 26, 1852, p. 2 c. 3-5.
Alberti was old, and had attracted sympathy, as some thought he might die in prison. In the aftermath of Christiana and in the midst of the Parker case, though, Bigler’s pardon unleashed a torrent of controversy, with Whigs and Free Soilers questioning whether, in the words of the Star, “Mr. Bigler designs by this pardon to show Maryland that her agents can hereafter invade our soil and kidnap our free colored people with impunity.”5 Democrats, who had felt the judge’s charge to the jury in Alberti’s case had been excessive, counterattacked by dragging up Governor Johnston’s pardons, including an eleventh-hour reprieve of Martin C. Auld. If kidnapping African Americans was so bad, they wondered why had Whigs not protested the pardon of that Cumberland County kidnapper? The Compiler hinted that the circumstances of Auld’s case were particularly heinous.6

Bigler appears to have been trying to induce a quid pro quo from Maryland, by releasing a slave catcher (Alberti) who had been working for a Maryland slave owner in exchange for the resolution of a case where Pennsylvanians had been kidnapped and killed (Parker and Miller). If so, he appeared to be successful at first. Shortly after Alberti’s pardon, the Gettysburg papers reported that the Baltimore County grand jury had found a true bill against Thomas McCready for false arrest and imprisonment in the Rachel Parker case.7 In addition, it had been learned that Rachel Parker’s sister, Eliza, had also been carried south in suspicious circumstances several years previously, and she was brought back to Baltimore to have her case resolved with Rachel’s.

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5 “A Most Righteous Act” [Alberti pardon], Compiler, February 9, 1852, p. 2 c. 5; “Pardon of Alberti, the Kidnapper,” Star, February 6, 1852, p. 2 c. 3.
7 Untitled, Star, February 20, 1851, p. 2 c. 6.
Marylanders accepted the *quid pro quo* principle, but in this case, interpreted the deal a little differently. When Pennsylvanians pushed for the extradition of McCreary several months later, Lowe sent a letter stating that the understanding he had reached with Bigler was that there would be no prosecution of McCreary in exchange for the release of Rachel Parker and her sister, Eliza. He also argued the Pennsylvania’s Attorney General had stated that McCreary was innocent, when, in actuality, the attorney general’s letter appeared to be another attempt to find grounds to reach an understanding on the case.8

Despite the desire of many along the border, particularly Democrats, to calm agitation, the fugitive slave issue had a way of interjecting itself into state and regional politics. When an officer from Baltimore and a marshal from Harrisburg tried to arrest a runaway slave in Columbia, near the Susquehanna River, the fugitive was shot while trying to escape. The Maryland officer, Ridgeley, fled to Baltimore to escape prosecution. This case became a significant one in antislavery circles. Even the *Compiler*, admitted that the “supposed … slave” had lived in Pennsylvania a number of years, and had a family. The *Star* called the killing a gross outrage and inveighed against American hypocrisy and the lack of justice. Where, the paper wondered, were the politicians who had denounced the Christiana tragedy when a white man was killed trying to carry out the controversial fugitive slave law? Where were those same politicians when a black man was the victim?9

8 “Important Correspondence [Bigler/Lowe].” *Compiler*, June 27, 1853, p. 1 c. 5-6.
9 “Fugitive Slave Case – Fugitive Shot,” *Compiler*, May 3, 1852, p. 3 c. 1; “Particulars of the Fugitive Slave Case,” *Compiler*, May 3, 1852, p. 3 c. 1; “Murder of an Alleged Fugitive Slave in Columbia,” *Star*, May 7, 1852, p. 2 c. 1
Again the Maryland legislature became involved, just as with the Christiana case, the Alberti kidnapping case, and the Miller/Parker case. Expressing the opinion that the shooting of the fugitive did not constitute murder, they asked the governor to appoint a special commissioner to look into the case.10

In late May, as the furor over the Ridgely case was temporarily abating, another fugitive slave case erupted in Harrisburg. A fugitive named James Phillips was decoyed and then subdued by an officer and two confederates. He had run away in 1838, lived in Harrisburg for over a decade, married, and had children. The critical point in this case was whether accurate identification was possible after fifteen years. Complicating the matter, Phillips was only in his mid-teens when he ran away. The two slave catchers testified that they were sure Phillips was the fugitive they sought because of their memories of him, and because of his resemblance to members of his alleged family in Maryland. One of the slave catchers, however, would have only been ten or eleven years old when Phillips escaped. The Star fumed that this evidence would not have been accepted to convict anyone of even a petty crime, and said, “This case has produced the most intense excitement in our community; even those who formerly approved the Fugitive Slave Law, now denounce and condemn it.” To increase the outrage, one of the Harrisburg papers reported that at the end of the hearing, Commissioner McAllister had taken from his desk an already completed “writ of removal (‘to save time’),” suggesting that he had foreknowledge of the seizure. Abolitionists immediately launched an effort to bring Phillips back, culminating in a Harrisburg lawyer traveling to Richmond and purchasing Phillips’ freedom for $800. The case was much less interesting to the

10 “The Columbia Homicide,” Star, May 21, 1852, p. 2 c. 5
Democratic paper, the *Compiler*, which simply reported, “A fugitive slave was arrested at Harrisburg last week, and upon positive proof of his being a slave, was taken off to Virginia. He ran off in 1838.”¹¹

In an example of the complicated dance of comity between Maryland and Pennsylvania on slave cases, while Governor Bigler did not requisition Ridgely from Governor Lowe, Maryland authorities sent to him John Johnson, a young black Pennsylvanian who had traveled to Baltimore, been arrested, and been bound out to labor until the age of 21 “for coming into Maryland without a pass.” When two Maryland commissioners were appointed to investigate the Columbia murder case, fugitive slave commissioner McAllister intervened with them concerning the Johnson case. They promised to look into it, assuring McAllister that “They were especially glad to have this opportunity to show the people of Pennsylvania that the people of Maryland had no disposition to interfere with their free people of color.” The individual who had purchased the time of Johnson agreed to release him, after he was reimbursed. Johnson was put on the train back to Harrisburg.¹²

Southern Pennsylvania’s opposition newspapers smelled a rat. According to the York *Republican*, the return of Johnson was “one of the richest attempts at diverting public attention from the violation of the law by the murder of a man, that we have ever seen.” The paper went on:

> These Locofoco Grand Inquisitors… find out that a little negro boy, who had strayed into Maryland, ignorant of her *humane* laws, had been …sold as a slave. Here was a chance to… furnish a set-off to Ridgely’s


homicide! They…send him back with a grand flourish… and in effect say, take your free boy, but don’t ask us to give up our shooting officer.\textsuperscript{13}

This was one \textit{quid pro quo} that the \textit{Star} would not tolerate. The following week, the \textit{Star} reprinted an ad from a Frederick paper, offering to purchase “one hundred negroes” for the New Orleans slave markets. The Star, angry over this case and the Phillips case, commented: “We are surprised at [someone] offering to buy negroes in Maryland, when they can be knocked down and dragged out for a mere song in Pennsylvania.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{The Decline of the Fugitive Slave Issue}

Despite these kidnapping controversies in 1852, the fugitive slave issue was diminishing in importance as a public, political topic. With the Whig’s resounding defeat in the national elections in the fall, one of Gettysburg’s opposition newspapers, the \textit{Star}, slowly turned toward nativism, necessitating endless pieces on papal plots, degraded foreigners, and immigration. Even when the Kansas-Nebraska act caused a renewal of anger over slavery extension, and the birth of the Republican party, this reaction centered on the issue of Kansas and free soil, and not fugitive slaves. Only Kansas could bring together a coalition of Free Soilers, Whigs, Know Nothings, antislavery Democrats, and later in the decade, Republicans to challenge Pennsylvania’s Democrats for control of the state.

Of course, as the years passed, slaves continued to escape, stirring up the fugitive slave issue. In 1854, fugitive slave cases in Harrisburg contributed to significant local reverses for the Democrats there. The Whig platform that year, while not mentioning

\textsuperscript{13} Untitled, \textit{Star}, June 18, 1852, p. 2 c. 3.
\textsuperscript{14} Untitled [Reprint from the York \textit{Republican}], \textit{Star}, June 25, 1852, p. 3 c. 1.
fugitive slaves, supported the writ of habeas corpus and the right to trial by jury, and James Pollock, the Whig-Know Nothing gubernatorial candidate, mentioned the fugitive issue when he was in friendly areas. In June 1855, a fugitive slave was captured at Joel Wierman’s farm in Adams County. That same summer saw one of the secretaries of the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society, Passmore Williamson, arrested in Philadelphia as he tried to persuade the shipborne slaves of the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, that they were free because they were inside the bounds of Pennsylvania. This resulted in the spectacle of Williamson being thrown in jail and, from there, being nominated by the new Republican party as canal commissioner, the highest state office being contested that year.

According to the unfriendly Compiler, an attempt to agitate the fugitive slave issue occurred in September 1856, when area antislavery activists unsuccessfully tried to swear out a writ of habeas corpus in a fugitive case in Carlisle. The Compiler believed that it was an attempt to put life back into the flagging presidential campaign of John C. Fremont, and was thwarted by a fast-acting commissioner. In 1853 and 1857, substantial attention was paid to the Lemmon slave case in New York and the Dred Scott cases. The Lemmon slaves were declared free after a steamship brought the eight slaves, on the way to Texas, into New York Harbor. It became a significant centerpiece for a battle over the “right of transit.” Southerners believed they should be allowed to carry their slaves anywhere, but abolitionists feared recognizing such a right in defiance of state laws would set a precedent for nationalizing slavery. Dred Scott sued for freedom after he resided several years in free states with his master, and the U.S. Supreme Court rejected his claim, invalidated the Missouri Compromise, and ruled that African Americans had
no “rights that a white man was bound to respect.” Both cases were technically not fugitive slave cases at all, although they did involve the right of Southerners to travel with their slaves throughout the country.\textsuperscript{15}

The rapid decline of the Whigs after their 1852 Presidential defeat helped the rise of a new party, the Know Nothings, later known as the American party. In border Pennsylvania, this party did not agitate issues like slavery or the fugitive slave issue, but rather had an anti-immigrant, anti-foreign bias. Explosively successful at first across much of the North, the party foundered in its inability to bridge the sectional divide over slavery and create a national party. In Pennsylvania, the new party attracted so many adherents that its 1855 attempt to nominate a Senator failed amid charges of fraud in the nominating convention balloting. As a result, at a time when sectional issues were at a peak, Pennsylvania went with one of its two Senate seats unfilled for a year, until the resurgent Democrats nominated William F. Bigler in 1856.

The \textit{Star}, the leading reform and antislavery newspaper in Adams County becoming nativist as well; the fugitive slave issue was largely winkled out. There was only so much space in antebellum newspapers, and the pages of Gettysburg’s \textit{Star and Banner} were taken up with papal plots, foreign plots, school controversies, and warnings about increasing immigration for much of the middle part of the decade. The controversy over Kansas also helped pushed the fugitive slave issue off of the newspaper pages. In 1854, Stephen Douglas pushed the Kansas-Nebraska act through Congress, both invalidating the 1820 Missouri Compromise and the “final settlement” of the 1850 Compromise. With the provisions that settlers to Kansas would decide whether the

territories would become slave states or free states, immigrants surged into the area from both the South (primarily pro-Southern Missourians) and the North, including Pennsylvania and New England.

The Kansas controversy allowed many of the essentials of the fugitive slave issue to be recast in compelling terms affecting white people. The suspension of habeas corpus and summary justice concerned abolitionists and humanitarians when applied to the fugitive slave; when the same thing happened to free settlers in Kansas, the range of interest was potentially much larger. Even the fugitive slave issue itself was cast in a way subsidiary to Kansas. “Negro Dogs” used to hunt fugitives were particularly reprehensible because they would hunt slaves in Kansas. The death sentence was threatened to white settlers who helped fugitives in the territory, and a settler who spoke out against the law could be jailed.16

Racial Retaliation Against the Republican Party

Northern outrage over the Kansas-Nebraska act had led to the foundation of the Republican party. With the Republican party set firmly against the extension of slavery, and its rapid rise, the Democrats retaliated by trying to tie Pennsylvania’s Republican party to African Americans. It did this by crudely exploiting racial stereotypes and prejudices. Nothing like this had been seen before in Adams County, but it marked an important sea change both in Pennsylvania and nationally. The same tactics would be used by the Democrats in 1857 during the gubernatorial campaign against David Wilmot, and in 1858 and 1860 against the resurgent Republican party. In fact, this change in

political rhetoric would last throughout the disputes over contrabands, the emancipation proclamation, and the Civil War, and into the post-war years. It was a shift of decided significance.  

Scholars have noted the Democratic party’s appropriation of racist language before, but have not sufficiently explored the context in which it happened, beyond generalizations about Northern racism and a concern about African American labor. The experience of south central Pennsylvania, though, suggests that at least in that locale, the practice arose because of deep Democratic concern that Republican John C. Fremont would be elected president.

In response to Fremont’s 1856 candidacy, Democrats wielded an aggressive, mud-slinging campaign, accusing him of financial dishonesty and of being a secret Catholic. They also employed a new level of anti-African American invective in charging that Fremont and the Republicans were in league with racially inferior African Americans against immigrants and white workers. Democrats accused the Republicans of promoting amalgamation, sexual relations between black and white. Prior to 1856, the editors of the *Compiler*, although undoubtedly imbued with the casual racism characteristic of many Northerners, had rarely had those sentiments slip through to its pages. In the year of the first Republican campaign for President, they were deliberately harnessed against Fremont. Fremont was ridiculed for being a “Wooly Head,” a derogatory term first applied to antislavery Whigs. Particularly striking was the *Compiler’s* gloating after the Democrats steamrolled to victory in the Pennsylvania state

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elections. The paper parodied the coalition behind Fremont and also made a veiled suggestion that its political opponents, the editors of the *Star*, had deliberately tried to agitate a fugitive slave case at the last moment to bring doubters back into the Fremont fold.\(^{18}\)

Curiously, no account of such a fugitive slave case exists in the *Star*. The *Sentinel*, however, fills in details which the *Compiler* omitted. It stated that a fugitive slave from Virginia had traveled to Carlisle in a railroad car. The owner and several others, however, had reached the station before the train arrived. The fugitive was arrested and taken before Carlisle’s fugitive slave commissioner. The fugitive was “completely identified,” remanded to the owner’s custody, and taken back to Virginia. According to the *Sentinel*, “the matter caused no excitement,” but the *Compiler* suggests that Fremont supporters were involved in a last-minute effort to swear out a writ of habeas corpus on the fugitive.\(^{19}\)

All of this happened in late September, and the presidential election was not until early November. Pennsylvania’s state elections, however, occurred in mid-October, and they were typically seen as a critical bellwether for both Pennsylvania and the North. A defeat generally diminished statewide turnout for the vanquished party in the national election, so for the flagging Fremont campaign, a victory in October was critical.

The *Compiler*’s picture of the *Star*’s editors and the Republicans desperately seeking to drum up a last minute, controversial fugitive slave case to rally antislavery voters is an intriguing one. In the past in south central Pennsylvania, fugitive slave cases in the newspapers had often been downplayed during the electoral campaign. Such had

\(^{18}\) *Compiler*, November 10, 1856, p. 2 c. 1.

\(^{19}\) *Sentinel*, September 29, 1856, p. 2 c. 3.
been the pressures of the border, and later, of fusion politics, the attempts to bring together all of the opponents of the Democrats. Apparently, the controversial nature of the cases was feared, although typically, as soon as the election was over, they would appear again, to rally the faithful after another statewide Whig defeat.

In September 1856, the defeat of Fremont was looming, and it appeared certain that he would carry with him most of the statewide fusion candidates as well. So the Compiler’s snide comments about “habeas corpus” may have been based in reality – perhaps the editors of the opposition press in Gettysburg had tried to develop a controversy late in the electoral campaign by taking advantage of a fugitive slave case, and were stymied by the quick actions of the commissioner.

Fremont was defeated, stymieing the Republican strategy of carrying the entire North. Instead, Pennsylvanian James Buchanan was elected. He took office with a program to pacify the Kansas violence, but was no more successful than his predecessor.

By 1857, a year after “Bleeding Kansas” and “Bleeding Sumner,” Kansas had become the key partisan battleground. Even the moderate opposition paper in Gettysburg, the Sentinel, took a strong position on Kansas. The Kansas issue was drawing into the opposition tent a large group of people who were not sympathetic to abolition or even fugitive slaves. Democrats, meanwhile, felt increasingly saddled with their party’s pro-Southern positions, unpopular in the border North. The Compiler hoped that the controversy over Kansas would soon pass.

The rhetoric heated up on both sides in 1857, and with the waning of the Know Nothing movement, Gettysburg’s opposition press began to coalesce on Kansas and

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antislavery. The Star reprinted a piece from the Erie True American which suggested that individuals who minimized the suffering of settlers in Kansas, or the “wrongs of the poor crushed slave” (it is probably significant which oppressed group was listed first) were uncompassionate, self-worshippers who “hath a devil.” As 1857 unfolded, the paper resumed printing more material that was overtly antislavery or in favor of fugitive slaves, but it still reassured its readers of its nativism through published articles supporting the American party, favoring changing the naturalization laws, or hinting, based solely on foreign-sounding last names, that significant Democratic leaders were “foreigners.”

Early in 1857, by declaring the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional in the Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court indirectly supported the Kansas-Nebraska act, but with thousands of free soil and proslavery settlers now in the territory, rather than resolve the controversy, the decision threatened to open a new level of violence. The Compiler, which had derided Scott as “an obscure African,” promptly warned its readers that the Republicans would try to stir up strife in Kansas, hoping for a violent result that could be channeled into support of the party. As a result of the decision, the Star, however, predicted that “Kansas to be a Slave State.” That this was a matter of concern to residents of south central Pennsylvania none of the papers doubted. Even before the Civil War, many residents of south-central Pennsylvania migrated west for better opportunities. Even a black resident of Gettysburg, probably Daniel Alexander Payne, had commented on it as early as the 1840s. The exodus included antislavery supporters such as Benjamin Lundy’s children and, in the late 1850s, Joel and Lydia Wierman, and

anti-abolitionists, like the Rev. Richard Bond and Andrew G. Miller. Even the Harrisburg fugitive slave commissioner, Richard McAllister, migrated to Kansas in the 1850s (where, according to one observer, he was labeled as a “Rank Abolitionist” because of his state of origin). Area newspapers frequently ran pieces on conditions in the west, and all three Adams County papers reported on an expedition organized by Colonel A. G. Ege of “mechanics” from Cumberland County and Maryland, migrating to Kansas.\textsuperscript{23} Later, the \textit{Star} noted a group of twelve Adams County citizens heading for Kansas and Nebraska, and commented that “the mania for ‘going west,’ instead of subsiding, appears to be on the increase in our county.”\textsuperscript{24} This westward movement made many in Pennsylvania keenly interested in the fate of Kansas.

\textit{The Democratic Racial Counterattack at the State Level: The 1857 Defeat of Wilmot}

\textit{Dred Scott} was a bombshell nationally; in Pennsylvania, the leading political event of the first quarter of 1857 was the union convention of Republicans and Americans in Harrisburg on March 22. With the strength of the Democrats statewide, most political observers, including the editor of the \textit{Star}, realized that a common ticket and close political cooperation were necessary between the Republicans, Americans, Free Soilers, antislavery Democrats, and the vestiges of the Whig party.\textsuperscript{25} The opposition closed ranks and for governor nominated David Wilmot, the former free soil Democrat. Wilmot had been the leading challenger to Pollock three years before, and so his

\textsuperscript{24} “For Kansas,” \textit{Star}, May 8, 1857, p. 3 c. 1.
\textsuperscript{25} “Union Convention,” \textit{Star}, March 27, 1857, p. 2 c. 3; “Meeting of the Republican and American State Convention,” \textit{Sentinel}, March 30, 1857, p. 3 c. 3.
nomination was expected, but he would prove to be a poor choice. After his nomination, the Compiler claimed that “he owes his present position altogether to his persistent efforts as a sectional agitator,” and predicted that the honest farmers of Pennsylvania, “slow to follow after strange gods,” would continue to shun divisive abolitionism.

There turned out to be a large measure of truth to the Compiler’s partisan attacks. The 1857 gubernatorial campaign would be largely contested over the issue of slavery. The Republican party had been founded in 1854 in opposition to the Kansas Nebraska act. In 1855, Pennsylvania’s Republicans had, for a time, nominated a jailed slave rescuer for that year’s highest office. The party had taken a strong antislavery stand in the previous year’s presidential election, and was determined to fight out this election on its antislavery principles. The Republicans had largely been ascendant at the Harrisburg convention. Not only did they nominate the militant free soiler, David Wilmot, whose name would forever be linked to his Proviso trying to keep slavery out of the territories acquired from Mexico, but their platform revealed a strong antislavery stance as well.

Five of the platform’s eight position planks dealt with slavery, slavery extension, Kansas, and Dred Scott. One plank rehearsed the position of the national Republican party, that it was the “duty of Congress to prohibit in the Territories, those twin relics of barbarism, Polygamy and Slavery.”

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26 “Call for a Union State Convention,” Star, March 6, 1857, p. 2 c. 2; “Another Coalition,” Compiler, March 2, 1857, p. 2 c. 2.
As this important election approached, the *Star* was under new leadership. With the first issue of May, D. A. Buehler turned over the editorship to John T. McIlhenny. Both men assured readers that the paper would continue to urge both American and Republican principles, although American issues such as immigration and “Jesuitism” were discussed first. Still, McIlhenny reported that “nor will that ‘sum of all villainies’ – the curse of human slavery – receive aid or comfort at our hands.” McIlhenny may have been a recent convert to slavery agitation, however, because he only dated the “unchristian” policy of the South as extending from the Kansas Nebraska act. According to the new editor, slavery must not be interfered with in the South, but its blighting institution must not be permitted to spread.29

With the transition of the *Star* to McIlhenny’s editorship, an evidence problem arises, as continuous records of the newspaper during the first several years of his stewardship do not exist, and this valuable source is mostly unavailable until 1868. For most of the rest of 1857, though, newspaper coverage in the *Compiler* and the *Sentinel* was dominated by the governor’s race and the other statewide races.

Vulnerable on the Kansas issue, the *Compiler* increased its level of race baiting as the election approached. The paper began to publish calls from Salmon Chase and other Republican leaders in Ohio for black suffrage, which the *Compiler* said, was a small step to “NEGRO EQUALITY.” Pennsylvanians could prevent it by defeating Wilmot.30

The issue that would most historians credit with deciding the 1857 election, however, appeared unlooked for by either party. In August, a panic began on Wall Street, wiping out investors and companies, and plunging the country into a sharp

29 “To The Patrons of the *Star*,” and “To Our Friends,” *Star*, May 8, 1857, p. 2 c. 3.
30 “Read! Read!” *Compiler*, September 21, 1857, p. 2 c. 5.
depression. At first, it appeared as if it might be a momentary disturbance, but the effects spread to banks across the Northeast and the nation. Eventually, even the normally strong Bank of Gettysburg had to suspend specie payments larger than $5.31

The panic of 1857 doomed Wilmot’s candidacy. A crusader against slavery extension, Wilmot had already alienated some of his potential antislavery base because he had been a Free Trade Democrat who supported the unpopular, lower Tariff of 1846. Aside from supporting free trade, however, Wilmot had no economic program whatsoever, and his lack of understanding of fiscal issues gave voters no confidence he would be able to bring the state quickly out of the depression. Wilmot was touring the state to campaign, and, as the panic deepened, his speeches and meetings were greeted with diminishing enthusiasm. When he arrived in Gettysburg late in the campaign, the Compiler mocked the affair as a “One-Horse Mass Meeting!” and remarked that despite the fusion of Know Nothings and Republicans – “Sam” and “Sambo” – there was low attendance and little energy. “No crowd,” the Compiler snickered, “no flags – no enthusiasm – Know Nothing.” Wilmot closed his speech with his strongest issue, opposition to slavery extension, and the Compiler sneered, “his speech was little less than Abolitionism of the darkest dye.”32

The Democratic attacks on Wilmot, and his apparent financial incompetence, took a toll. General William F. Packer, the Democratic candidate, won the election by a

substantial majority. With the election over, the *Compiler* returned to pushing the new Lecompton Constitution in Kansas as a way of ending the Kansas agitation.33

Wilmot’s defeat in the election of 1857 signaled the beginning to the end of the era of fusion politics in Pennsylvania. Although the opposition would continue to campaign as a fusion or “People’s Party,” the Know Nothings were waning and the Republicans ascending. In addition, the Republicans were broadening their appeal. The consecutive defeats of Fremont and Wilmot made it clear that an antislavery platform alone could not prevail in Pennsylvania. In 1860, militant antislavery statements would be toned down, and the party would adopt strong support for a protective tariff.34

Despite the rise of a party formed around opposition to slavery extension and the Kansas-Nebraska act, the fugitive slave issue was in eclipse. Controversies over Kansas proved the most effective tools to keeping old Whigs, Free Soilers, and Know Nothings in the Republican camp. In many Adams County newspapers, the space that might have gone to cover fugitive slave cases a few years before now went to material about Kansas. Notable local or regional cases were still covered, but the fugitive slave issue itself was largely dead as a political issue in Pennsylvania, killed by the requirements of fusion.

In Pennsylvania, Kansas had displaced the fugitive slave issue as the leading way agitation against the “Slave power” was maintained. In border Pennsylvania, thousands of citizens migrated west every year, and defending the rights of white settlers was more palatable than defending African American fugitives. It seemed that the rest of the decade appeared would consist of Democrats throwing water on the Kansas fire and

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34 Coleman, *Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy*, p. 110.
Republicans throwing oil. At least it appeared that way until a Kansas settler, working from south central Pennsylvania, explosively moved the fugitive slave issue back to center stage.
Chapter 7

Revival of the Fugitive Slave Issue, 1858-1861

The fugitive slave issue appeared quiescent in 1858. The Republican party’s fortunes continued to rise, despite defeats statewide in the 1856 presidential election and the 1857 governor’s race, but the fugitive slave issue did not rise with them. Although the Republicans were perceived as antislavery, the party had been founded on opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska act and the extension of slavery, not resistance to the fugitive slave law. In addition, any new party wishing to succeed along the border would shrink from urging defiance of the law and the Constitution, particularly when the Democrats had been presenting themselves as the party of Union and law during the decade.

Even without this pressure from the Democrats, in Pennsylvania the requirements of fusion politics led Republicans to emphasize Kansas and the tariff. The fugitive slave issue did not reappear until it did so explosively after the 1859 Harpers Ferry raid and then again on the very eve of secession and war. The Republicans’ potential vulnerability on this issue was illustrated by the fact that in 1860-1861, when the fugitive slave issue reappeared in Pennsylvania politics in the most significant way since the Christiana riots, it was the Democrats, not the Republicans, who again injected it into the debate.

In the 1850s, the Republicans realized that if they could carry the entire North, they would win the Presidency without winning any Southern states. As weak as a candidate as he ultimately had proved to be, even John C. Fremont had carried most of the North in 1856. He would have been President had he carried Pennsylvania and Illinois or Indiana. The keys for the Republican party in 1860, then, would be developing a platform and party to carry the border North, and nominating a better candidate.
Pennsylvania would have to be swung into the Republican column. This would necessitate improving on the cumbersome coalitions, fusion movements, People’s parties, and Union parties of the 1850s, while retaining the support of the state’s dwindling Know Nothings. This approach, which would not emphasize the fugitive slave issue, would be the basis for the successful 1860 campaign. To the Republican plans, however, would be added the dramatic actions of John Brown. His raid would ensure that the fugitive slave issue would be a dramatic part of the political debate at the end of the decade.

1858-1859: Republican Revival, Racial Counterattacks, and Shifting Sentiments

In 1858, the Republicans were laying the groundwork for their 1860 triumph. The Kansas controversies had taken a toll on Northern Democrats who supported the national Democratic positions, and now debate raged over the proslavery Lecompton Constitution. Many Northern Democrats were tired of being saddled with unpopular pro-Southern positions. Some who opposed slavery extension became “free soil” Democrats or even joined the Republicans in 1860. Others just hoped for the Kansas controversies to subside. Early in 1858, the Compiler expressed its hope that “the wounds of bleeding Kansas are being healed,” robbing the Republicans of an electoral issue. It gave front-page placement to speeches by the area’s State Senator George Brewer and Congressman Wilson Reilly, urging acceptance of the Lecompton constitution. The paper’s hopes that the Kansas controversies would resolve, however, proved illusory.¹

¹ “Democratic Meeting in Philadelphia,” Compiler, January 4, 1858, p. 2 c. 2; “Kansas,” Compiler, January 11, 1858, p. 3 c. 2; “Important Message from the President,” Compiler, February 9, 1851, p. 2 c. 1 and p. 3 c.1. “Pennsylvania with the President,” February 22, 1858, p. 2 c. 2. “Senate Bill to Admit Kansas,” Compiler, April 5, 1858, p. 2 c. 2-4. “Speech of Hon. Geo. Brewer,” March 29, 1858, p. 1 c. 4-7; “Speech of Hon. Wilson Reilly of Pennsylvania In Favor of the Admission of Kansas, Under the Lecompton
Since the mid-1850s, the Kansas issue had been more significant in the local papers than fugitive slave or kidnapping cases. For African Americans, of course, there was no comparison, as kidnapping threatened immediate reenslavement. One attempt to kidnap an African American woman momentarily grabbed the attention of the Adams County newspapers early in 1858. Mag Palm had been washing for a Gettysburg family. Waiting to get paid had delayed her departure. Crossing the alley behind the house in the dark, she was seized by men who tried to push her into a nearby carriage. They had picked the wrong victim, however. “Possessing more than ordinary muscular power,” the Compiler commented, Palm drove off the kidnappers. She then swore out a warrant before the magistrate, implicating her employer and two others.

Figure 7.1 Mag Palm indicating how kidnappers attempted to bind her hands

Source: Adams County Historical Society

Constitution.” Compiler, April 12, 1858, p. 1 c. 3-7; “Decline of the Anti-Slavery Sentiment” Compiler, April 26, 1858, p. 2 c. 6. “Mr. Reilly’s Speech,” Compiler, April 26, 1858, p. 2 c. 5.
This incident illustrated the continued danger of the border regions, where groups of informers and slave catchers, existed in the same areas as networks of those who would help the fugitives or kidnap victims. Informers and slave catchers existed in many communities in southern Pennsylvania, and it was difficult to determine loyalties, with slave catchers often posing as the fugitive’s friend.

The Palm case briefly exposed some of these relationships. According to the *Compiler*, “the affair caused considerable excitement amongst the colored population.” An African American man, Jacob Jones, suspected “for having some hand in it,” was beaten by several African American women and their children in retaliation. Jones went before a Mummasburg magistrate and swore out a warrant against a several local African American woman, including Milly Magee, for assault and battery. When the women learned this, they posted bail before the magistrate in Gettysburg, and then swore out a warrant on Jones, for attempting to kidnap two of Milly’s children. The *Compiler* commented dryly, “Jones, not having as good luck as Milly in getting security, was compelled to take up quarters under Sheriff Lightner.”

Although a fictionalized version of the attack on Mag Palm survives in Elsie Singmaster’s *A Boy at Gettysburg*, this kidnapping attempt is more than just a local interest story. This incident showed collective action and resistance by the local African American community. It also illustrated how, by 1858, the African American community, and not just white abolitionists, knew how to appeal to the legal system to stop kidnappings.

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This momentary interest in kidnapping stirred up by the attempt to seize Mag Palm faded from the politically attuned newspapers; what persisted was the need for the Democrats to find an issue to beat back the Republicans. Democrats applied to the Kansas issue the virulent racial rhetoric they were developing to combat the Republicans. In May 1858, the *Compiler* printed a speech by William H. English, Congressman from Indiana, praising the passage of the Kansas bill and deprecating Republican agitation. English, in a perfect reversal of Martin Luther King’s vision over a hundred years later, said, “I never want to see the day come in this country when the black man shall sit at the table with the white man, upon terms of perfect equality.” The *Compiler* also reprinted from the *West Chester Republican* a fairly standard Democratic critique of proposals for African American suffrage in Kansas: “… if the white free-soilers of Kansas are not able to… frame laws… without the aid of negroes, they better fall back and let others take the lead… [it is] mortifying… that they should beg the support of negroes to help them.”4

This race baiting intensified as the 1858 summer campaigning season heated up. For years, the Democratic press had appealed to their foreign-born constituencies by proclaiming that the Know Nothing elements were blocking citizenship for immigrants while the Republicans were easing it for fugitive slaves and African Americans. In “The Union of Sam and Sambo,” the paper claimed that the fusion movement between the Republicans and Know Nothings had two major principles:

1. All white men born outside of U.S. to be disfranchised and proscribed from political rights. Assented to by Sambo on condition:
2. Negroes have same political and social rights as native born Americans and in all respects. Vote and hold office while the white European is to be denied these privileges.

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The paper accused those who attended the recent Union convention of Republicans and Americans of “laying down in the bed of niggerism,” and predicted the movement would fail, because, “White men cannot be got to proscribe each other that negroes may profit by it.” The paper labeled this event “The Mulatto State Convention.”

This vociferous campaign stemmed from the Compiler’s deep concern over the fall elections. The Democrats’ Kansas position was unpopular, and the lingering effects of the panic of 1857 threatened incumbent, anti-protectionist Democrats. In August 1858, the paper tried to win back defectors by warning its readers to vote Democratic in the upcoming Congressional election, lest the Republicans gain seats that could decide the Presidency if the 1860 election was thrown to the House of Representatives.

At the same time, the opposition parties in Adams County saw an opportunity in the Kansas controversy to recapture a seat in Congress. At an Adams County “People’s Convention,” Edward McPherson was nominated by acclamation to be the Congressional candidate. This choice was soon ratified by a mass meeting of the Congressional District, which included both Adams and Franklin counties. McPherson was the son of John B. McPherson, an intimate of Thaddeus Stevens and the longtime cashier of the Gettysburg bank. The younger McPherson was a peripatetic journalist who had mastered the slash and burn style of the day. After an apprenticeship at the Adams Sentinel, McPherson had edited papers in Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, and in 1857 he wrote a series of respected papers.

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5 “Union of ‘Sam’ and ‘Sambo,’” Compiler, July 19, 1858, p. 1 c. 7; “The Mulatto State Convention,” Compiler, July 26, 1858, p. 2 c. 4. This was a reprint from the Pennsylvanian.

articles for the Philadelphia *Bulletin*, contending that the state should sell its Main Line of works.7

In the party’s brief history, a Republican had never been elected from the district which included Adams and Franklin counties, and the *Compiler* worked hard to ensure that McPherson would not be the first. The paper criticized his youth, his journalistic career and his associations with the failed gubernatorial candidate David Wilmot. It also insinuated that like Wilmot, McPherson supported free trade in an area which, because of the presence of several iron furnaces, largely favored protection.8

The *Compiler*’s efforts failed. McPherson triumphed in the Congressional district, a noticeable shift from its recent turn to the Democrats, but his margin was just three hundred votes. Franklin County, the home of the youthful Republican power broker A. K. McClure, was the key to the victory. While narrowly carrying Adams County, McPherson won Franklin by about five hundred votes, providing his victory margin. The district had given a nearly seventeen hundred vote margin to Democrat William F. Packer over David Wilmot for governor the previous fall, with Adams and Franklin counties accounting for nearly five hundred of the majority. So the shift to the local Republican was significant, although Adams County remained very competitive.9

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9 “The XVIIth Congressional District,” *Sentinel*, October 18, 1858, p. 2 c. 4. McClure had originally sought the Congressional nomination himself, but due to the convoluted system of alternating nominations by county, McClure, the better known rising Republican, had stood aside for McPherson in this election. Despite becoming Speaker of the State Senate, McClure would never win election to Congress.
In fact, the Republicans had made a rapid recovery in the state as a whole, as McPherson’s victory was matched by that of many other Pennsylvania Republican—Know Nothing fusion candidates. Across the North, the Republicans had done well also. In the aftermath of the 1858 elections, Kansas continued to be in the forefront and the fugitive slave issue remained largely eclipsed. The tumultuous events of late 1859 would change that.\textsuperscript{10}

To beat back the Republican advance, the Compiler kept up racial attacks on the “black Republicans” well into 1859. The paper highlighted events elsewhere, particularly in Massachusetts, as evidence of the Republicans’ agenda for the nation. The paper tried to pin the more overt antislavery proclamations and actions of their colleagues on Pennsylvania’s Republicans. For example, it publicized cases of African Americans in New England running for office as Republicans, and printed the abolitionist comments of radical Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson, who favored immediate emancipation. Recognizing the difference that proximity to the border and the defeat of Fremont and Wilmot made on the Republican message, the Compiler commented wryly, “In the latitude of Pennsylvania the Republican party has always sought to escape the odium of Abolitionism.”\textsuperscript{11}

The attempt to link Pennsylvania and Massachusetts Republicans extended to the fugitive slave issue. When a bill in the Massachusetts legislature proposed a two year residency requirement for immigrants to be eligible to vote, yet allowed African

\textsuperscript{10} Eric Foner identifies a radical Republican-led campaign to nullify the fugitive slave law in “almost every northern state.” He discusses well-known examples in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Ohio, but I have not found anything similar in Pennsylvania. Foner, \textit{Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men}, pp. 133-143.

\textsuperscript{11} By Their Fruits Shall Ye Judge Them,” \textit{Compiler}, January 3, 1859, p. 2 c. 4; “Blacks in Office,” January 3, 1859, p. 2 c. 2; “The Directors of the Republican Party and Their Object” \textit{Compiler}, January 31, 1859, p. 2 c. 3;
Americans moving into the state to vote after one year’s residence, the *Compiler* complained, “A *runaway slave* from a Southern State becomes a voter there after one year’s residence, immeasurably above white foreigners [emphasis added].”\(^{12}\) In short, the paper claimed that Republicanism was just abolitionism in a new guise. The abolitionists “could not prevail on the people to swallow their hash of white and black meat, in the style introduced by cooks Garrison and Giddings, and cookess Abby Kelley;” so “Republican negroism” had emerged as “a snake in the grass.”\(^{13}\)

The *Compiler* continued its strong support of the fugitive slave law. When the U. S. Supreme Court ruled against the state of Wisconsin’s actions in nullifying the fugitive slave law in the Booth case, the *Compiler* expressed the hope that the decision would put an “end… to all contests…as to the constitutionality of the fugitive slave law.”\(^{14}\) The *Compiler* also tried to exploit local fugitive slave cases where possible. Certainly, the paper was little inclined to restrain the invective when a fugitive slave case appeared in Harrisburg. The slave, ironically named Daniel Webster, was arrested by Marshal Jenkins and taken before the commissioner in Philadelphia. This change of venue would have been highly unusual several years before, but the Harrisburg commissioner’s job had not been filled after Richard McAllister had moved west. What had also changed was the degree of political attention this case received at the state legislature. One member even proposed moving the state capital from Harrisburg. He declared he did not want to remain in a town “where such outrages were permitted.”

\(^{12}\) “News, etc.” and “One of the Fruits of the People’s Party,” *Compiler*, May 23, 1859, p. 2 c. 1 and p. 2 c. 3. “What is Black Republicanism?” *Compiler*, June 20, 1859, p. 2 c. 2; Untitled, July 4, 1859, p. 2 c. 4; “The Two Year Amendment, August 15, 1859, p. 1 c. 7.

\(^{13}\) “Republicanism,” *Compiler*, April 4, 1859, p. 2 c. 2.

Some of the legislators made “the ‘Personal Liberty Bill’ the special order for some evening this week.” The paper was pleased that there was no rescue attempt made, but noted that “the circumstance aroused the ‘colored’ element [i.e. Republicans] in the House of Representatives.”

Even as the *Compiler* tried to agitate the fugitive slave issue, there were signs that tolerance for slave catching was diminishing in south central Pennsylvania, as evidenced by the Butler case in particular. “Considerable excitement” was caused by the seizure of John Butler and his family from Cumberland County; the Butlers had lived for years previously in Adams County. In this case, rather than aiding slave catchers, as many constables had previously, the local sheriff devised an ingenious strategem to catch one. He arrested an accomplice to the seizure who implicated Emmanuel Myers, a “noted negro catcher,” as the ringleader. Myers, though, lived literally just across the state line in Maryland, outside of Pennsylvania’s jurisdiction. With the poisoned relations between Pennsylvania and Maryland over fugitive slaves, it was unlikely that Maryland’s governor would extradite him on request. So the sheriff hitched a ride in the mail wagon, and directed it to drive past Myers’s house, seemingly by accident. Apparently reluctant to labor at turning the horses around, the driver held a package of letters out of the window of the carriage and waved it at Myers’s house. When Myers walked up to the wagon to claim his mail, he inadvertently crossed the Pennsylvania line. There the sheriff arrested him and took him back to Cumberland County. The efforts to which he was willing to go to get his man illustrates changing sentiment towards slave catching in south central Pennsylvania. For many years, constables and law officers had been one of

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15 “Fugitive Slave Arrested,” *Compiler*, April 11, 1859, p 3 c. 1. The evening gathering was probably an after-hours meeting with speeches and resolutions.
the primary agencies slave holders used to recover fugitive slaves; now some of them were arresting kidnappers instead.

This case caused controversy on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. Abolitionists seethed because the Butlers were believed to have been manumitted fifteen years earlier by a Maryland widow. Many Marylanders were outraged because they believed Myers had been duped. At his trial, the state’s prosecution was handled by A. Brady Sharpe and Frederick Watts, two leading members of the Carlisle bar, indicating the continued involvement of leading lawyers in fugitive slave and kidnapping cases. Myers was convicted, but in another border quid pro quo, he promised to return the Butlers if he were freed. The sentence was suspended and when the family reappeared in Cumberland County, the state essentially dropped the case against Myers.16

While the Republican party in Pennsylvania, in the aftermath of its 1857 defeats, downplayed controversial racial issues to maintain unity across their coalition, the Compiler sought to stir racial issues up. The Compiler insisted that the Republican goals was NEGRO EQUALITY (the phrase was almost always capitalized in the paper), or, as the paper put bluntly caricatured the Republican position, “Up with the black man and down with the white!” Pennsylvania was critical to the Democrats hopes in 1860. With the party nearly certain to carry every southern state, Pennsylvania’s electoral votes could give the Democrats the presidency. Consequently, the paper tried to appeal to traditional, law-and-order Whigs, as any attempt to reach out to former Know Nothings could alienate the Democrats immigrant constituency. Using rhetoric from an Ohio Republican convention superheated by the Oberlin rescue case, the paper claimed that the Republican

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party had “taken open ground against the fugitive slave law,” demanding its “repeal or modification.” Citing Whig pronouncements that the 1850 compromise was final, and making references to the pacific Daniel Webster, the paper urged former Whigs to abandon the Republican party, whose platform could be “summed up in a few words, ‘Negro, Kansas, Proscription and Popular Sovereignty.’”\(^{17}\)

The Oberlin case was a portent of what was to come; events of the fall of 1859 would force partisan political debates about Kansas, immigrants, and equality to take a back burner to the issue of fugitive slaves and insurrections. John Brown’s raid shook the nation, and particularly, south central Pennsylvania and the nation out of any complacency regarding the fugitive slave issue.

*The Harpers Ferry Raid*

John Brown was a volatile mix of the militancy of a Kansas free soiler and the willingness to disregard the law of a nonresistant Quaker. Fugitive slaves were close to Brown’s heart. His father had helped fugitives, and early in his career, Brown tried to start a school for the children of fugitive slaves and free blacks. He would also engineer several expeditions to free fugitives. It was this interest that led Brown to begin planning a way to enable large scale escapes from the Upper South. Brown wanted to exploit the Allegheny mountains as a pathway for fugitives heading north; later he decided to make it a redoubt.

\(^{17}\) A Hard Dose for Old Whigs,” *Compiler*, September 26, 1859, p. 1 c. 7. “The Republican Creed,” *Republican Compiler*, October, 1859, p. 1 c. 6-7; Don Fehrenbacher, The Slaveholding Republic (Oxford, 2001), pp. 238-239. “The [Opposition] Platform,” *Compiler*, July 4, 1859, p. 2 c. 4, p. 3 c. 1. In Oberlin and Wellington, Ohio, a large body of abolitionists managed to free a fugitive slave from rendition south. Afterwards, thirty-seven individuals were indicted by a federal grand jury with violating the Fugitive Slave Law, while a deputy marshal and three others were indicted by a county grand jury for kidnapping.
Making locations in the Alleghenies into mountain fortresses required arms, which directed Brown’s attention to Harpers Ferry. Once the decision to attack the armory there was made, geography ensured that south central Pennsylvania played an extensive role in Brown’s raid and its aftermath. South central Pennsylvania was the closest area to Brown’s target that was still in a Northern state. Brown based his operations for the project out of Chambersburg for several months before moving his headquarters to a Maryland farm. Even then, he or his men returned to Chambersburg multiple times to get supplies, pick up shipments, or meet recruits. Still, apparently no one recognized the old man, who claimed he was a prospector named Smith. Some area blacks knew of Brown’s identity, but whether they recognized him or he revealed himself is not clear. One such individual, local barber Henry Watson, helped arrange Frederick Douglass’s meeting with Brown at an abandoned quarry near town. Brown wanted Douglass to lend his considerable prestige to the effort. They spoke on and off over a day and a half; in the end, Douglass refused to join the undertaking, which he thought would end in disaster. Brown’s new project of armed insurrection substantially varied from his plans when Douglass had last heard them described. Then the plan had been to melt into the rugged mountains, and entice slaves in Virginia, Kentucky, and elsewhere to join them. A network of fortified safe houses would be created to form a sort of super Underground Railroad to rapidly move fugitives to Canada. Weapons would be used for self-defense only. Now, Brown’s plan emphasized an attack on a federal armory, and armed resistance and insurrection. Douglass doubted whether this could succeed and, as
a former slave himself, he was particularly dubious that Virginia slaves would spontaneously join an attack of which they had no prior knowledge.\(^{18}\)

Douglass stayed to give a speech at the Town Hall the evening of his meeting with Brown, essentially as a cover for why he was in Chambersburg. The unannounced appearance of the nation’s most famous former fugitive slave caught the town by surprise, although the local press attended. The Chambersburg Valley Spirit, a Democratic paper, admitted that Douglass was personally impressive, but said that he spurned the judgment of the Almighty Himself when he ignored the created difference between the races. The Republican paper, the Repository and Transcript, also said that Douglass went too far in advocating immediate emancipation – any efforts at abolition would have to be accompanied by colonization. According to the Baltimore American, many of the town’s residents believed “that he came solely for the purpose of delivering a lecture and pocketing the profits.”\(^{19}\)

Douglass’s mission had far more serious consequences, however. While he did not dissuade Brown from his plans, his companion, Shields Green, a fugitive slave from South Carolina, joined Brown. Brown’s body of about twenty volunteers also included Osborne Perry Anderson, a free African American from Chester County, Pennsylvania. Anderson’s involvement proves that the spirit of William Parker still remained after Parker’s flight to Canada; at least one of southern Pennsylvania’s African Americans had decided it was time to violently resist slavery and the fugitive slave law.\(^{20}\)


\(^{19}\) Ayers, In the Presence, pp. 7-9; Benjamin Quarles, Allies for Freedom: Blacks and John Brown (1972 & 1974; Da Capo Press edition, 2001), pp. 76-77; see also, McFeely, Frederick Douglass, pp. 95-97.

\(^{20}\) McFeely, Frederick Douglass, pp. 196-197. Ayers, In the Presence, p. 16.
The story of the raid is well known and will not be repeated here. Some of the dramatic aftermath played out in south central Pennsylvania. Only a few of the conspirators evaded immediate capture; those who did fled through southern Pennsylvania, at times aided by the Underground Railroad. Osborne Perry Anderson successfully fled through south-central Pennsylvania to Canada. Two others were seized in south central Pennsylvania. John Cook was taken near Mont Alto furnace by Dan Logan, one of Franklin County’s noted slave catchers. Logan turned Cook over to A. K. McClure, a lawyer and politician who occasionally helped Logan out of legal difficulties owing to his slave catching activities. The notorious slave catcher was even a Republican, having supported McClure’s state Senate campaign in 1858. Logan claimed to have regretted seizing Cook, and he, McClure, and other sympathetic townspeople hoped that Cook would escape from the Franklin County jail and avoid execution. A plan to free the prisoner was foiled when an officer from Virginia showed up early the next day with a warrant. The other conspirator, Albert Hazlett, nearly reached Carlisle before being captured and extradited to Virginia. Both would hang. Although few wanted Cook or Hazlett executed, many around Chambersburg were mortified that such a rebel as Brown had lived in their midst, and feared economic reprisal by the South.21

Although Brown’s ultimate goal was for an uprising, enticing slaves to flee from their masters had always been a critical part of his plan, and his raid pushed the issue of the fugitive slave and border slavery back to the forefront of national consciousness. The immediate Southern response was to organize militarily to oppose abolitionist invasion or insurrection. African Americans in northwestern Virginia suffered greatly during the

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winter, as numerous “plots” were ferreted out. With militias drilling regularly at Charlestown, Shepherdstown, and elsewhere, actual war was a possibility. Throughout the Union, and certainly in border Pennsylvania, anyone not dedicated to the cause of the fugitive reexamined the issue to see if the South could be mollified.\textsuperscript{22}

Republicans in particular engaged in this retrospective reexamination. They struggled to avoid endorsing Brown’s lawlessness while not alienating their key antislavery constituency. Despite the violence of John Brown’s raid, many south central Pennsylvanians continued to move toward the Republican party. With the decline of the Know Nothings and the failure of the Free Soil and Liberty parties, there was really no place else for people to go who opposed the Democratic party and its accommodations to its southern wing. Old line Whigs, who had been able to hold out for some time due to the persistence of that party in some pockets of Pennsylvania, now had to choose between their traditional hatred of the Democrats and their dislike for the Republicans. For many of them, the move to the Republicans was made more palatable by the presence within the new party of champions of business and industry, including Thaddeus Stevens, Andrew Curtin, and Simon Cameron.

Emblematic of this gradual swing of the Whigs into the Republican party was Adams County’s Robert G. Harper. Harper edited the \textit{Adams Sentinel} for decades, and was a committed Clay and Webster Whig.\textsuperscript{23} He never brooked any enthusiasm for “fanatical” abolitionists, but with the Whig party dead, his options for continued political leadership were limited. After thirty years of opposition to the Democrats, joining them

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\textsuperscript{22} See \textit{Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society by the Executive Committee for the Year Ending May 1, 1860} (New York, 1861; reprinted New York, 1969), pp. 138-139.

\textsuperscript{23} I have been unable to determine whether Adams County’s Robert Goodloe Harper was related to Robert Goodloe Harper, the procolonization Congressman from South Carolina and later Maryland.
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was inconceivable. The bigoted Know Nothings violated his sensibilities, and he had a running feud with the Know Nothing editors, C. H. and D. A. Buehler, who were trying to supplant his paper for opposition leadership in Adams County. During the 1850s, Harper strongly supported a free Kansas and wished for the colonization of the region’s African Americans. Eventually, he turned to the Republicans, sealing his commitment by attending the 1860 Republican convention in Chicago. When Lincoln was nominated, he was enthusiastic – probably because Lincoln was perceived as an antislavery moderate.24

If conservative Whigs like Harper were turning into Republicans, it was a warning for the Democrats. Adams County, which had been traditionally Whig until Scott’s defeat in 1852, had become quite competitive due to the strong Democratic base among the county’s Germans and within Gettysburg’s professionals and artisans. In 1858, Edward McPherson broke an eight-year Democratic hold on the Congressional seat from Adams and Franklin, but the county’s Democrats were still optimistic of recovering their position. Most of McPherson’s winning margin came from Franklin County, despite his descent from a prominent Adams County family. In 1860, though, the Democrats had to ensure their position did not erode further.

The 1860 Election and the Fugitive Slave Issue

In 1858, Republicans had done well across the North. Their strong showing had revived the hopes of 1856 – that by carrying all the Northern states, the Republican party would control the electoral college and elect the next President. In Pennsylvania, the possibilities for success had been improved by the Republican party’s decision to support

a strong tariff, winning vital support in manufacturing and coal mining districts. The party leadership also determined to maintain unity among the varied parts of the statewide fusion coalition. In particular, if former Know Nothings could be persuaded to vote Republican instead of Democratic, success would be almost assured. Here is where the difficult fusion politics of the 1850s paid off. By 1860, most Know Nothings were already in the Republican fold, having already voted for candidates supported by Republicans in “fusion” elections. The trick would be to keep them voting Republican, despite determined Democratic efforts to pry them away.25

Perceptive Democrats realized that defeat in 1860 was highly likely. The Democrats split early in the campaign, with Deep South delegates nominating John C. Breckenridge at Charleston, most Northern Democrats supporting Stephen Douglas at a second convention in Baltimore, and John Bell, a Constitutional Unionist and a former Democrat, appealing to the Upper South. Douglas traveled extensively, warning of the risks of war if the Republicans won. He appealed to many Pennsylvania Democrats, and his June 1859 speech at Philadelphia had been prominently published in the *Compiler.* Along the border, however, even John C. Breckenridge had support, particularly among Democrats who realized that he was the candidate most acceptable to the South and thus had the best chance to win. The split between the two Democrats was contentious, however, and a conciliatory letter writer to the *Compiler* warned that either one must be preferred over the Republican: “Douglas or Breckenridge before Lincoln.”26

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The Democratic platform adopted at Charleston had specifically endorsed the fugitive slave law, since it was “designed to carry out an express provision of the Constitution, [it] cannot with fidelity therefore be repealed.” Most of the platform, however, was concerned with slavery, the territories, and states’ rights. These were the critical issues of the 1860 campaign. The acceptance letters of both Douglas and Breckenridge emphasized the territorial issue, and neither mentioned fugitive slaves.27

Regardless of which Democratic candidate was preferred, the Republican party was attacked with the now common tactic of racist smears. In that year’s Pennsylvania governor’s race, the Compiler summed up the difference: “[Democrat] Gen. Foster is advocating the passage of the tariff bill and the interests of the white people of Pennsylvania; [Republican] Col. Curtin is stumping it in Pennsylvania in behalf of niggerism and the ‘Nigger.’”28

Enthusiasm for Lincoln and the Republicans, however, was palpable in some parts of Adams County. In York Springs, a traditional area of strength for opposition politics and antislavery sentiment, volunteers raised an 11-foot flagpole topped by a Republican campaign flag. The “Wide Awakes” demonstrated frequently. These groups of young Republican men who paraded in oilskin cloaks and carried lighted torches were mocked by the Compiler, which reported, ironically, that their favorite marching song was a ditty suited to Gettysburg’s location near the border — “Dixey’s Land.”29

29 (Wide Awakes) Singmaster, A Boy at Gettysburg, pp. 43-44; “‘Wide Awakes,’” Compiler, June 20, 1860, p. 3 c. 1; “Flag Raising,” Compiler, June 10, 1861, p. 1 c. 6; “History of a Wide Awake,” Compiler, February 25, 1861, p. 1 c. 7. If this peppy tune was widely used as a campaign song for Lincoln (he was born in Kentucky), then it could explain why he told a band at the end of the Civil War it had always been one of his favorite tunes.
As it became clearer that Lincoln could win, the Democrats developed a “Plan of Union” so that Pennsylvanians could vote for electors who would support either Douglas or Breckenridge if either could win the Presidency with the support of Pennsylvania’s Democratic vote. After the defeat of the Democrats in the October statewide elections, this plan was largely moot. Andrew Curtin routed Henry Foster by 32,000 votes, and in south central Pennsylvania, Edward McPherson won reelection to Congress, although Foster outpolled Curtin in both Adams and Cumberland counties. Since Pennsylvania’s October elections were frequently watched as a harbinger of the November results, the Democrats grew desperate, and the fugitive slave issue reappeared, this time raised not by abolitionists, Free Soilers or Republicans, but by the Democrats. In a prominent, front page article reprinted from the Cincinnati Enquirer, the Compiler warned that Republican defiance of the fugitive slave law meant that they had little regard for the U.S. Constitution. According to the Cincinnati paper’s accounting, ten Northern states prohibited their officers from assisting in the arrest of fugitive slaves; five forbade the use of jails and public space in the rendition process; seven, including Pennsylvania, provided legal defense for the fugitive; and three declared slaves free if their master brought them into the state. New Hampshire even recognized a slave as free if he escaped to the state on his own. Pennsylvania and eight other states imposed sizable fines or prison terms if the master violated these personal liberty laws.30

Despite these desperation tactics, Lincoln won in Pennsylvania, and across the North. In Adams County, Lincoln also won, although all of the Democratic votes,

including “straight out” votes as well as votes for the “Union ticket” of Breckenridge and Douglas voters, amounted to three more than Lincoln’s total. Across the state, although sixteen thousand fewer voters participated in the November elections than in October, Lincoln won 5,640 more votes than Curtin – a sure sign the Democrats had become demoralized after the October defeat. The Compiler speculated that without this effect, two hundred more Democratic voters would have turned out in Adams County. If the Democrats could have united on one candidate, the paper believed they would have had at least a three hundred vote majority.  

While the Compiler was trying to put a positive spin on a significant political reverse, there was a kernel of truth in its suggestions, and Lincoln’s plurality should not be interpreted as a strong turn to the Republican party.

The Fugitive Slave Issue, the Secession Crisis, and Pennsylvania’s Petition Campaign

Statewide, the Democratic reaction to Lincoln’s election was immediate, indicating that it was probably pre-planned and orchestrated. In their moment of crisis, Pennsylvania’s Democrats seized on the fugitive slave issue. Repealing personal liberty laws would harm no whites, and could be portrayed as respect for the Constitution, law and order, and sectional comity. Almost immediately, the Compiler highlighted a fugitive slave case and rescue in Chicago. The paper warned that the rescue, occurring at a time when South Carolina was sliding towards secession, marked “the beginning of the end.” A week later, it printed remarks from the Journal of Commerce, which, like the Cincinnati Enquirer, had published a summary of how the North had “broken faith” through its personal liberty laws. The national journal opined that “Northern thieves steal

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31 “The Result in the County,” Compiler, November 12, 1860, p. 2 c. 1; Coleman, Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy, p. 141.
great numbers of slaves in the border slave States, and ... harbor them at the North, or send them off to Canada.” The solution to the disruption of relations was for the North to “fulfil the stipulations of the Constitution.”

Recognizing the risk to national unity posed by Lincoln’s triumph, Pennsylvania’s Democratic leaders and newspapers began calling for a petition campaign urging the repeal of Pennsylvania’s fugitive slave laws to preserve sectional peace. The Harrisburg Patriot and Union, a statewide Democratic journal, called for the Republicans to “at once repeal their Personal Liberty bills.”

This movement to repeal the personal liberty laws was very shrewd: regardless of whether it held promise to avert war, as many believed it did, if war came, it created a way to blame Republicans for it. This could generate a groundswell to blunt Republican gains in Pennsylvania and elsewhere. It angered a constituency the race baiting Democrats cared little about, Pennsylvania’s disfranchised African Americans and their committed abolitionist allies, who were not likely to vote Democratic anyway.

By December, accounts were pouring in to Democratic newspapers from Southern mass meetings. One in South Carolina denounced the “unfriendly legislation” of many of the free states as an “outrage” which was “demanding resistance.” The Compiler weighed in with an editorial, remarking that the Democratic press was unanimous in demanding “speedy repeal of the nullifying acts” of Northern state legislatures. As soon as the new Congress opened, Stephen A. Douglas was expected to

32 “The Fugitive Slave Case in Chicago,” Compiler, November 19, 1861, p. 2 c. 7 – p. 3 c. 1; “The Nail Hit on the Head,” Compiler, November 26, 1860, p. 2 c. 2;
33 “Political Meanness, Compiler, November 26, 1860, p. 2 c. 2.
introduce a bill to make it a penal offense to obstruct U. S. officers from carrying out the fugitive slave law.\(^{34}\)

In Pennsylvania, the campaign to repeal the personal liberty law emanated from Philadelphia, the state’s traditional Democratic stronghold. The city’s mercantile community was strongly tied to Southern commerce. In 1859, some Philadelphia merchants even proposed resuming the slave trade, as a way of meeting — and profiting from — the rising demand for slaves in the cotton South. Philadelphia’s Democratic party was led by Robert Tyler, a former chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee, and the brother of John Tyler, the Virginia planter and former Democrat chosen to be the Whig Vice Presidential Candidate in 1840. When William Henry Harrison had suddenly died, and Tyler became president, he had supported Southern positions. Robert Tyler too had pro-Southern leanings and was accused of urging Pennsylvania to join the Confederacy. His views were sufficiently extreme that he was forced to leave Philadelphia for the South once the Civil War began.\(^{35}\)

The city’s Democrats turned out in early December for a massive Union meeting in Philadelphia’s Independence Square, presided over by the mayor. It urged repeal of the personal liberty laws, and compensation for slave owners in the case of rescue. Judge George Woodward, a leading Democrat who would run for governor in 1863, addressed the gathering. Woodward decried the “false name of [the] Liberty bills,” and asked, “What part of the purposes of the founders are the underground railroads intended to

\(^{34}\) “The Secession Movement in the South,” Compiler, November 26, 1860, p. 2 c. 4; untitled, Compiler, December 3, 1860, p. 2 c. 1; “Rumors from Washington,” Compiler, December 10, 1861. p. 1 c. 7.

The repeal movement was also helped by the Pennsylvanian in the White House. In his December 3 message on the post-electoral crisis, Buchanan urged repeal of Northern personal liberty laws, and suggested Congress frame a Constitutional amendment to nullify them.  

The petition campaign and the Union meetings were two parts of a concerted effort to mollify Southern anger over the election of Lincoln. Printed literature was a third ingredient. The author of “Concession and Compromise,” a pamphlet published in Philadelphia and intended for wide circulation, proposed a number of ingenious constitutional modifications to preserve national unity. He urged that all state laws obstructing the return of fugitive slaves be immediately repealed. Instead, “suitable penalties” should be applied to those who interfere with the fugitive slave law. The author also argued that in case of a slave rescue, the county where the rescue occurred should be liable for the slave owner’s loss. He maintained that this was an ancient Anglo-Saxon principle concerning liability for loss by riot. In return, the author proposed that the fugitive slave law should be modified to have a five-year statute of limitations, and to guarantee a jury trial, albeit in the Southern county from which the slave was alleged to have escaped. He also argued for a right of transit for slave owners visiting free states.  

38 [Joshua Francis Fisher], “Concession and Compromise,” [Philadelphia? 1860?], Microprint edition. Louisville, KY, 1962. Authorship of this pamphlet is attributed to Fisher; for stylistic reasons, I assume that the author is male. A bill to hold counties liable for slave rescues was introduced into the Pennsylvania legislature, and Henry Clay had tried to add to the 1850 fugitive slave law a provision for a jury trial in the Southern county from which the slave had fled.
The pamphlet proposed other constitutional changes to pacify Southern concerns. The appointment of postmasters should be taken from the Postmaster General and given to cities and towns. (Southerners feared that the Republican Party might try to build an organization through federal patronage in the South, and postmasters were a particular concern because they might allow “incendiary” antislavery publications to travel through the mails). The author also argued that African Americans were incapable of citizenship, and should not be given the vote. He reminded his readers “we are here with an inferior race.” According to the writer, Pennsylvania was the key locale in this national crisis: If the Northern border states could arrive at a solution with the Southern states, “the crusade against slavery will end” and “the political philanthropists of New England must seek some new field for their labors.”

This pamphlet explicitly supported the ongoing petition drive on these topics. This petition campaign was more than just a reprise of the 1851-53 statewide contention over Pennsylvania’s personal liberty laws, now similar concerns were taking root across the nation. Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden made the fugitive slave issue an integral part of his proposals to end the sectional crisis in Congress. After resolutions concerning extending the Missouri Compromise line, forbidding Congress from abolishing slavery (including in the District of Columbia), and guaranteeing the right of transit, Crittenden’s fifth resolution called for Congress to compensate the owners of fugitive slaves who were rescued. The United States also would gain the right to sue the county where the rescue took place. Crittenden’s bill was accompanied by resolutions calling for the repeal of personal liberty laws. Even William H. Seward, the militant Republican governor of

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39 [Fisher], “Concession and Compromise.”
New York, experienced an eleventh-hour conversion on the fugitive slave issue that made the friends of noted underground railroad conductor Harriet Tubman fear for her personal safety (Tubman lived in a house she was buying from Seward). In 1850, Seward had electrified the country by advocating a “higher law” than the U.S. Constitution and the Fugitive Slave Law, and the American Anti-Slavery Society had printed 10,000 copies of his speech. In 1857 he had proclaimed an “irreconcilable conflict” between free and slave labor societies. Now, Seward too began to advocate enforcement of the fugitive slave law as a way to preserve the Union.40

In the last thirty years, the writings of Eric Foner and many others have renewed historiographic interest in the issue of slavery extension to the territories, and highlighted its pivotal role in the 1860 presidential campaign. If this issue was so important, why, on the eve of the Civil War, was there a massive petition campaign focused on the fugitive slave issue, not slavery extension? One reason was political: Antislavery Republicans could be placed in an awkward position through attacks on the fugitive slave issue. Aside from that, the petition campaign appears to have been rooted in a genuine perception that Southern states were angry, fearful of the safety of their slave property, and likely to secede. One of the issues Southern statesmen fulminated over in their public statements was the fugitive slave question. Finally, and this should not be discounted, the fugitive slave issue, through the repeal of the personal liberty laws, was one of the few issues that could be effectively addressed at the state level in the North.41

Undoubtedly, many Southerners were angry that Northerners failed to return fugitives. Pennsylvania’s reluctance to remand fugitives had caused disputes between the Pennsylvania legislature and those of Maryland and Virginia in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s. Complaints about Northern failures – particularly Pennsylvania’s – to enforce the fugitive slave laws had also marked the Nashville Convention in 1850, the Georgia resolutions in 1850 and 1851, and Thomas Hart Benton’s published comments in 1856. In 1856, a fugitive slave case in Pittsburgh caused an eruption of anger in the Virginia. After a mob prevented the owner, James Parsons, from capturing his slave, and he was indicted on kidnapping charges, some Virginia legislators called for retaliation on Pennsylvanians and their property in Virginia. Others warned that if abolitionists were not stopped, they would actually invade Virginia to free fugitive slaves. In the late 1850s, Southern anger was compounded by a Republican campaign to repeal the fugitive slave law in Ohio, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and other Northern states. When the South Carolina seceded in November 1860, its “Declaration of the Immediate Causes” complained prominently about Northern states’ failure to meet their obligations under the fugitive slave law. Pennsylvania was mentioned specifically.

While the anger was genuine, by 1860 the focus had changed. Many Southern leaders were not as vexed about the fugitive slave issue as they were about the restrictions on extending slavery to the territories. This was where the Republican party and the new president represented a fundamental threat to the South. It was Lincoln’s

refusal to concede this point which defeated efforts like the Crittenden Compromise, not the fugitive slave issue.44

Still, in Pennsylvania, short of instructing representatives in Congress how to vote - and that was difficult, because outside of the compromise proposals, there was no pending legislation before Congress on the territories - the only accessible mechanism to ease the crisis seemed to be repealing the restrictive 1847 law, now codified into the new state penal code in 1860. The pro-compromise petitioners also sought to drop the ban prohibiting slaves from being brought into the state by Southern visitors. In addition, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society took advantage of the political situation to start its own campaign, urging state funding of the society as a solution to the state and national unrest regarding African Americans.

The 1860-1861 Petition Campaign against the Personal Liberty Law

The petition campaign to repeal Pennsylvania’s personal liberty laws, and a counter-campaign by abolitionists to maintain them, was truly extraordinary. Petitioning was a sacred right to antebellum Americans, and petitions concerning slavery, fugitive slaves, African American immigration, and colonization had been received by the Pennsylvania legislature since the 1820s. Generally, however, there were only a few such petitions a year. Carl Oblinger claims that numerous petitions urging financial support for colonization were sent to the legislature in the late 1820s, but after that, their

44 Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men, pp. 133-140. Both privately before his inauguration and in his address itself, Lincoln indicated a willingness to enforce the fugitive slave law; it was the territorial issue that was the sticking point. Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, pp. 447, 459.
number drops off considerably.\textsuperscript{45} There was a brief flurry of petitions to the 1837-1838 state constitutional convention over issues of African American suffrage and immigration. During most of the later antebellum period and the war, the Pennsylvania Senate annually received six or fewer petitions or memorials relating to slavery or colonization, out of a total number of petitions typically ranging between three and six hundred. The exception was 1847, when an orchestrated campaign of over fifty petitions pressured the state legislature to pass the personal liberty law. In 1861, a record year for petitions in general, nearly one hundred were received relating to Pennsylvania’s personal liberty laws, the right of transit, African American immigration, colonization, and equal rights for African Americans. After 1861, the number of petitions on topics relating to African Americans declines to an average of two a year, even during the post-war campaigns to win equal treatment for African Americans on public transportation in Philadelphia.

There was another reason 1861 was unique. The previous peak year for petitions relating to slavery, fugitive slaves and African Americans, 1847, had been a coup by antislavery forces to put pressure on the legislature to pass a new personal liberty law. The eve of the Civil War represented the only time when both abolitionists and colonizationists, Democrats and Republicans, militants and pacifists had flooded the legislature with petitions, making the contest truly a “war of words.” The political crisis had briefly made the fugitive slave issue of burning importance again.

Many of the petitions urging repeal of the state’s personal liberty law or concessions to Southern slave owners came from Democratic-led “Union Meetings”

\textsuperscript{45} Oblinger, “New freedoms, old miseries,” pp. 121-122. I have not been able to locate these petitions in the Pennsylvania Archives. See also Turner, \textit{Negro in Pennsylvania History}, pp. 150-154.
being conducted around the state. These meetings typically passed resolutions urging restoring normal relations with the South and removing of all barriers to the rendition of fugitive slaves. At a Union meeting in Carlisle in December, many of the county’s leading luminaries, including much of the local bar, had signed a petition to repeal the personal liberty law. The meeting had been chaired by Frederick Watts, a leading lawyer who had prosecuted Emmanuel Myers; as a judge, he had sent kidnapper Martin Auld to jail. He was also a former president of the state’s Agricultural Society.

The Union meetings and the petition campaigns revealed the importance of the border in the sectional crisis. Pennsylvanians believed that their state could and should play a key role. Most fugitive slaves on the Eastern Seaboard had to pass through Pennsylvania on their way to freedom, and Pennsylvania had passed some of the first effective Personal Liberty Laws interfering with the recovery of fugitive slaves. Consequently, some Pennsylvanians believed that the key to sectional reconciliation lay in their hands, and if issues regarding fugitive slaves could be resolved, war could be averted.

For the historian, this explosion of petitions offers a rare glimpse of antislavery and procolonization support at something approximating the grassroots. While some petitions were signed by influential, socially prominent individuals, or, more rarely, low status individuals (like the 1847 Gettysburg petition of African Americans), in most cases, petitioners represented the middling ranks of the “antislavery rank and file,” to use Edward Magdol’s expression, or in this example, also the “pro-colonization or pro-Southern rank and file.” Examining the petitions and their signers give us insight into the
political and social divisions over fugitive slaves, African Americans, and slavery in Pennsylvania on the eve of the Civil War.\textsuperscript{46}

In the 1860-1861 Pennsylvania campaign, petitions supporting the personal liberty law and African American rights were outnumbered nearly four to one by petitions supporting colonization, repeal of the personal liberty law, and restrictions on African Americans. Several of these came from south central Pennsylvania. One late-arriving pro-colonization petition was sent from Chambersburg, the county seat of Franklin County, in south-central Pennsylvania (Appendix E). It was submitted with a similar petition from adjacent Adams County.

The Chambersburg petition, which urged that the legislature appropriate money to the Pennsylvania Colonization Society (PCS), was signed by 29 individuals; of these, 16 could be clearly identified in the 1860 census records. Most of these were part of the rising urban middle class or elite. All 16 were from Chambersburg or southwest Chambersburg; three were wealthy “gentlemen,” five were urban professionals (two were attorneys, one was a physician, one a clergyman, and one a school teacher), and two were associated with Chambersburg mercantile community (one was a merchant, one was a clerk). The rest were various artisans: a printer, a machinist, a tanner, a bookbinder, a stone cutter, and a silver plater. All owned real property as well as personal property, except for the clerk, the physician, and the school teacher. Professionally, all of them could benefit from not offending southern clients in a border area. The signatories included B. S. Schneck, a theological professor at the Mercersburg Seminary, and William Heyser, a Chambersburg businessman and champion of the Cumberland Valley.

\textsuperscript{46} Edward Magdol, \textit{The Antislavery Rank and File} (New York, 1986).
Railroad. Heyser’s diary of the Civil War period has been preserved, and from it, we know that he had several African American servants. All of the signers who could be located in the census were born in Pennsylvania except for a German school teacher, a stone cutter from Scotland (James King), and the printer, who was born in Maryland. Only three signers of this petition (Thomas J. Wright, William Heyser, and Samuel R. Fisher) were 50 or above, with only Heyser above 60 (he was 64). Three signers were in their twenties, three in their thirties, and six in their forties.47

Similar demographics can be observed in the Adams County colonization petition sent in with the Franklin County one (Appendix F).48 This petition had 37 signers, 32 of which could be identified in the 1860 census. In addition, a third petition of twelve names arrived later from Adams, with identical language, requesting support for the PCS (Appendix G). Combining these petitions – seven individuals signed both – offers a slightly larger sample set to apprise Adams County’s pro-colonization population. The signers were largely professionals and merchants in Gettysburg: seven merchants, seven attorneys, two, possibly three coachmakers, two college professors, two physicians, a bank clerk, clergyman, clerk, clothier, confectioner, druggist, furniture dealer, hatter, printer, salesman, and saddle maker. (Two individuals of means had no listed occupation and nine others could not be found in the census). Gettysburg’s coach making industry in

48 “To the Honorable Senate and House…”, Pennsylvania State Archives, RG-7, Senate File, Folder 85, Petition 486
particular was dependent on wealthy Southern customers from Virginia and Maryland.\textsuperscript{49} Most of these signers were between 20 and 39, with significant numbers in their forties and fifties.\textsuperscript{50} The approximate average age in 1861 was 40.5.

This pattern of town professionals and artisans expressing their support of the colonization society at this moment of crisis was not limited to south-central Pennsylvania. A petition from Bucks County, in the southeastern corner of the state, also supports this trend. In Bucks County, one petition supporting the PCS came in from Doylestown, the county seat (Appendix H). Of the 31 signers, 24 could be confidently identified in the 1860 census. While some had traditional rural occupations – three were farmers, one a drover, and one a laborer – most fit into the town professions. Five of the signers were lawyers, and one a law student. One was an Episcopal clergyman, one was a merchant, one a bank clerk, one a store clerk, one was a gentleman, and another had no occupation listed. Town artisans and craft professionals were represented as well: one signer was a butcher, one was a machinist, one made furniture for cars, and another made or operated “conveyances” [carriages]. Only six of the signers were over forty, and the two oldest were 60. The average age in 1861 was 39.\textsuperscript{51}

While petitions supporting colonization or compromise on the fugitive slave issue greatly outnumbered petitions supporting African American rights or a stand fast approach, still, twenty one of those type of petitions were sent in to the legislature, the largest number since the 1847 campaign for a strengthened personal liberty law. Not one


\textsuperscript{50} RG-7, SENATE FILE, Folder 85, Petition 486, Pennsylvania State Archives.

\textsuperscript{51} Doylestown, Bucks County 1861 Pro-colonization petition, March 1, 1861, Pennsylvania State Archives, RG-7, Senate File, Petition 358.
of these petitions came from south-central Pennsylvania – Adams, Cumberland, or Franklin counties. There are several reasons for which this might have been the case. According to Ed Ayers, Franklin County had no organized antislavery society, although there was a strong Underground Railroad in the county. The antislavery society in Carlisle was reportedly dominated by African Americans; African Americans in the county seats of rural counties generally did not petition the state legislature, Gettysburg’s black population in 1847 being a notable exception. Adams County, however, had both a functioning Underground Railroad, with both white and black participants, and an antislavery society, although it is not clear how active it was in the 1850s and 60s. In addition, Adams County’s abolitionists had petitioned the state legislature before: both white and black abolitionists had campaigned for a stronger personal liberty law in the 1846-1847 time period. Why, at this moment of supreme crisis and risk for fugitive slaves, did they not send a memorial to Harrisburg? We can only speculate, but at least three possibilities suggest themselves. First, the core abolitionists involved in petitioning the legislature in 1846 had aged significantly. The average age of white Adams County petitioners urging a personal liberty law had been about 42 in 1846. If new blood had not entered their ranks, the average age of these same individuals would have been about 57 in 1861 – and some probably would have died. Those remaining may not have had the drive and determination to mount a petition campaign. Westward migration had also taken a toll on Adams County’s abolitionist community; even stalwarts like Joel and Lydia Wierman had left. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Adams County and

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52 No published account of the society exists after its 1847 celebration of the passage of the personal liberty law; in 1884, Charles W. Gries wrote to an inquirer that the Anti-Slavery society had met in a school house for nine years and describing its last meeting, indicating it had probably ceased meetings around 1847. Charles W. Gries to Friend David, February, 1884. Copy provided by Deb McCauslin.
Franklin County were on the southern border of Pennsylvania. If war came, they would be on a prime invasion route. This might diminish the enthusiasm of both petition circulators and signers for a campaign that could risk rupture with Southern neighbors.

To get a sense of the demographic makeup of antislavery supporters in Adams County, then, requires examining the 1846 petition discussed in Chapter 4. That petition showed strong support for protecting fugitives in the eastern part of the county, closer to Carlisle and York than Gettysburg. Almost all of the signers were farmers, although there were a few in rural artisanal occupations. A sarcastic petition sent in 1845 to Congress from Gettysburg suggests that there was some antislavery support there as well, but in general the picture that emerges is a concentration of antislavery support among the rural populace. Much of the elites in the county seats supported colonization, and while opposition to slavery and support for colonization were not always in diametrically opposed, by 1861 most committed abolitionists and many antislavery supporters no longer supported colonization.

The picture emerging from Adams County, of antislavery support in southern Pennsylvania centered in rural areas and market towns not including the county seat, is supported by another 1861 petition from Bucks County. This Bucks County petition (see Appendix I) asked that no change be made to the state’s personal liberty laws and that an old law not be reinstated permitting Southerners to travel through the state or live there for up to six months without losing their slaves. Repeal of the personal liberty law and restoration of this “Comity Law” were goals of many others who were petitioning the
legislature in a bid to reconcile the seceding South.\textsuperscript{53} This Bucks County petition was signed by 38 individuals, 31 of whom could be identified in the 1860 census; two others were identified by genealogical research. These petitioners generally lived near the village of Newtown and almost all worked in rural or non-professional occupations. At least fifteen of signers were women; eastern Pennsylvania abolitionists and the Pennsylvania Female Anti-Slavery Society eagerly recruited female signers in many petition campaigns.\textsuperscript{54} Only four woman had a listed occupation, working as domestics, but eight others were married to farmers or lived with them and would be considered farmers in today’s nomenclature. Among the men, twenty-one of the signers were farmers, one an “assistant farmer,” one was a farmhand, one with no listed occupation lived with a farmer, and one was a prosperous landlord. Another petitioner was listed as a gentleman in the census. The only artisan identified was a “master wheelwright.” Despite the presence of ten signers over the age of 50, the average age of the signers in 1861 was about 41 years old. As a number of the women signers were under 25, the average age of the male signers was 47 years old. These names were not compared with Bucks County meeting records, but the Quakers had a strong presence in rural Bucks County. Many of these signers were probably Quakers, as many of the names were common Quaker names.

At a time when the Keystone state was industrializing, then, committed antislavery support for Africans Americans in southern Pennsylvania appears to have been concentrated in rural enclaves, often around Quaker meetings. This demographic

\textsuperscript{53} “To the Senate & House…” Pennsylvania State Archives RG-7, Senate File, Petition 375. To Thomas Hart Benton, restoring such comity laws was critical to rekindling kind feelings between the North and South. \textit{Thirty Years’ View}, v. 2, p. 778, 780.

profile would seem to support David Donald’s contention that many abolitionists were from the agricultural classes, and felt displaced by the changes being brought by rapid industrialization. Donald has been criticized for the representativeness of his sample, but his model appears to hold true in at least the eastern part of Adams County. This constituency was aging or migrating westward in the last decades before the Civil War. At the same time, many of the professionals and artisans in larger towns, particularly county seats, supported colonization or the repeal of Personal Liberty laws. This long term trend of an aging rural antislavery constituency and a rising class in towns and cities who wanted to be rid of African Americans did not bode well for any significant postwar advances in African American rights in rural Pennsylvania.55

1861: Denouement

As the new year opened with the petition campaigns under way, William F. Packer, the outgoing Democratic governor, discussed the fugitive slave issue extensively in his annual address to the legislature. In the previous legislative session, the 1847 law had been codified as part of Pennsylvania’s penal code, but Packer considered it to be a dead letter and urged return, if possible, to the 1826 anti-kidnapping act. Packer also favored a right of transit for Southerners to bring their slaves through the state.56

Virginia’s governor expressed similar sentiments. In January, Governor Letcher had called, as his primary demand, for “unconditional repeal” of the North’s personal liberty laws. That demand was followed by insistence on guarantees of the right to hold

56 “Message of Wm. F. Packer, Governor of Penn.,” Compiler, January 3, 1861, p. 2 c. 1. As the 1826 act had been declared unconstitutional, there were significant questions as to whether it could be reapplied.
slaves in the District of Columbia; equality for Southerners in the territories; the right of transit through Northern states, with compensation if slaves were lost; the maintenance of the internal slave trade; and the stipulation that “Government cannot appoint office holders hostile” to Southern rights. Letcher urged that commissioners visit the legislatures of each state with a personal liberty law to urge its repeal. He excepted, however, the New England states, showing that he believed that New England was too far down the path of resistance to the fugitive slave law and the extension of slavery to be worthwhile visiting. It also reflects the reality that states like Pennsylvania and Ohio were much more significant when it came to the fugitive slave issue. The Virginia governor felt that the crisis could be resolved if moderate men of the border could be allowed to reach an understanding. It would help, he stated, if New England and western New York seceded to join Canada.57

These proposals swirled around Congress while a committee of fourteen “border states” met and recommended a repeal of all personal liberty laws. The committee members tried to address Northern concerns by recommending amending the fugitive slave law to protect against kidnapping, and eliminating financial incentive by equalizing the fugitive slave commissioner’s fees. The committee also recommended extending the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific, which doomed their proposals.58

To place pressure on Congressional Republicans in Congress, throughout Pennsylvania people met to support the Crittenden Compromise. There were large

57 “Very Important Intelligence! Message of Gov. Letcher, of Va.”, Compiler, January 14, 1861, p. 2 c. 1. In late 1860, Letcher had been in correspondence with Philadelphia conservative Lewis D. Vail over Pennsylvania’s personal liberty law. Morris, Free Men All, p. 216.
58 “The Difference,” Compiler, January 14, 1861, p. 2 c. 5. The states in the border state committee were Maryland, Virginia, Missouri, North Carolina, Kentucky, Delaware, Arkansas, and Texas as well as Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and New Jersey.
meetings in York and Carlisle – the Carlisle meeting being at least the second Union Meeting of the crisis in that town. The renowned jurist Frederick Watts, who the Compiler said was a Republican, chaired the meeting, and “nobly” supported compromise over his party’s divisive positions. “It was a complete triumph of the friends of our country – a triumph of patriotism over Abolitionism – a triumph of reason over fanaticism and hatred.”

In Congress, Pennsylvanians continued to be at the heart of the fray. Former governor William F. Bigler, who was now a U. S. Senator, introduced into the Senate a measure to create a national referendum on the Crittenden Compromise. This would be an end run around Republican obstructionists in Congress, and the Democrats were confident – perhaps rightly so – that many people had voted Republican in the fall thinking that Southern threats of disunion were a bluff. In Bigler’s proposition, the U.S. government would pay slave owners full value for their slaves if intimidation or force prevented the U.S. Marshal from successfully returning them. Then the U.S. government would sue to the county where the rescue or intimidation had taken place for the value of the slave. The county could then sue the individuals involved.

Petitions supporting the Crittenden Compromise continued to flow into Congress. One Pennsylvania petition was supposedly five hundred feet long. A petition from Maryland reportedly contained 17,000 signatures favoring the compromise; a petition from New York claimed 63,000 signatures; one from Lancaster a thousand; one from

59 Untitled, Compiler, January 21, 1861, p. 2 c. 2; “The People Speaking,” Compiler, January 21, 1861, p. 2 c. 3.
60 “Highly Important Proposition by Gov. Bigler,” Compiler, January 21, 1861, p. 1 c. 3-4; untitled, Compiler, January 21, 1861, p. 2 c. 2. This concept was similar to the one advocated in “Concession and Compromise,” and which became Article 4, Section 3 of the new Confederate Constitution, one of the few changes in that document from its U.S. predecessor.
rural Massachusetts contained nearly 27,000. Fourteen thousand women, from various
states, signed another. The Democratic press highlighted the pro-compromise movement,
and the Compiler did its part. At no time in the previous forty years had an Adams
County newspaper so directly supported a petition campaign, with the Compiler urging
“Let the good work go on.” It even printed a sample form of the petition in the paper,
urging them to be circulated and sent to McPherson, Bigler and Cameron. In Littlestown,
the paper reported that a large number of people had signed such petitions, and from
Hanover, four similar petitions had been sent to Congress. The Compiler argued that the
Crittenden Compromise was eminently fair – by extending the Missouri compromise line
to the Pacific, the North would be receiving three times more territory than the South. It
urged people to agitate for compromise until there is no hope left.⁶¹

The people tried, but the partisan battle lines were being drawn, as illustrated by
another massive pro-compromise meeting in Philadelphia on January 16. Early in the
repeal movement, published calls had gone out to “all men irrespective of party,” even
though most state Union meetings had been controlled by Democrats. Now that fiction
was ended. This invitation went to “all men of all parties in opposition to the
Republicans.” The meeting proclaimed that the “Democrats are the true friends of the
Union,” and called for repeal of all legislation “unfriendly” to Southern “brethren.” In
particular, it urged the legislature to secure Southerners’ property while they traveled into

⁶¹ Untitled, January 21, 1861, p. 2 c. 2; Untitled, Compiler, January 28, 1861, p. 2 c. 2. “PETITIONS TO
CONGRESS,” Compiler, January 28, 1861, p. 2 c. 6; Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, p. 393. “Let the
People Speak,” Compiler, February 4, 1861, p. 2 c. 2; “Thaddeus Stevens” [Lancaster], February 11, 1861,
p. 2 c. 2; 2/18/61 2/2 “What the People Say [Massachusetts],” Compiler, February 18, 1861, p. 2 c. 2.
or through Pennsylvania. The meeting hinted that if war could not be prevented, Pennsylvania should secede and declare neutrality.

Pennsylvania’s Democratic press warned that even a successful civil war would destroy Southern markets and ruin Northern manufacturers. In the Senate, Bigler stated that while zealots in Maine, Vermont and Florida might be anxious to fight, this was not the case along the border, where there were no geographical barriers between North and South. Instead, there were abundant social, economic, and kinship ties. “All along this line there has been marrying and giving in marriage,” Bigler intoned, and so he declared, “Pennsylvania will never become the enemy of Virginia.”

In February, the Union meeting movement finally reached Adams County. One in Mountpleasant passed resolutions to “take prompts and decided steps ‘clearing our skirts’… by repealing all laws that… may tend to impede the recovery of fugitives from service on the part of our brethren of the South.” This meeting opposed all coercion of the South and endorsed the Crittenden Compromise. It applauded Bigler and Cameron for pro-compromise efforts in the Senate. One speaker introduced an additional resolution criticizing the local Underground Railroad. It stated that the meeting was “not insensible of the many great wrongs perpetrated against [Southern] local institutions by the people of our section of the Union,” and pledging to restore Southern rights by removing from the state statutes all laws that interfered with the Constitution.

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62 “Union Meeting at Philadelphia,” Compiler, January 21, 1861, p. 3 c. 2. Even for those Southerners who did not wish to visit to Pennsylvania, Philadelphia was a frequent steamboat stop on the way North.
64 “Effects of Civil War Upon the North,” Compiler, February 4, 1861, p. 2 c. 3; “Senator Bigler,” Compiler, February 11, 1861, p. 1 c. 3.
65 “Union Meeting at Mount Rock [in Mountpleasant],” Compiler, February 4, 1861, p. 2 c. 5.
In mid-February, the Harrisburg *Patriot and Union* summed up the situation. Republicans stood in the way of compromise, national unity and peace. Southern demands were eminently reasonable:

The first demand of the South is, that the provision of the Constitution requiring the return of fugitives from labor shall be faithfully executed, and that all State laws which embarrass, conflict with, retard, or obstruct the peaceful enforcement of the fugitive slave law shall be repealed. There is nothing unreasonable in this demand. – The South has a right to its runaway slaves, and the North has no right to protect them...

The second Southern demand, the paper stated, was equal access for slaveholders to the territories. On the eve of Civil War, in Pennsylvania’s Democratic press, it was the fugitive slave issue that was seen as the primary barrier to reunion and peace; in convention, the party declared it opposed any coercion of the South, “so long as the laws contravening Southern rights remain on Northern books.”

Democratic anger mounted as it became clear the Republicans in Congress would not yield. After the Crittenden Compromise failed to pass in Congress, the Peace Congress meeting at Washington’s Willard Hotel adopted a modified version of a proposal by James Guthrie of Kentucky. Representatives from Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Illinois, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland voted for the plan, but this initiative also failed in Congress.

As the crisis worsened, the conflict between Gettysburg’s papers heated up. The * STAR* urged the * Compiler*’s editors to “move down South,” where their views would be welcomed. Stahle haughtily replied, “We will not retort by advising the *STAR* folks to take

the underground railroad for Canada, where so many of their friends have gone. But that region will ere long be more congenial to their feelings than this…”⁶⁸

While there is no evidence of petitions to the state legislature from Adams County residents supporting the personal liberty law, the Star reported that one petition with 106 signatures had been sent to Congressman McPherson, opposing the Crittenden Compromise. It asked that Congress stand by the Constitution, the Union, and the laws. The law and order sentiments used by Democrats in the mid-1850s were now being invoked their opponents to forestall concessions to the South. The Compiler countered that a recent pro-compromise petition campaign around Littlestown had garnered many more signatures than those opposing compromise.⁶⁹

The Compiler clung to its slim hopes for averting disaster. In late March, it reported that the Rhode Island legislature had repealed its personal liberty law, and that Maine was expected to do the same. In April, it declared that “The Constitution as It Is:”

— Is against all Personal Liberty Bills in the States that conflict with the authority of the Federal Government.
— Against all Underground Railroads that run off servants from their masters South, to Canada or elsewhere, North.
— Against all mobbing of U.S. Marshals that in the line of duty execute Federal laws.
— Against the denial of all right of transit North for servants as well as masters.

The fugitive slave issue, then, which had been in eclipsed by mid-decade in Pennsylvania, now appeared to many to be critical to resolving the sectional crisis. Many of these men were Democrats, with the party agitating the issue in late 1860 and early 1861, but many others, like William H. Seward, were not. How much of the revival of

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⁶⁸ Untitled, Compiler, February 25, 1861, p. 2 c. 5.
⁶⁹ “No Compromise!” Compiler, March 4, 1861, p. 2 c. 4.
⁷₀ “Coming to Their Senses,” March 25, 1861, p. 2 c. 3; “The Constitution As it Is,” April 1, 1861, p. 1 c. 6.
interest in the fugitive slave issue was due to the effects of the desperate raid at Harpers Ferry cannot be definitely determined, but certainly the actions and responses of John Brown, abolitionists, and the party of Lincoln revived national interest in an issue that had been largely an afterthought in the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska act. South Carolina’s Declaration of Causes had featured the fugitive slave issue prominently, and named Pennsylvania as a principal offender; and at least three of the major compromise proposals in Congress had made an improved rendition process a key to sectional reconciliation. In Pennsylvania, a massive campaign of petitions, meetings, and literature had tried to place pressure for compromise on both the state legislature and the state’s delegation to Congress. All of these efforts had failed. Seven Deep South states had seceded, and the slave states closer to the border hung in the balance. War and national rupture were at stake.

The key to the crisis would be the choices of the border states, especially Virginia, the largest slaveholding state in the South. Whether Virginia seceded would determine the safety of Pennsylvania and its south central portion. The decision of Virginia, however, would largely be determined by men pulling lanyards in Charleston Harbor and the man in the White House, calling for volunteers. Lincoln’s call would chase Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Arkansas out of the Union. It would also begin a significant transformation of the fugitive slave issue from concerns about individual fugitives to deeper apprehensions about a mass movement of southern African Americans north.
Chapter 8

Contrabands, “White Victories,” and the Ultimate Slave Hunt:
The Recasting of the Fugitive Slave Issue in Civil War South Central Pennsylvania

All hopes for peaceable reunion exploded at Fort Sumter. Lincoln’s subsequent call for volunteers pushed most of the Upper South to secede. The possibility of Maryland joining Virginia in the new Confederacy endangered south central Pennsylvania. For a time, anger over secession and concerns of recruitment and local defense overshadowed the fugitive slave controversy, which some saw as largely moot. The issue, however, was only pushed to the background, and soon reemerged in the form of bitter partisan conflict over African American refugees, called “contrabands” because of their potential military value.  

Later, the Confederate army, angered by Union army depredations and emancipation, captured hundreds of African Americans in its invasion of the region in 1863.

The war’s commencement did not end the focus on the fugitive slave issue. Instead, it enlarged the issue’s scope and impact. Through the “contrabands” issue – the controversy over the movement of African American slaves to Northern states and U.S. military camps - the issue was transformed into a vital part of the debate about the meaning and extent of the war.

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1 General Benjamin Butler coined the phrase “contrabands” to justify his refusal to return escaped slaves to Southerners who sought them. Since the South considered African Americans as property, and that “property” could dig trenches, build roads and engage in other activities in support of the military, he classified them as “contraband of war,” or militarily useful property. The phrase stuck, and was soon used to refer generally to all African American slaves who had fled, regardless of whether they had traveled to a specific U.S. military encampment.
Across the North, the war was immediately politicized, but especially so along the Pennsylvania border, where issues of sectional comity and concerns over an expected influx of African Americans were starkest. The Democratic party, whose national power relied heavily on support from its Southern wing, had the most to lose from a permanent rupture. The party and its press were determined to limit the war effort to restoring the Union. The intensity of their racially charged rhetoric actually increased during the war.2 They opposed leniency towards runaway slaves, the possible emancipation of Southern slaves, and particularly African American military participation, because they would all make a quick reunion difficult. The party’s bills to restrict the immigration of African Americans into the state also attracted substantial support.

As they had during the secession crisis, it was Pennsylvania’s Democrats who refused to relinquish the fugitive slave issue. Less than two weeks after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, the Republican Compiler, Gettysburg’s Democratic paper, printed a rumor that John Brown, Jr. was training four hundred African American soldiers in western Pennsylvania. The Democratic press urged Governor Curtin to disperse the gathering, if it existed, and to assure “these negroes” that “white men will attend to this war.” Rebellion must be punished without the Government encouraging “another John Brown to gratify the vengeance of runaway negroes.”3

The war had forced the Democrats to recycle material; this piece was actually an update of a similar rumor which had circulated in the state’s Democratic press in the aftermath of John Brown’s raid. That seems appropriate, however, as much of the

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3 Untitled, *Compiler*, May 13, 1861, p. 2 c. 5.
Democratic critique of the war, including the contrabands issue, was also an updating of familiar themes from the late postwar period.

Politically, the region’s 1850s turn towards the Democratic party also continued during the war, even as the state was trending Republican. Adams County followed the call of its leading Democratic newspaper to vote for the “white man’s ticket” and supported both Democratic gubernatorial candidate George Woodward in 1863 and presidential nominee George B. McClellan in 1864. In response, the region's embattled Republicans labeled any attacks on war policy as dangerously pro-Southern and potentially treasonous. The bitter partisan conflict was exemplified in the multiple arrests of Gettysburg’s Democratic editor, Henry J. Stahle, during the turbulent summer of 1863.

Not only did the war keep partisan conflict white-hot, it substantially disrupted the area’s communities to an extent unparalleled elsewhere in the North. In addition to the universal experience of young men leaving to support the war effort, south central Pennsylvania also suffered substantial physical and social devastation. Chambersburg in Franklin County burned in 1864, and Gettysburg, in adjacent Adams County, experienced a massive three day battle, accompanied by the burden of burying the dead and caring for thousands of wounded. Most pronounced, however, was the disruption brought to the area’s African American community. Robert E. Lee’s 1863 invasion caused a massive flight of refugees from Maryland and the south central Pennsylvania counties to Harrisburg and Philadelphia, and many of those unable to flee or hide were captured by Lee’s soldiers as fugitives and re-enslaved or imprisoned. This left the area’s African American communities disrupted just as the larger community was contesting the role of African Americans in the war, and, by implication, in post-war society. The region’s
Civil War experience would influence the atmosphere of early Reconstruction in the region. The irony was that as the war brought freedom to millions of Americans south of the Mason-Dixon line, controversies over African Americans contributed to an environment in which few of Pennsylvania’s blacks would win the full equality they expected to gain from the war.

The attack on Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s call for volunteers pushed the fugitive slave issue, such a consuming political topic in February 1861, briefly into the background. In its place was a deep, palpable anger toward the South among many Pennsylvanians who had tried so hard to preserve the Union. Republicans tried to stoke anger at Southern secession to increase support for the new administration and to attack local Democrats. Having been criticized for months for their obduracy, Republicans jumped at the chance to label Southern secessionists traitors and villains. Democrats, in turn, responded by using the suspension of habeas corpus, the contraband issue, the Emancipation Proclamation, and wartime losses to make the war seem unnecessary, unconstitutional, and unworthy of support.

The rhetorical battle commenced immediately. In Chambersburg, citizens gathered on April 18, 1861, just four days after the surrender of Fort Sumter. They passed resolutions blasting the “band of traitorous spirits” who had plotted the dismemberment of Union. Jefferson Davis was labeled “the Arch traitor of all,” but the resolutions also warned against the traitors in their midst.4 This practice of implying that

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Northern Democrats were as traitorous as their seceding Southern counterparts began with the war’s commencement and continued throughout.5

As the John Brown story illustrates, issues of race had particular resonance in south central Pennsylvania. Some may have blamed African Americans for the war. On June 1, 1861, troops from the small army in Chambersburg lynched a local African American after he had tried to protect himself and his wife from a beating at their hands.6 On June 3, 1861, as troops were about to move south from Chambersburg into Virginia, their commander were warned them that one of their responsibilities would be to “suppress servile insurrection.”7

Most Union generals followed similar policies early in the war. Retaining support of the border states was critical to the Union war effort, and Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware and Missouri all included slaveholders. In addition, much of the Union leadership believed there was also a possibly large body of Unionist Southerners in the Confederacy whose allegiance could be restored if the war effort was limited and did not disturb them or their property, including their slaves. These Unionist Southerners supposedly had been silenced by a few large slaveholders who would not let the true

5 In Gettysburg, a similar meeting was attended by members of both political parties. While it condemned the seizure of the fort as rebellion and treason, it did not cast aspersions on any party. “Union Meeting,” Compiler, April 22, 1861, p. 3 c. 1.
6 “Horrible Occurrence,” Compiler, June 10, 1861, p. 2 c. 3; “Horrible Occurrence,” Sentinel, June 12, 1861, p. 3 c. 3; “Murder Trials in Franklin County,” Compiler, April 25, 1864, p. 2 c. 5.
sentiments of the South be expressed. This concept, known as the “Slave Power Conspiracy,” was widespread in the Union leadership early in the Civil War.

Despite this belief, after the debacle at Bull Run in the first battle of the war, which was partly blamed on slave-built fortifications, some troops and commanders thought seizing slaves would be the best approach to punishing secession and winning the war. Union troops securing the defenses of Harpers Ferry widely utilized impressed and escaped slaves from Virginia’s Loudoun and Jefferson counties. Soon escaped African Americans had a name, “contrabands,” to designate their status as supposedly confiscatable property with military potential.

At first, Pennsylvania’s Democratic papers were agnostic concerning the military use of African American slaves. The state organ the Harrisburg Patriot and Union, in a piece reprinted by the Compiler, stated, “We are not prepared to indicate what disposition should be made of fugitives when they flock in great numbers to our camps…. But one thing is clear – our army cannot be diverted from the great purpose of putting down rebellion, either to protect fugitives or restore them to their masters.” The papers did oppose slaves escaping north, as they believed that they would congregate on the border. Adding to “the vagabond free negro population of Pennsylvania would be a calamity.” They complained that the fugitive slaves already in the state were “non-producing” and recommended that all abolitionists be taxed to send them to Liberia. Variations of the “tax the abolitionists to pay for the cost of freed slaves” argument would continue throughout the war.9

Perhaps sensing a political vulnerability for the Republicans, the *Adams Sentinel* tried to defuse criticisms on the contraband issue and the abolition of slavery in Washington, D. C.\(^{10}\) In general, however, they studiously avoided the issues. John T. McIlhenny’s *Gettysburg Star*, was reportedly ruthless towards Democrats and “Copperheads,” but its positions on African Americans and fugitive slaves, though, are difficult to divine, as only scattered issues are available.\(^{11}\)

The “contrabands” dispute over wartime refugees was an extension of the pre-war debate over the fugitive slaves. The Democrats favored speedy rendition of fugitive slaves before the war and continued that position during it, opposing permitting escaping Southern slaves from fleeing to protection behind federal lines. Some Republicans tried to protect fugitives before the war, and during the war, welcomed fugitive slaves from the Confederacy as sources of information, military labor, and a way of weakening the South. What the war had changed was the scope and the number of fugitives under discussion.

The orders to suppress insurrection, the controversy over “contrabands,” and the riot in Chambersburg illustrate that by July 1861, tensions were emerging which would affect the partisan debate about African Americans and the nature of the war throughout. Some area Democrats deplored the war entirely; most wanted to punish the rebellious seceders but limit the war to restoring the Union “as it was” – which included retaining slavery in the Southern states. Early in the war, many moderate Republicans agreed with them, as strong efforts were being made to retain the loyalty of the border states. There was widespread belief that the “Slave Power” conspiracy had overcome the latent

\(^{10}\) Untitled [Contrabands], *Sentinel*, November 4, 1862, p. 2 c. 4 and November 25, 1862, p. 2 c. 5; “Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia,” September 30, 1862, p. 2 c. 6.

Unionism of many common Southerners. The Democrats, however, also blamed the war on the Republican “Chicago” platform opposing the extension of slavery to the territories, and to the Republican refusal to compromise during the secession winter. They hinted that Republicans had an agenda to abolish slavery throughout the South, citing as evidence every effort made to harbor fugitive slaves, help the contrabands, or end slavery in the District of Columbia. Abolition would jeopardize a quick end to the war and jeopardize the position of the Democratic party. It also threatened to flood Pennsylvania with African Americans, who, in the long run, could become Republican voters. To forestall this, the Democratic press intensified the level of its race baiting assaults on the Republicans to levels that exceeded the rhetoric of even the late 1850s.  

At the same time that some Democrats were criticizing the early war effort, the outbreak of the war solidified antislavery opinion along the border. During much of the 1850s, active resistance to federal legislation, such as the Fugitive Slave Law, had been tempered by concerns over the need to maintain the Constitution and preserve “law and order.” These factors, for instance, had caused the Conscience Whig paper the Star to tone down its criticism of the Fugitive Slave Law after 1850. The outbreak of war, however, removed this consideration and provided an opportunity for convergence among the opponents of slavery. By seceding from the Union, Southerners, already guilty of holding slaves, had created a colossal breach of law, order, and polity. Now, border politicians and journalists who opposed slavery but supported law and order could unite with radicals and let their anger rise. The animosity secession generated is

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illustrated in an 1861 sermon by Henry L. Baugher, the president of Pennsylvania
(Gettysburg) College.

Like his colleague Samuel Schmucker, Baugher was a child of the border. One
Southern student accused him of being “in sympathy with… Garrison and Phillips,” but,
based on limited evidence, it appears he actually was an antislavery moderate, as were
many faculty at the college and seminary. Baugher had supported colonization in the
mid-1830s, and he did not write letters to the *Liberator* or take a leading role in the
Adams County Anti-Slavery Society, as Professor William L. Reynolds did. What
Baugher did share with radicals like Garrison was a commitment to an egalitarian, color-
blind society. His sermons throughout the 1850s, however, suggest that he supported
preservation of the Union through compromise. He believed that slavery, while terrible,
could be tolerated while political solutions for its extinction were pursued.13

Secession and war changed that attitude. In April 1861, Baugher had helped write
the resolutions denouncing “treason” which were presented at the April 18 meeting in
Adams County. His anger at secession was still pronounced five months later. In his
address to the college’s entering senior class, a group of young men of prime military
age, he combined an opposition to slavery with a sense of the sacredness of law and the
egregiousness of secession. Baugher believed that if the American polity were destroyed,
anarchy would result, since America did not have a monarchy or nobility to offer social

Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, PA: 1883; reprinted
(Gettysburg, 1852), esp. p. 16; Baugher, “The Men for the Times” (Gettysburg, 1854), esp. p. 5. Baugher,
“Let No Man Despise Thee,” (Gettysburg, 1855), esp. p. 16. Special Collections, Musselman Library,
Gettysburg College.
stability.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, he urged his students to enlist to fight and die, if need be, their country. Those who could not should support the government and pay the higher taxes that would be needed for victory. Failure to prevail would be a disastrous collapse of majority rule, because the success of secession would be the triumph of a minority over a majority. For Baugher, majority rule was a logical extension of his belief in the political equality of all races and ethnicities. Legislative enactments that were unjust to one section should be remedied through political action, not secession and war. In this way, even unjust laws, properly rectified, could be part of God’s plan.\textsuperscript{15}

The address contained a discussion of the Buchanan administration’s final actions, and no mention of the battle of Manassas or any other military events, suggesting that Baugher was reprising a sermon he wrote several months before the war’s costs began to be apparent. About halfway through, however, Baugher issued a chilling lament:

Oh it is dreadful… that this government should be assailed by her own children, her plains covered with blood, her towns burned, her households made desolate, and her sons slain for the purpose of establishing the dominion of the few upon the ruins of the many.\textsuperscript{16}

When Baugher made this grim prophecy, no one knew how much death and destruction would come to south central Pennsylvania in particular. Just a few months after this address was printed, Baugher’s own household would be desolated by the death

\textsuperscript{14} H. L. Baugher, “The Christian Patriot: A Discourse Addressed to the Graduating Class of Pennsylvania College, September 15, 1861,” (Gettysburg: A.D. Buehler/H.C. Neinstedt, 1861), pp 15-16, Baugher Family Papers, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College. Anarchy undoubtedly was particularly troubling to a descendant of Germans familiar with the carnage created as a result of the Thirty Years’ War in Europe, when disputes over sovereignty led to carnage and mass starvation in central Europe.

\textsuperscript{15} Baugher, “Christian Patriot,” (pay taxes), pp. 5-6. (Majority rule), pp. 20-21 (unjust laws); 23 –24 (God’s plan).

\textsuperscript{16} Baugher, “Christian Patriot,” p. 12; pp. 16-17
of his son from war wounds in May 1862. Homes, businesses and farms in Franklin and Adams counties would be damaged by Confederate invasion. The African American community would be devastated. Central Chambersburg would burn in 1864.

Baugher’s address illustrates the animosity that resulted from combining resentment of an encroaching Slave Power with fury over the Southern states' significant breach of the Constitution. This anger would sustain many area Republicans and abolitionists throughout the war. It fueled their repeated invocation of “treason” during the conflict.

In the main, this convergence appears to have primarily strengthened the convictions of those who were already philosophically opposed to slavery. Given Adams County’s consistent support for the Democrats during the war, it does not appear that antislavery supporters of the Union were able to substantially broaden their appeal there. The death and desolation Baugher mentioned may have worked against them.

The Democratic Critique of the War Effort

For their part, the Democrats hoped that a short, limited war would spare the country the atrocities that Baugher feared. The principal obstacle Democrats saw to limited war was any effort to free the slaves. The Republican Compiler warned that the Administration would try to turn the conflict into a war of emancipation, and strongly opposed an early proclamation by former Republican president candidate John C. Fremont’s freeing the slaves of Missouri. The paper also published the “Ohio

17 Frassanito, Early Photography, pp. 379-380.
18 For the importance of this concept to Civil War Americans, see Phillip S. Paludan, “The American Civil War Considered as a Crisis of Law and Order,” American Historical Review 77:4 (October 1972): 1013-1034. The power of appeals to law and order and the sacredness of the Constitution should not be minimized; they may have helped contribute to the heavy military turnout in this border state.
Resolutions,” praising the soldiery but deploiring abuse of habeas corpus, and calling for a national convention to end the war. The *Compiler* would publish extensive material about the Ohio peace movement and noted peace Democrat Clement Vallandigham during the war. A proposed constitutional convention also received support; since Republicans in Congress had blocked the Crittenden compromise in the secession winter, another avenue would be for the states themselves to call a convention and ratify it outside of Congress.

The Democratic vision of the war had appeal in southern Pennsylvania. The October 1861 elections in Adams County were extremely close, with the Republican candidate for the state legislature only triumphing by three votes – after months of dispute – as a result of the soldiers’ vote. The Democrats gained a majority in the state House of Representatives, although the Republicans still controlled the state Senate.

Emboldened by their victories and encouraged by the close margins of their defeats, south central Pennsylvania’s Democrats pushed forward with their critique. They maintained their attack on early efforts by Fremont, now a Union general, and General David Hunter to free Southern slaves. The *Compiler* worried in particular about former slaves moving north into Pennsylvania. Warning that emancipation would mean

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the loss of a cotton crop which clothed millions, the paper opposed Northern efforts to
free and arm slaves in areas along the South Carolina coast. The Compiler fumed: “The
idea of putting muskets into the hands of such men as the slaves at Port Royal is
considered ridiculous.”

In June 1861, the state’s Democratic press had been agnostic on the military
seizing fugitive slaves; by November, it was not. Union General Henry Halleck had
banned escaping slaves from military camps in his Ohio district, a decision praised by the
Compiler on the grounds of stopping leaks of military information. The paper contrasted
Halleck’s policy of treating fugitive slaves as potential spies with that of the abolitionists
who wanted to arm them. It also applauded General John Dix’s proclamation that the
U.S. Army would “have nothing to do with the slaves in any manner, shape or form.”

As 1862 opened, the Democrats seemed poised to advance politically in the North
just over a year after their sharp defeat at the hands of Abraham Lincoln. After initial
reverses at Manassas, Ball’s Bluff, and Wilson’s Creek, Union military fortunes were
now advancing, raising hopes of a short war, followed by a possible return to the status
quo ante bellum. The U.S. Navy was blockading the Southern coastline, and amphibious
operations were making incursions along the coast in the Carolinas and Florida. In the
west, U.S. armies were preparing to move south into Tennessee. When Ulysses S. Grant
delivered significant victories at Forts Henry and Donelson, and marines captured

23 “Emancipation as a Means of Subduing Rebellion,” Compiler, November 4, 1861, p. 2 c. 3; “How to
Turn the World Topsy-Turvy,” Compiler; November 25, 1861, p. 2 c. 2; “Consequences of Universal
Emancipation,” Compiler, November 25, 1861, p. 2 c. 2; “Slaves at Hilton Head,” Compiler, December 9,
1861, p. 1 c. 7. Cornish, The Sable Arm, pp. 33-34.
24 “Fugitive Slaves in Camp,” Compiler, December 16, 1861, p. 2 c. 4-5; Untitled, Compiler, January 6,
1862, p. 1 c. 7; “General Dix’s Proclamation,” Compiler, December 30, 1861, p. 2 c. 1. Cornish, Sable
Arm, pp. 25. Halleck issued a similar proclamation in St. Louis on February 23, 1862, for which the
Democratic paper renewed its applause, saying “it is the only proper rule.” “Important Order of Gen.
Halleck Regarding Slaves and Other Property of the Rebels.” Compiler, March 3, 1862, p. 2 c. 7; Untitled,
Compiler, March 10, 1862, p. 2 c. 1.
Roanoke Island, the Compiler proclaimed through a reprint that these were “white victories,” because they could enable a rapid end to the war without emancipation.25

Although content with the progress of the war, the Democratic press was concerned about the direction of Administration policy. Particularly troubling was the Lincoln’s offer of compensated emancipation to the border states, and the bans on military officers returning fugitives. Soon, the Compiler predicted, Congress would “open up black Pandora’s box as wide as possible” by amending the fugitive slave law to permit trials by jury. The Harrisburg Patriot and Union feared that wages would be depressed by hordes of contrabands passing through Harrisburg and flooding into Lancaster, Chester, and Delaware counties. The Compiler agreed with the Harrisburg paper on “The Necessity for a White Man’s Party,” which would “hurl from power the black man’s [Republican] party.”26

The Wartime Movement of African Americans to South Central Pennsylvania

As the bloody fighting at Shiloh, Pea Ridge and elsewhere made clear that the “white victories” were not going to quickly end the war, concerns over liberated African Americans and escaped slaves increased. Resistance to “contrabands” moving north was significant part of the Democratic political program along the border. During the war hundreds, if not thousands, of escaped slaves fled to south central Pennsylvania and other locations in the southern part of the state. The Carlisle Volunteer proposed that every voter for Lincoln be required pay to compensate border state slave owners for their

runaways, and to post bond for surety against damages as fugitives moved north. Soon, however, the Democrats in Pennsylvania would be advocating an outright ban of immigration to deal with the African American “curse” - a flood of “runaway blacks” threatening to form a “degraded caste” to compete with white labor.27

Many south central Pennsylvanians saw the problem of African American slaves moving north as forming a continuum with the pre-war concerns about fugitives, and not just as a special wartime circumstance. In October 1861, the *Compiler* printed a notice from the Rockville (Md.) *Sentinel*, which described how one African American near Frederick, Charles Johnson, had been apprehended as a fugitive by Maryland authorities. Johnson, who claimed to be free, was found dressed in a military uniform and with a pass to Gettysburg. The paper published it “for the information of the public as to one of the ways and modes by which our negroes are enabled to escape to the North.” The document, signed by Banks’ Assistant Adjutant General, asked that Johnson be passed to Gettysburg. At the bottom were listed the military commands he might come in contact with, including Rockville, Westminster, Gettysburg, Chambersburg, and Philadelphia. By naming the individual and publicizing his intended escape routes, the article was remarkably reminiscent of the runaway ads of the 1820s.28

While the Democratic press rejoiced in the enforcement of the fugitive slave act in Maryland, they regretted that the fugitive slave act was not as effectively implemented

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27 “The Emancipation Bill,” *Compiler*, March 17, 1862, p. 2 c. 3-4; “Sick of the Negro,” *Compiler*, February 17, 1862, p. 2 c. 2; “The Negro to Be Excluded from Illinois,” *Compiler*, March 17, 1862, p 1 c. 7; “Necessity of a White Man’s Party,” *Compiler*, May 4, 1862, p. 1 c. 5; “Calmly Think of It,” *Compiler*, May 5, 1862, p. 2 c. 6; “The Evil Beginning to Be Felt,” *Compiler*, July 21, 1862, p. 1 c. 6. Movements to ban African Americans also occurred in Illinois and Ohio. The *Compiler* was actually critical of the movement in Ohio, because the paper felt that given that state’s long history of harboring fugitive slaves, it should accept its proportional share of refugees now.
28 [Untitled], *Compiler*, October 28, 1861, p. 2 c. 3.
in Pennsylvania. In April 1862, the *Bedford Gazette* lamented that four runaway slaves had passed through that county in April. They were overtaken in Altoona, but, “as usual, the master was denied his property.” “Such work,” the paper remarked, “is, no doubt, very efficient in restoring the Union.”

The unwillingness of some Pennsylvania authorities to stem the tide of fugitives partly reflected a changing attitude towards the fugitive slave law among a part of the populace. With secession and war, many Northerners felt liberated from complying with the onerous law. Anger toward secession appears to have translated into a rapid decline in public support for fugitive slave catching. O.P.M, an informant of a local Cumberland County historian at the turn of the 20th century, reported that at least one Maryland slave catcher tried to continue his activities in the area until the Civil War. Not realizing “that the business of slave hunting in Pennsylvania had ended,” he was summarily run out of Chambersburg on the eve of war and never returned. A populace that had at least tolerated his presence before – some had even collaborated with him - had now, in the aftermath of secession, turned against him.

As the summer moved into the fall campaign season, much of the local Democratic criticism of Republican policy centered on Edward McPherson, Adams County’s Congressman, and the scion of one the county’s antislavery families. Democrats tried to portray McPherson, a protégé of Thaddeus Stevens, as a consistent

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29 Untitled, *Compiler*, April 28, 1862, p. 3 c. 1.
30 OPM to Jeremiah Zeamer, January 1901, Zeamer Papers, File 40-9, Cumberland County Historical Society, p. [5]. Conversely, shortly before the war, in January 1861, several fugitive slaves were captured in Adams County without any resistance from the local citizenry – which was cited as proof that “the Southern people have no just cause of complaint against Pennsylvania, in this respect.” “Runaways,” *Sentinel*, January 30, 1861 (reprint from the *Hanover Spectator*). Thanks to Tim Smith, Adams County Historical Society, for bringing this to my attention.
Radical. This was not true. For example, in the aftermath of the defeat at Bull Run, a bill was before Congress to emancipate slaves used for insurrectionary and military purposes, including building fortifications and trenches, and working in navy yards and armories. This was the first of a long line of emancipatory and confiscatory actions by the wartime Congress. McPherson, in contrast to Thaddeus Stevens and other Republicans, asked that this bill be tabled, so that he could move to postpone consideration until December – which would have been after the elections. When McPherson’s efforts were not successful, he voted against the bill, which passed anyway. McPherson did vote for Lincoln’s proposal for compensated emancipation in the border states. In light of what came later, this was a mild antislavery measure, but to border Democrats, it appeared to be a massive taxpayer funded bribe to the border states to start emancipation.

The paper tried to link McPherson with Stevens because the Lancaster Congressman was personally leading many of the initiatives the Democrats hated. Stevens was one of the most powerful and radical Republicans in the wartime Congress. In 1861, he had wholeheartedly endorsed the confiscation of slaves used by the Confederate military, and even predicted that soon freed slaves would be needed to wage war on the South. In 1862, in the House of Representatives, Stevens managed the passage of the bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. He also introduced

31 “Little McPherson’s Great Speech,” Compiler, July 14, 1862, p. 1 c. 7. McPherson was also criticized for opportunism. Like many politicians, he had volunteered for military service when the expectations had been for a short war. As Congress returned to session, he had to resign from the leadership of troops and serve as a volunteer aide-de-camp to various generals. “Capt. McPherson vs. Buncombe,” Compiler, October 10, 1862, p. 2 c. 6.
Lincoln’s proposal for compensated emancipation of the slaves of the border states. In short, it was Stevens who wanted to confiscate the slave property of Southerners, who wanted to arm the slaves, who proposed military colonies of Union soldiers in the South, who argued that the war had made fundamental changes in the constitutional polity, and who refused to return to the Union “as it was” with slavery intact. In contrast, the prevailing Democratic position was succinctly stated by one of their Pennsylvania Congressional candidates, General William Miller. As reported by the Compiler, he “was for the Constitution as it is, the Union as it was, and the niggers where they are.”

General Miller’s succinct summary of the Democratic program was just one example of many of the Democrats’ attempts to use race to solidify their core and broaden their appeal. In the last issue of the Compiler before the October 1862 elections, the Compiler’s editor defined for its readers the critical question of the local Congressional election: “if you desire confiscation, emancipation, and free negro immigration into Pennsylvania – then vote for McPHERSON and elect an Abolition Congress… If you wish the Constitution maintained, the negro let alone… the interests of the WHITE MAN respected and maintained – then vote for COFFROTH.”

General A. H. Coffroth did defeat McPherson handily, including besting him by 450 votes in McPherson’s native Adams County (Coffroth had once lived in Adams County as well). The Democrats also carried York and Cumberland counties, with the Republicans maintaining a narrow margin in Franklin County. Nationally, Democratic victories in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana, and electoral gains in New York and New

34 “Military Colonies,” Compiler, July 14, 1862, p. 2 c. 5.
35 Untitled, Compiler, August 11, 1862, p. 2 c. 3
Jersey, were widely interpreted as a significant mid-term rebuke to President Lincoln and the Republican party. In reality, in some regards, the Republican performance was quite good. As James McPherson has pointed out, the Democratic margins in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana were small. Had absentee soldier voting been permitted, the results could have been reversed. The Republicans actually gained in the U.S. Senate and still held a significant majority in the U.S. House of Representatives.37

In short, while the results cannot be interpreted as a crushing defeat for the Republicans, they indicated substantial anxiety over the progress of the war in the lower North from New York to Illinois. Along the border, residents recognized that their local economies were likely to suffer from continued rupture with the South, and many feared economic competition with freed slaves as a result of Lincoln’s preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, issued on September 22, 1862. They also knew that they could lie on an invasion path if Confederate forces again moved north, as they had in the September Antietam campaign, Braxton Bragg’s invasion of Kentucky, and, just before the election, J. E. B. Stuart’s October raid to Chambersburg. In Adams County, where a native son incumbent Republican Congressman had been defeated, the election was yet another step in the transition to becoming a traditionally Democratic county. Republicans were still competitive in some local races, but the county as a whole was shifting away from the Republican Party just as the Republicans were preparing to hold the state as a whole through much of the Reconstruction period.38 Certainly, there was nothing in the election results to persuade Democrats to slacken their assault on emancipation, contrabands, and the direction of the war.

The Debate over Emancipation and African Americans

It was in this atmosphere of intense political contestation that the war’s middle year, 1863, opened. It would be an extremely significant year for south central Pennsylvania’s inhabitants, white and black. The invasion by General Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia would devastate families, homesteads, and especially the African American community. Most of the region’s blacks would flee the Confederate advance, but hundreds were captured by the invading Confederate army, resulting in massive displacement. For many south central Pennsylvanians, especially African Americans, life would never be the same after the Confederate invasion.

The year dawned, however, with few portents that anything would be remarkably different. J.E.B. Stuart’s October 1862 raid had affected Chambersburg and Franklin County, but had only touched the edge of Adams County and left Cumberland County unscathed. It probably had not escaped the attention of the area’s black community, however, that the troopers had taken a number of African American captives from Franklin County when they decamped. Except for African Americans, most people just learned to ignore continual rumors of Confederate invasion. A local judge even refused to adjourn court to respond to one rumored advance.39

In an event that would make the invasion even more dangerous for African Americans occurred on January 1, when President Lincoln signed the final Emancipation Proclamation. This action dominated much of the discussion of the war for the first few weeks of 1863. The Sentinel, the county’s moderate Republican paper, supported the

39 Untitled, Compiler, January [5], 1863, p. 2 c. 6.
proclamation, although not strenuously. The Democrats used the occasion to revisit the “contrabands” issue, as the movement of freed slaves north thus far in the war suggested that thousands more might migrate in the aftermath of emancipation. The *Compiler* even printed a satirical anti-black ditty about the “contrabands,” a biting parody of James S. Gibbon’s popular recruiting song, “We are coming, Father Abraham, Three Hundred Thousand More.” Although originally published in Cincinnati, it included a reference to southern Pennsylvania as a potential destination for emancipated slaves:

They [fired slaves] come, they come in multitudes,  
Along Ohio’s tide;  
The ‘shucking tramp’ of their brogans  
By Susquehanna’s side….  
And though the country may be poor,  
And labor be oppressed  
And white men starve and die in want,  
You surely will be blessed;  
For fools, in ages yet to come,  
Will sing your praises long:  
They are coming Father Abraham,  
About four millions strong.41

The Proclamation led the Democrats to renew their efforts to ban newly emancipated blacks from emigrating to Pennsylvania.42 At first this began as simple exclusionary legislation against the immigration of blacks and mulattoes, but then the bill’s sponsor recast it as an amendment to the state constitution. This would make it harder to reverse, and it now included a provision to colonize African Americans who were “already here, who may be willing to go.” The exception was for fugitive slaves: they were to be returned to their masters. In support, Democratic legislators introduced a

number of petitions from Adams, York and Lancaster counties. Eventually, the bill passed the Democratic-dominated House but not the Republican-controlled Senate.⁴³

They were unable to push through the immigration ban, but the Democrats did so well in local spring elections, on top of their Congressional victory the previous August, that area Republicans reportedly began to reconsider their stands. Alexander K. McClure, the Republican power broker, editor, and Speaker of the Pennsylvania Senate, began to express words of conciliation and to voice reservations about the Emancipation Proclamation.⁴⁴

The Democrats were determined to exploit their advantage, and for the next several months, the topics of emancipation, African Americans, and immigration restrictions featured prominently in the Compiler. The unfairness of placing the cost of emancipation on taxpayers who had already paid heavily for the war was emphasized. The paper suggested that white soldiers were neglected by the government’s focus on African Americans. Published letters from Adams County’s 165th Pennsylvania Regiment, which had strong representation from the county’s German community, expressed anti-black sentiments. The Compiler also returned sympathetic coverage of leading anti-war dissident Democrat Clement Vallandigham in the wake of his arrest for sedition.⁴⁵

While Democrats criticized emancipation and laid plans for returning fugitives, abolitionists planned to arm some of them, if they could succeed in their goal of creating African American military regiments. This had already been undertaken on a small scale by the state of Massachusetts. Gettysburg’s *Compiler* opposed this; it was antithetical the Democratic objective of a short, limited war with a return to the status quo, and it set a potentially troublesome precedent for arguments of African American equality and citizenship. The paper criticized the performance of African Americans in the field and sharply condemned Thaddeus Stevens and lame duck Edward McPherson for supporting the “negro soldier bill.” “Is it not time,” the paper asked, “to drop niggerism, and think and act for the country and its white taxpayers?” The Democratic critique of the Republican party was becoming increasingly centered on issues of race, and the race-baiting was intensifying: in a reprint from another paper, the *Compiler* labeled the Republican press the “Kinkyhead” newspapers.46

Beyond their insidious racism, the Democratic press’s slurs were deliberately political. A significant portion of their constituency in southern Pennsylvania was among German and Irish immigrants, who themselves were struggling to be fully accepted by society as “white.” The response of the Democratic press to the rise of the Republican Party and the racial issues of the Civil War could be considered an example of “herrenvolk” democracy, the concept that the interests all whites had in maintaining their position atop the racial hierarchy should override political disputes within them. This concept was rarely made explicit, but was permeated the paper’s appeal to the immigrants

who were at the core of the party. During the war, the Compiler ran several pieces hinting that Republicans had deliberately insulted immigrants by insinuating that African Americans were more intelligent. In February the Compiler ran a reprint from the Sunbury Democrat stating, “All the Abolition legislation degrading white men, recognizing negroes the same as all other emigrants to this country, &c…. [should] be repealed.” The paper fumed, “This may truly be said to be a NIGGER ADMINISTRATION.”47

Despite the Democratic opposition, the drive to recruit African Americans would not be stopped. Recruiters had been canvassing the state to enlist Pennsylvania’s free blacks and contrabands into African American military units, especially the storied Massachusetts 54th and 55th Colored Infantry regiments. As Pennsylvania did not permit the enlistment of African Americans into its own units, this was the only way Pennsylvania’s blacks could serve. Noted African American leaders including James Loguen and T. Morris Chester served as recruiting agents, and their appeals were effective. Nearly one hundred African Americans from around the black enclave of Mercersburg in Franklin County volunteered for military service during the war, many with out-of-state units. Others came from Chambersburg, Shippensburg, and Carlisle.48 By 1863, the Democratic press was commenting on this activity. One of the state organs, Harrisburg’s Patriot and Union, remarked that “The State is overrun with agents from


Massachusetts seeking negro recruits for her unfilled quota of the army…. Massachusetts may have all the negroes she can raise from this quarter.” That last remark may have been facetious, however; several months later, the paper made the incendiary suggestion that black troops would be used to track down white deserters. By June, the *Patriot* reported that 1,155 African Americans had been recruited from Pennsylvania for Massachusetts’s colored infantry regiments. At the same time, Governor Curtin refused to receive African American troops as volunteers or militias, even during the invasion emergency. This included a company offered under the leadership of Randolph Johnston, a Gettysburg African American.

Expressions of anti-Republican sentiment and the tenuous military situation concerned Republicans and Union military officials throughout the border North. In Ohio in March, several Democratic newspaper offices were raided. The brigadier general in charge of the Columbus district called for calm and conciliation. It was James Cooper’s last act of public service. The former Adams County resident and former U.S. Senator died of illness soon afterwards.

Also in Ohio, Democratic peace advocate Clement Vallandigham was arrested in May. So were five Adams County residents in Pennsylvania. They were seized by the Provost Guard from Westminster, Maryland in Littlestown, a mostly German community located almost on the Mason-Dixon line. They were questioned about any involvement

in the secretive, putatively pro-Confederate organization the Knights of the Golden Circle. Another was arrested over a week later.\textsuperscript{52} In the aftermath of the battle of Gettysburg, the editor of the \textit{Compiler}, Henry Stahle, was arrested three times for suspected disloyalty in the summer of 1863.\textsuperscript{53} A Democratic newspaper editor in Harrisburg was also arrested. Along with border Ohio, southern Pennsylvania was one of the areas where the populace’s loyalties concerned Union leadership the most. Here the peace movement was taking hold in an area which lay directly on the path of any Confederate invasion towards the heart of Pennsylvania.

\textit{The Ultimate Slave Hunt: The Confederate Invasion of Pennsylvania}\textsuperscript{54}

Soon Adams County residents, white and black, Republicans or Democrats, would wish for a larger Union army presence than just visits from the provost guard. In June, the long rumored Confederate invasion of south central Pennsylvania began. White residents greeted the news of the advance of the leading elements of Lee’s army to Chambersburg on June 16 with dread, and took precautions by hiding livestock and family valuables. Many of the men disappeared as well. Most of south central Pennsylvania’s black population, though, fled for their lives, as had African Americans in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{52} "Case of C.L. Vallandigham," \textit{Compiler}, May 18, 1863, p. 2 c. 3; “Address of C. L. Vallandigham to the Democracy of Ohio,” \textit{Compiler}, May 18, 1863, p. 2 c. 4. “Arrest of Adams County Citizens by the Provost Martial [sic],” May 18, 1863, p. 2 c. 1; Untitled, \textit{Compiler}, June 1, 1863, p. 2 c. 6. For more information on the Knights of the Golden Circle, a shadowy organizations whose impact and possibly very existence was greatly exaggerated, see Frank L. Klement, \textit{Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War} (Baton Rouge, 1984).
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Portions of this section were previously published in David G. Smith, “Race and Retaliation: The Capture of African Americans During the Gettysburg Campaign,” in B. Wyatt-Brown and P. Wallenstein, eds., \textit{Virginia’s Civil War} (Charlottesville, 2005), pp. 137-151.
\end{itemize}
the path of the Confederate army from Virginia to Harrisonburg. Contemporary observers described the frantic flight of exhausted families, sometimes with the children being urged on with threats of the seizure by the Confederate army. A few others went into hiding, sometimes protected by white families.\textsuperscript{55}

African Americans had good reason to fear. The Confederate command had already promulgated a policy on returning captured fugitive slaves, and African Americans had been captured in 1862 in the Shenandoah Valley, at Harpers Ferry, at Cedar Mountain, and near Chambersburg. So many African Americans were seized at Harpers Ferry during the Antietam campaign that a disgusted Massachusetts chaplain, also captured there, wrote that “it seemed more like a negro hunt than a fight for right and country to me.” In the aftermath of the campaign, estimates of the number of seized African Americans were as high as several thousand.\textsuperscript{56}

As soon as Lee’s army entered Pennsylvania in mid-June of 1863, African Americans were rounded up, bound, and sent south. This activity continued until the battle of Gettysburg in July. For generations, this activity was largely overlooked by American historians, but recently increasing attention has been placed on these events.\textsuperscript{57}


\textsuperscript{56} W. H. Taylor to General[s], 21 March 1863, Orders and Circulars Issued by the Army of the Potomac and the Army and Department of Northern Virginia, C.S.A., 1861-65, National Archives Microfilm M921, Reel 1, frame 1391. The order directed the army to comply with an early March directive by the Confederate Adjutant General, General Orders No. 25, 6 March 1863. See the OR, ser. 2, vol. 5, pp. 844-845. George M. Neese, Three Years in the Confederate Horse Artillery (New York, 1911), p. 61; Edward H. Phillips, The Lower Shenandoah Valley in the Civil War (Lynchburg, 1993), pp. 114, 118; Alonzo H. Quint, From the Potomac to the Rapidan (Boston, 1864), p. 235; Jedediah Hotchkiss to Sara Hotchkiss, 17 September 1862, Letters of Jedediah Hotchkiss, 1860-65, Valley of the Shadow project; Smith, “Race and Retaliation.”

The evidence of the captures and the disruption of African American community comes from Northern and Southern newspaper accounts, soldier’s letters, diaries of Pennsylvania townspeople, military orders, prison records, and the effects caused by the absence of a large number of people. Pennsylvania College had to get someone else to ring the college bell when their janitor, Jack Hopkins, fled. A South Carolina soldier remarked “it is strange to see no negroes” as he stayed at Chambersburg, home to hundreds of African Americans in 1860 and destination of many a fleeing contraband since then. A Gettysburg woman made the same observation of her hometown.58

Some who escaped fled to Harrisburg, where many of the men were put to work building entrenchments and pumping water for the endangered city. Many were impressed and not paid for their labor. Perhaps it is not surprising that when emergency calls for volunteers to meet the Confederate threat to Harrisburg were issued, a number of African American laborers answered. Some were mustered into an emergency company which fought bravely in a skirmish at Wrightsville Bridge, protecting Harrisburg and the east bank of the Susquehanna by keeping that critical bridge from falling into Confederate hands. Not all of Harrisburg’s residents were grateful for this protection,

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however – a Democratic paper in the city suggested that the Confederates would sack and burn it if African American soldiers had killed Confederates in its defense.\textsuperscript{59}

Not everyone escaped. Rachel Cormany, the Chambersburg wife of a Union cavalryman, reported that it saddened her heart to watch Confederate troops “hunting up contrabands and driving them off in droves.” Another Chambersburg woman intervened to save a woman she knew, but she was rebuffed, and had to watch her being led away. Had the Confederate forces been able to remain in south central Pennsylvania all summer, the local African American population might have been eliminated. Some African Americans in Greencastle claimed that a Confederate officer, after seizing several African Americans from a house, said, “When they had destroyed Penn[sylvania] they would return that way and take off every neager.”\textsuperscript{60}

Most of the captures appear to have been in Franklin County, which was occupied by the Confederate army for two weeks. A number were also seized around Gettysburg, although some were able to escape in the confusion that accompanied the battle. One woman eluded her captors and hid in the bell tower of a church for several days.\textsuperscript{61}


\textsuperscript{60} Diary entry for Rachel Cormany, June 16, 1863, in James Mohr and Richard Winslow III, eds., \textit{The Cormany Diaries: a Northern Family During the Civil War} (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), pp. 328-330 (also available at the Valley of the Shadow Project). Creighton, “Living on the Fault Line,” p. 215. Capt. W. S. How to Mr. Wills, 31 August 1865, in “Letters from Captain W. S. How in relation to colored people at White Post,” Freedmen’s Bureau Records, RG 105, National Archives, Virginia: Winchester 1865-1867, Box 64. It is not clear whether the captain’s threat referred to all local African Americans or just to the remaining “family slaves” he believed were in the area.

\textsuperscript{61} Schildt, \textit{Roads to Gettysburg}, p. 106. Creighton, “Living on the Fault Line,” pp. 228-229. This account of the fate of “Old Liz” is based on the account of Albertus McCreary, who was a young boy during the battle. His description of Gettysburg during wartime includes inconsistencies, exaggerations, and some outright incorrect statements, but other portions appear as if they may be true. I am indebted to Timothy Smith, Adams County Historical Society, for pointing out some of the inconsistencies in McCreary’s account. Albertus McCreary, “Gettysburg: A Boy’s Experience of the Battle,” \textit{McClure's Magazine} 33 (July 1909), p. 250.
The total number of African Americans captured by the Confederate army may never be known. One Chambersburg resident recorded in his diary that the Confederate army had taken 250 African Americans with them from there alone, but he had been absent from the town briefly and appears to have been citing a local newspaper, not making a firsthand observation. From Franklin and Adams County, however, it does appear that scores, if not hundreds were taken. Taking a larger view of the whole 1863 campaign from Winchester to Gettysburg, hundreds of African Americans were likely seized in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. One Confederate soldier in Staunton reported that they had received nearly a thousand prisoners “in all colors, ages, sizes, sexes and from all nations.” As fewer than one hundred white civilians were captured as hostages during the campaign, this statement indicates the capture of a large number of African Americans in the fall of Winchester and afterwards. Confederate prison records are ambiguous, but would seem to indicate between ten to forty African Americans from Pennsylvania wound up in Confederate prisons in Richmond – mainly African Americans who could plausibly claim that they were free. Hundreds more may have been reclaimed as fugitive slaves, or sold to slave traders. Regardless of the precise numbers involved, the Confederate invasion inflicted substantial disruption on the African American community in south central Pennsylvania just a few years before the critical Reconstruction period.62

62 Diary Entry for William Heyser, June 18, 1863, in Jane Dice Stone, ed., “Diary of William Heyser,” Papers Read Before the Kittochtinny Historical Society 16 (Mercersburg, Pa.: Kittochtinny Historical Society, 1978), pp. 54-58, available electronically at the Valley of the Shadow, www.iath.Virginia.edu/vshadow2/personal/wmheyser.html. Department of Henrico Papers, Section 13, Virginia Historical Society, Microfilm C591, Frame 830, undated list of African Americans received at the prison from spring until July 31, 1863, at least one of the eleven African Americans received in July, William Sprigge, claimed to be a free black from Pennsylvania. Frames 793-794 contain “List[t] No. 1 from 1st to August 1863,” which includes the names of twenty seven African Americans. Six of these were identified as claiming to be free and captured in Pennsylvania, but a comparison of names to the Franklin County
No order has been located mandating the captures, although Lieutenant General James Longstreet’s adjutant did direct Major General George Pickett to bring the “captured contrabands… with you for further disposition” as he moved his division to Gettysburg and its appointment with history. Longstreet functioned as Lee’s second-in-command, and this order indicates that the highest ranks of the Confederate command were aware of the captures and at least acquiesced in them. While direct documentary evidence is lacking, some surmises may be made about the motivations of Confederate soldiers and leadership. A primary purpose of the Gettysburg campaign was to provision Lee’s army and relieve pressure on the Shenandoah Valley, a vital Confederate breadbasket, during the growing season. Many citizens of the Valley had been complaining to James Seddon, the new Confederate Secretary of War, about their loss of slaves and asking him to appoint an “accomplished general” to drive out the enemy. Seddon had made Lee aware of these sentiments. It seems logical that one ancillary purpose of the invasion could have been to restore a critically needed labor force to that region. Certainly, one soldier in Jubal Early’s Confederate division thought so, writing: “I do not think our generals intend[ed] to invade, except to get some of our Negros back

census indicates that at least eight others may have been from Pennsylvania as well. George W. Davis to Family, 7 July 1863, Rebecca Pitchford Davis Papers, Southern Historical Collection (SHC), University of North Carolina.

G. M. Sorrel to George Pickett, July 1, 1863, OR, Series I, v. 51, pt. 2, pp. 732-733. This significant order was first noted by Coddington, Gettysburg Campaign, p. 161. Alfred Nofi has stated that Longstreet and several other Confederate commanders directly ordered their soldiers to recapture fugitive slaves during the campaign, but offers no documentation; presumably he had the above order in mind. Alfred A. Nofi, The Gettysburg Campaign (New York, 1986), p. 37.

Kent Masterson Brown, Retreat from Gettysburg (Chapel Hill, 2005), pp. 12-33. James A. Seddon, Secretary of War, to General R. E. Lee, January 12, 1863, in OR, ser. 3, v. 3, p. 13. An examination of just two (reels 102 and 110) of the potentially two dozen relevant reels of microfilm in the Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, National Archives Microfilm 437, revealed eight letters from residents in or near the Valley urging action to clear the Valley of Union soldiers and bemoaning the loss of slaves. Wm Simmons, Madison County, January 1, 1863, S15 WD, 110: frame 59; W. Skee, Provost Marshal to Quarter Master General, March 13, 1863, S188 WD, 110:733; W. Skee, April 2, 1863, S258 WD, 110:1045-47; Charles Moore, Mt. Jackson, February 11, 1863, M111 WD, 102:82; J. G. Meen, Lynchburg, February 24, 1863, 102; Thomas B. Massi, Rappahanock County, March 10, 1863, M239 WD, 102:541.
which the Yankees have stolen and to let them [Pennsylvanians] know something about the hardships of war."

Race and Retaliation: Lee’s Army and African Americans

In addition to restoring a labor force to the vital Shenandoah Valley region, retaliation was another powerful factor motivating the Confederates. Union troops had inflicted grave damage to civilian homesteads and towns in Northern Virginia, in particular the lower Shenandoah Valley, which was frequently described as desolated by Confederate soldiers passing through. In December 1862, Union forces had deliberately shelled the town of Fredericksburg, after a warning to the town’s inhabitants. In June 1863, one group of invading Confederates specifically told a Mercersburg professor that they were retaliating “especially for Fredericksburg,” and, in seizing African Americans, “they were only reclaiming their property which we had stolen and harbored.” In addition to anger over perceived Yankee violations of the laws of war, the Confederates were influenced by the increasingly racialized nature of the war itself, and the deep Southern anger over the Emancipation Proclamation, and the arming of African American soldiers. The Gettysburg campaign was the first opportunity for Confederate soldiers to retaliate, and they did so against the African American population.

As early as September 1862, when Confederate forces seemed first poised to enter Pennsylvania, the Richmond press contained many suggestions that Pennsylvanians feel

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65 A. A. Anderson to C. Anderson, 8 July 1863, in Patrick H. Cain Letters, Duke University Special Collections.
the retaliatory wrath of the Confederate army. One paper, fuming at the loss of “at least 30,000 negroes,” urged Lee’s army to “turn the whole country into a desert,” stating that because “[t]hey have no negroes in Pennsylvania,” then “[r]etaliation must therefore fall upon something else.” The Confederates were turned back at the battle of Antietam, but there were actually many African Americans in southern Pennsylvania in 1862, and there would be even more to experience Confederate retaliation when Lee’s army invaded in 1863.67

In fact, captures of African Americans were frequent enough that Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia needed a policy. In an order from Lee’s adjutant, the army’s commanders were instructed that “arrested” fugitive were to be sent back to several “Camps of Instruction” near Richmond and Petersburg.68 Some Confederate soldiers tried to comply with this during the invasion, sending African American captives back to the rear.69 The procedure varied for the Gettysburg campaign, however, as the army was operating outside of the borders of Virginia. As Lucy Buck, the daughter of a slave-owning family in Winchester put it, captured African Americans were to be sent to the

67 “The Treatment of Conquered Cities,” Richmond Daily Whig, September 12, 1862, p. 2 c. 1; “Our Army in Maryland,” Richmond Dispatch, September 17, 1862, p. 1 c. 1. The Richmond Dispatch’s comments were noted in Gettysburg. Untitled, Adams Sentinel, September 30, 1862, p. 2 c. 5.
68 W. H. Taylor to General[s], 21 March 1863, Orders and Circulars Issued by the Army of the Potomac and the Army and Department of Northern Virginia, C.S.A., 1861-65, National Archives Microfilm M921, Reel 1, frame 1391.
69 See, for example, Newman Feamster’s note that his brother Thomas and his men had “captured several Negroes and are sending them back.” This implies there was a policy to send captured African Americans, like other captured supplies, back to the quartermasters. S. W. N. Feamster to mother, June 23, 1863, Feamster Family Papers, Library of Congress. For use of this “sent back” phraseology with supplies, see Robert E. Lee to General John D. Imboden, June 10, 1863, in Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin, The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee (Boston, 1961; reprinted New York, 1987), p. 510.
jail in Winchester, where the women and children could be reclaimed by their owners if
they were fugitives. Male slaves would be sent to Richmond to work on fortifications.70

The Fate of Captured African Americans

Buck’s understanding of the policy for captured African Americans is supported
by the experience of one of the best documented captives from the area, Amos Barnes.
Barnes, who claimed to be free, was captured by the Confederate army in Franklin
County, sent to Winchester, and then from Winchester to Castle Thunder prison in
Richmond. In an attempt to win his freedom, Barnes asserted that he had actually helped
the Confederate army locate the hiding places of other African Americans. He and
another captive also wrote to some merchants and ministers in Chambersburg and
Mercersburg, including the Rev. Thomas Creigh and William McKinstry, asking them to
corroborate that they were free blacks. The Pennsylvanians wrote back, verifying that
they believed Barnes to be free. They also asked the Reverend T. V. Moore, a noted
minister in Richmond, to look into the matter. Moore had gone to school in Mercersburg,
and, before the Civil War, had been offered the presidency of Lafayette College.71  The
minister visited Barnes in prison and reported that his account was credible. Before the
end of the year, the Confederate Assistant Secretary of War ordered the general in charge
of Confederate prisons to deliver “Amos Bar[n]es, a free negro from Pennsylvania,

70 Diary entry of Lucy Rebecca Buck, July 3, 1863, in Elizabeth R. Baer, ed., Shadows on my Heart: The
Civil War Diary of Lucy Rebecca Buck of Virginia (Athens, Ga., 1997), p. 228. The need for military slave
labor in Virginia was great; see Ervin L. Jordan, Black Confederates and Afro-Yankees in Civil War
Virginia (Charlottesville, 1995), and James H. Brewer, The Confederate Negro (Durham, 1969).
71 T. V. Moore to James Seddon, December 3, 1863 C (WD) 1025, Letters Received by the Confederate
Secretary of War, National Archives microfilm M437, reel 88. William D. McKinstry et. al. to Amos
Barnes, November 5, 1863, and Thomas Creigh to T. V. Moore, November 10, 1863, Department of
Henrico Papers, Section 11, Virginia Historical Society, reproduced in Joseph T. Glatthaar, Confederate
Military Manuscripts, Series A, Microfilm Reel C591, frames 61-63. (Lafayette College) Adams Sentinel,
October 14, 1850.
whose release is applied for by Rev. T. V. Moore, of this city, upon grounds which appear to the Department sufficient to justify an exceptional policy with regard to him. 72

Such a fate apparently did not meet with any of the other free blacks captured in Pennsylvania. 73 Their incarceration occurred at a time when attitudes on both sides were hardening towards prisoner exchanges and releases. With African American soldiers now being captured, the Union army insisted that they be exchanged as well as white soldiers and officers. The Confederates refused – as the Northern authorities knew they would – and the prisoner exchanges stopped. 74 The captured African Americans from Pennsylvania were civilians, not soldiers, but Confederate authorities may have hoped that they could be exchanged for Confederate civilians or runaway slaves. For the most part, however, they fell through the cracks of the Confederate prison system. Major General Isaac Carrington, the Confederate inspector of the prisons, recommended that the men be placed out to work, and the women labor in hospitals and laundries. Alexander Lewis, a captured African American from Chambersburg, eventually became the de facto head of the culinary system in Castle Thunder. A young African American from York was used as a messenger and errand boy. 75

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73 Based on the Barnes evidence, Dr. Mark Neely believes that all the captured African Americans were ultimately freed. I have been unable to find the kind of documentation for their releases, however, that accompanied Barnes’s. James Epperson believes the Confederates held on to their African American hostages from Pennsylvania, and may have offered to trade them for runaway slaves. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Southern Rights: Political Prisoners and the Myth of Confederate Constitutionalism (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), pp.139-140. Epperson, “Lee’s Slave Makers,” p. 51. According to a Mercersburg newspaper, Rev. Moore offered to undertake similar intercessions for other prisoners, but it is not clear if Creigh or other south central Pennsylvanians pursued this. “Rev. Dr. Moore – Richmond – Our Colored Prisoners,” Mercersburg Journal, January 1, 1864, p. 2 c. 1.

74 The Compiler would call for both Robert Ould, and Meredith, the Southern and Northern exchange commissioners, to be replaced. “Exchange of Prisoners,” Compiler, December 7, 1863.

75 Isaac H. Carrington toCapt. W. S. Winder, August 26, 1863, in Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, C (WD) 604, National Archives microfilm M437, reel 86, frames 919-921. I am indebted to Dr. Mark Neely for both this reference and the December 3 reference to Amos Barnes.
The records in the Department of the Henrico, which had jurisdiction over the network of Richmond area prisons, are somewhat ambiguous as to the number incarcerated; some prisoner lists from the summer of 1863 include notations, “Free negro captured in Pennsylvania” or “Negro captured in Pennsylvania claiming to be free.” Often, they are at the top of a list with a number of other African American names, the status of which is not indicated. Some of these names are identical to names in the 1860 Franklin County census, suggesting that they too were captured in Pennsylvania. Some of these prisoners likely were hired out to the railroad or to build fortifications, as were captured slaves held in other prisons.

Even if they appear to have been largely forgotten, Pennsylvania’s captured African Americans had value to the Confederate hierarchy. As the Union army pushed closer to the city in the summer of 1864, and as the prisons experienced gross overcrowding, some of the African American captives were sent to a new prison in Salisbury, North Carolina. By November, that prison’s commandant was asking what could be done with the “negroes confined at Salisbury.” Robert Ould, the Confederacy’s agent for prisoner exchanges, noted on an endorsement that he could put them to use if permitted - probably meaning he would offer to trade them for captured Confederate

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Hoke, *Historical Reminiscences of the War, In and About Chambersburg, During the War of Rebellion* (Chambersburg, 1884), p. 144.

76 Department of Henrico Papers, Section 13, Virginia Historical Society, Microfilm C591, Frame 830, undated list of African Americans received at the prison from spring until July 31, 1863, At least one of the eleven African Americans received in July, William Sprigge, claimed to be a free black from Pennsylvania. Frames 793-794 contain “List[t] No. 1 from 1st to August 1863,” which includes the names of twenty seven African Americans. Six of these were identified as claiming to be free and captured in Pennsylvania, but a comparison of names to the Franklin County census indicates that at least eight others may have been from Pennsylvania as well.

77 The activities of African American prisoners at Castle Thunder are not documented, but for Libby Prison, the morning reports contain frequent references to placing African American prisoners out for work. The October 10, 1862 report mentions, “Rec’d 12 negroes returned from President of Y[orktown] RRd, October 9, 1862,” and on November 19, 1862 the report reads, “Off 19 Negroes who are at work outside at various places.” Morning Reports of the C.S. Eastern Military District Prison [Libby], March 22, 1862-December 16, 1863, Ryder Collection of Confederate Archives, Tufts University.
civilians or soldiers. A footnote identifies these African American prisoners as “Brought from Pennsylvania by C. S. Army.” After that mention, it becomes difficult to track them in the confusion of the Confederate prison system in the last days of the war. Some may have been sent to Camp Maxcy Gregg in South Carolina, where a large number of African American prisoners were sent from Salisbury in January 1865.78

When the war ended, it was unclear where most of the captured African Americans were, if they were still alive. Their incarceration, like their capture and the flight of many others, contributed to the disruption of African American community in south central Pennsylvania.

The white communities of the area were also substantially disturbed. Houses were damaged, stores cleaned out, fences burned. Compensation from the state and federal government would be delayed for years, as Republicans and Democrats battled over who deserved it. W. P. Conrad and Ted Alexander suggest that in Franklin County, many families simply chose to move west rather than begin again in Pennsylvania. In Gettysburg, not only was there the carnage of the battle to clean up – where contractor teams under the leadership of local African American Basil Biggs helped dispose of the thousands of human and animal bodies – but the suffering extended for months in the dozens of hospitals surrounding the town.79

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One unexpected impact of the invasion was to change the state’s position on the recruitment of African American soldiers. During the campaign, Pennsylvania’s state government caved in to the demands of the emergency and began to allow recruitment of African Americans for state units. Once the crisis had passed, the state realized that a black volunteer could take the place of a drafted white, and began allowing the recruitment of African American soldiers to fill up U.S. Colored Troops units, and count against Pennsylvania’s draft quota. These soldiers trained at Camp William Penn near Philadelphia and scores of African American men volunteered, particularly from counties like Adams that had not been extensively visited by the earlier Massachusetts recruiters. At least fifty-three African Americans from Adams County volunteered to serve in ten different U.S. Colored Infantry regiments. 80

The Aftermath of the Invasion and the 1863 Pennsylvania Gubernatorial Election

The political struggle between Democrats and Republicans did not cease during the crisis of invasion. Elections were not suspended during the Civil War, and the Gettysburg campaign took place in the midst of a heated battle for Pennsylvania’s governorship. The Democrats wanted to maintain and expand their gains from the fall before, and sensed that incumbent Republican Governor Andrew Curtin was vulnerable. Some considered the battle to be a referendum on the execution of the war. The Democratic candidate was George Woodward, a member of Pennsylvania Supreme Court, and a leading figure in the state’s Democratic party organization. He had a long

80 Johnson, “History of Camp William Penn,” pp. 41-46. James M. Paradis, African Americans and the Gettysburg Campaign (Lanham, Md., 2005), pp. 65-66. It appears that the 1862 recruiters for the Massachusetts regiments only visited communities easily accessible by rail line, since that would be the primary method for transporting recruits to New England. Gettysburg was on a spur which would impose significant delays on recruiters traveling to it.
history of political leadership in the state. He was not a strong orator, though, and the Democratic leadership insisted he stay on the state bench during the campaign, making it impossible for him to speak on his own behalf.81

Some historians believe that because of Curtin’s unpopularity in parts of the state, a stronger Democratic candidate could have defeated him. The Democrats hamstrung themselves, however, by not postponing their nominating convention, which began on June 17, the day after Confederate forces had moved into the state. The convention was held in Harrisburg, which lay within reach of the invading army. Without knowing that the invading army would soon be turned back, and perhaps fearing disaster, the convention declined to nominate General William Franklin, who was perceived as relatively neutral on the war. Woodward, on the other hand, was believed to favor a quick end to the war, and had made a number of controversial wartime rulings, including pronouncing from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court that soldier voting in the field was unconstitutional.82

During the hard-fought campaign, the Republicans released a letter from Major General George McClellan praising Governor Curtin after the battle of Antietam. This letter was solely to thank Curtin for Pennsylvania’s military and logistical help during the campaign, but the Republican press made it seem to be more. McClellan, a Pennsylvanian himself, would have preferred to stay uninvolved from the political campaign, but under tremendous pressure from the state’s Democrats, he released a letter

81 Neely, “Pennsylvania Politics.”
82 Neely, “Pennsylvania Politics;” “The Decision of the Supreme Court,” Compiler, June 2, 1862, p. 1 c. 6; “The Soldiers’ Vote Unconstitutional,” Compiler, June 2, 1862, p. 2 c. 4. As the Compiler pointed out, had the soldier’s vote been prohibited in 1861, Henry Myers would have been elected to the state legislature from the district including Adams County, instead of Henry Busbey triumphing by two votes in a disputed election.
endorsing Woodward at the last possible moment. It was too late to be included in Pennsylvania newspapers before the election, however, and Curtin defeated Woodward by about 15,000 votes, or about three percent of the vote cast.

In south central Pennsylvania, the situation was different. Curtin was a target for criticism because he was titularly the commander of Pennsylvania’s militia, who had been unable to slow the Confederate’s advance in Pennsylvania before the battle of Gettysburg. Also, Democrats blamed him for impeding compensation to the farmers whose property had been damaged by J. E. B. Stuart’s 1862 raid. The implication was that he might do so again in the face of the much greater losses of the Gettysburg campaign. As the campaign became more desperate the Compiler also resorted to its typical election tactics of race baiting. Voters were told to “remember” that it was Woodward who had moved for the insertion of the word “WHITE” in the qualifications for voting in the 1838 constitution, so that now “WHITE MEN DO THE VOTING!” The paper maintained that, “Woodward is the white man’s friend and belongs to the party that believes that this Government was made for WHITE MEN,” and a vote for Woodward was a vote for “WHITE FREEDOM.”

Despite his electoral defeat statewide, Woodward carried south central Pennsylvania. In Adams County, Woodward beat Curtin by 228 votes; in Cumberland, the margin was 641. In Franklin County, a Republican county where the party was under the leadership of the energetic A. K. McClure, Curtin squeezed out a 166-vote majority. Overall, in the three south central Pennsylvania counties, Woodward had a 703-vote

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84 “Farmers of Adams County, Read! General Stuart’s Raid,” Compiler, October 12, 1863, p. 2 c. 3; “White Men, Remember,” Compiler, October 5, 1863, p. 1 c. 5.
majority. Woodward had also carried York County by over 2500 votes, but in Thaddeus Stevens’ Lancaster County, Curtin had a nearly six thousand vote majority. This election continued the trend of Adams County turning Democratic while Republicans were strengthening their position in the state as a whole.85

When This Cruel War is Over: South Central Pennsylvania and the End of the Civil War

In November, President Lincoln visited Gettysburg to speak at the consecration of the National Cemetery. The Sentinel covered the events and minutiae of the day over an entire page of newsprint. The Compiler barely took notice of the visit of the sitting president to the little borough, devoting more attention to Judge Woodward’s declaration that Congress’s draft law was unconstitutional. Woodward’s act would reinforce public opinion that he was a “Peace Democrat;” McClellan’s eleventh-hour endorsement would come back to trouble him in his own campaign in 1864.86

In 1864, while the Republicans continued to try to pin the “traitor” label on the opposition, war weary Democrats also hammered away on their themes, criticizing the administration’s conduct on the war and positions on race. Senator Charles Sumner’s bill to grant equality to African Americans in the District of Columbia was considered a fearful step toward social equality. Radical Republican advocacy of a Constitutional amendment to ban slavery was opposed; so was any proposal to make the abolition of slavery as part of a postwar settlement. Since the nation had existed “happily” with slavery for many years, the Compiler believed that abolition was not a necessity. African Americans were very inferior to whites, the paper said, and not suited for freedom.

86 Neely, “Pennsylvania Politics.”
Besides, Southern whites would not accept abolition in “black majority” districts; to emancipation would guarantee the resistance of twelve million white Southerners to any postwar settlement. Later in the year, south central Pennsylvania’s Democratic Congressman, A. H. Coffroth, openly opposed the Thirteenth Amendment forever abolishing slavery. According to Coffroth, only the states could abolish slavery, and to do so would unleash the “pestilential” effect of four million “ignorant and debased” African Americans “swarming the country.” Even more than a year after Lincoln’s final emancipation proclamation, south central Pennsylvania’s Democratic papers and politicians opposed the abolition of slavery. 87

Just as the Compiler fought the abolition of Southern slavery, it also opposed any steps towards granting Northern African Americans equality. The Compiler bluntly stated that it would be “vitiating the purity of the suffrage” to allow “an inferior and degraded race to partake equally with whites in that and also in all social rights and benefits.”88 As the rhetoric grew more heated, Radical Republicans were labeled “miscegenation agitators,” and the paper bemoaned the fact that African Americans were being “voted into railroad cars” (i.e. being granted equal access to public transit).”89

The Democratic attack on the war effort gained momentum from the swelling casualty lists. The Union Army of the Potomac suffered heavily during its spring offensive in the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor, and so did the south central Pennsylvania units with it. Two local companies of the 138th Pennsylvania had suffered

88 “America for White Men,” Compiler, May 23, 1864, p. 2 c. 2.
eight killed and forty-two wounded during the period from May 5 to June 12, and the 87th Pennsylvania volunteers, which included local residents, also suffered heavy losses. More would fall during the battle of Monocacy in June, when troops under General Lew Wallace delayed Confederate General Jubal Early’s advance on Washington. In response, the Compiler demanded an immediate armistice.

During the 1864 presidential campaign, south central Pennsylvania suffered yet another invasion by the Confederate army. Cavalry forces led by Confederate general John McCausland burned the central portion of Chambersburg in retaliation for houses and buildings burnt by Union General David Hunter in the Shenandoah Valley. Just as in 1863, African Americans were particularly vulnerable to this retribution. Confederate soldiers, learning that one town resident was a school teacher, asked him if he taught African Americans. When he said that he did, they burned his house down. A Republican paper, the Franklin Repository, stated that a former fugitive slave, Daniel Parker, was the only fatality in the burnings. He died when Confederates burned his house down around him.

The Compiler suggested that, in addition to the scorched earth policies of the Union army in Virginia, it was the fugitive slave issue, and the arming of African Americans, which were at the root of the retaliation. There could have been some truth to this. David Hunter was the general who, early in the war, had tried to free the slaves of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, only to have his edict reversed by President

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90 “Letter from the 87th,” Compiler, June 20, 1864, p. 4 c. 1.
Lincoln. Hunter was also involved in an early and abortive effort to arm the fugitive “contrabands” which had come into his lines. General Early, in justifying the Chambersburg burning, supposedly remarked that his men had captured a man within Confederate lines who had authority from the Provost Marshal in Maryland to “decoy Negroes from Virginia” to be used as draft substitutes. Both the Provost Marshal and the man were to profit from the scheme. This incident, however, had occurred months before Early’s invasion.93

With all the destruction the war had brought to the region, and the three major draft calls in 1864, in August the Compiler warned that people voting for the Republican ticket were voting for “war and bloodshed, drafts and taxes” until the abolition of slavery was complete. “No more insane Abolition rule,” the paper demanded. Throughout the summer, the paper urged a policy of peace. It changed its masthead to read “Peace and Union,” and strongly supported the efforts to negotiate an end to the war. The paper rejoiced when Major General George McClellan was nominated on the first ballot at the national Democratic convention. Other local Democrats concurred. The Democratic county convention, meeting in September, condemned the Administration for having “changed the policy of this war from that of restoring the Union to a war of subjugation, abolition and extinction of slavery.”94

The 1864 presidential election was shaping up as a referendum on the war and Lincoln’s leadership. Issues of race also played prominently in south central

Pennsylvania. The *Compiler* complained that Republican supporters of emancipation had averred that freed slaves would remain in the South – but instead, they were migrating north, taking jobs from white laborers, and being treated preferentially over white widows and orphans. The paper urged voters who wanted a “white man’s Government” to “vote for McClellan and Pendleton, on the white man’s ticket.”

The campaign in south central Pennsylvania saw the usual frenetic last minute attempts to sway votes. The *Compiler* suggested that Lincoln’s policies in the Shenandoah Valley would result in retaliation to Adams County if the Confederates invaded again. The paper maintained that McClellan, the savior of Pennsylvania when he had turned back the Confederates at Antietam in 1862, was the man of the hour – now he was the man who could make an honorable peace.

Either the *Compiler’s* arrows found their way home, or they reflected shifting sentiment in the area, or both. When the national elections took place in November, George McClellan defeated Abraham Lincoln in Adams County by over five hundred votes – a large majority for a small county. This was an increase of over one hundred from the Democratic majority in the gubernatorial race the year before; of course, turnout increased in the Presidential election. Although McClellan lost in the state and nationally, the *Compiler* immediately began to position itself for the next campaign. To fulfill their pre-election prophecies, they glumly announced that “the draft wheel was

again in motion.” This was a reference to a supplemental draft in Chambersburg, but the paper implied it was the first of a new wave of drafts.97

As Union military victory became increasingly certain after the victories of the fall, attention shifted to postwar policy, with issues of race at the center. In February, the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery came up again for Congressional vote. It passed 119-56, although when the same measure had come up for vote in June of 1864, it failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority, 96-65. Two Pennsylvania representatives, including Adams County’s A. H. Coffroth, had “switched votes” from June to February. In 1862, the Compiler had hailed Coffroth as the “white man’s candidate;” now, it expressed surprise that Coffroth had “allowed himself to stray” from the “conservative” policy of “NON-INTERVENTION.” The paper predicted that Coffroth “will have no little difficulty in explaining it to the satisfaction of those to whose efforts and votes he was indebted for the seat.”98 Until the end of the war, the Compiler opposed any efforts aimed equality for African Americans, or even to end slavery.

The war did end, but in April 1865, while there was rejoicing as Confederate troops laid down their arms, there was sorrow over Lincoln’s assassination. Many in south central Pennsylvania mourned and there, as in communities throughout the North, the local papers were filled with details of the assassination, the pursuit of Booth, his death, and the trial of the conspirators. With no indication that they noticed the irony, the Compiler printed an “important letter” from John Wilkes Booth in which to justify the

97 “The County,” Compiler, November 14, 1864, p. 2 c. 1; “524!,” Compiler, November 21, 1864, p. 2 c. 1; “The Election,” Compiler, November 14, 1864, p. 2 c. 2; “The Draft Wheel Again in Motion,” Compiler, November 21, 1864, p. 2 c. 6. A supplemental draft was performed when for some reason a community had failed to meet its quota in an earlier draft.
98 Untitled, Compiler, February 6, 1865, p. 2 c. 1.
killing, the assassin repeated a slogan used widely by border Northern Democrats: “This country was formed for the white not for the black man.”99

For three years, the Compiler had fought Lincoln’s policies; now that he was dead, the paper reversed course. It hoped that his assassination would not stop Lincoln’s plan for reconciliation. It noted approvingly that new President Andrew Johnson had told freed African Americans he would prefer them to live in their own country somewhere else rather than in America.100

The bitterness and anger evidenced in south central Pennsylvania during the four years of war did not bode well for postwar efforts to improve the lot of African Americans. The Civil War in south central Pennsylvania had seen an escalating use of racialist rhetoric, a turn by the electorate towards the race baiting Democratic party, increasing concern over fugitive slaves in the guise of “contrabands” fleeing to the North, and significant disruption of both the white and especially the black communities as a result of wartime invasion and military service. The ramifications of these changes would play out in the Reconstruction period and leave the county’s African American residents on the edge of freedom rather than fully within its confines.

100[Untitled], Compiler, May 1, 1865, p. 2 c. 2; Untitled, Compiler, May 29, 1865, p. 2 c. 1.
Chapter 9

After the Shooting: African Americans and South Central Pennsylvania after the Civil War

In April 1865, the long war ended. Vacant chairs and empty sleeves in communities across the North testified to loss; south central Pennsylvania suffered especially. The area’s soldiers had fought and fallen in many of the war’s major engagements. In addition, three times the region had been invaded; in June and July of 1863, it had experienced the devastation that results from two large armies camping, looting, and fighting within it. The 1863 battle of Gettysburg, the 1864 burning of Chambersburg, and to a lesser extent Stuart’s 1862 raid had devastated this region to a greater extent than any other part of the North except Missouri.¹

Having suffered extensively, how would these Pennsylvania communities respond to the end of the Civil War? How would it affect actions and attitudes towards the African Americans among them, whether former fugitives, former soldiers, emancipated slaves, or free blacks? Would abolitionists’ and African Americans’ prewar focus on legal and political change result in legal or political advancement for African Americans after the war, or would the anti-black vision of a Democratic party that used race to rally its constituency? Put another way, while expressions of antislavery sentiment along the border were controversial and contested, Franklin and Adams County had gone, extremely narrowly, for Lincoln. Why did not the prewar abolition organizations,

¹ Confederate irregulars and spies failed to burn down St. Alban’s, Vermont, or Manhattan, giving south central Pennsylvania and Missouri undisputed rights to the most devastated area of the North. For the disruption which accompanied mobilization, see Reid Mitchell, The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home (New York, 1993); and William Marvel, “A Poor Man’s Fight: Civil War Enlistment Patterns in Conway, New Hampshire,” Historical New Hampshire 43 (1988), pp. 21-40.
Underground Railroad activity, and antislavery sentiment result in a greater role and freedoms for African Americans after the war? Similar questions can be asked across much of the North regarding the failure of African Americans to win greater equality after the war. South central Pennsylvania was a distinctive border region, and the only part of the North that served several times as battleground. Still, a brief examination of the postwar experience of its African Americans may suggest why the push for equal rights, such as it existed, generally failed across the North. In south central Pennsylvania, African American aspirations for equality were largely stymied by conservatism, war weariness, racism and anti-black rhetoric, significant demographic shifts, and the effects of wartime dislocations.2

The fugitive slave issue had been particularly relevant to these communities along the border before and during the war. In Chambersburg, soldiers massing to march south in 1861 had been instructed to return fugitive slaves to their masters. During the war, despite resistance from some area residents, the region became a wartime place of refuge for fleeing contrabands, many of whom eventually volunteered for the Union army. Those that remained behind risked organized, systematic efforts at recapture. Instead of several kidnappers with a wagon, in June 1863 a determined army was in pursuit. When area white residents saw first-hand the treatment of fugitive slaves and free blacks by Confederate troops during this campaign, this had caused an outburst of sympathy and solidarity. The *Mercersburg Journal* called the region’s African Americans “free colored citizens,” and the Gettysburg *Star* had labeled Lee’s invading forces “an army of

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kidnappers and horse thieves.” This brief solidarity would not result in a sustained press for full rights for these “colored citizens,” however. This appears to have been a result of a numerous factors. Both the African American and the abolitionist community in south central Pennsylvania were significantly affected by social and demographic changes throughout the region. Another influence involved the border character of the region. Its continued ties to the South, which were so significant to the area’s antebellum identity, also affected the postwar experience. The net effect, both what changed and what stayed the same, severely limited any opportunity for significant advancements in African American civil rights and equality after the war.

In south central Pennsylvania’s abolitionist constituency, many key members had moved on. Some reformers who desired to help African Americans traveled to former Southern states such as Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia. That was where most of the publicized opportunities to help “freedmen” were – in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, or in the Sea Islands project led by former south central Pennsylvania resident J. Miller McKim. Even this geographically distant work did not always meet with approval of conservatives in back home. Rev. Thomas Agnew had moved from Mercersburg to Tennessee to work with the freedpeople. In 1868, he received death threats from the Ku Klux Klan, which won him some sympathy from the Republican papers in Mercersburg. In contrast, a Democratic paper, the Chambersburg Valley Spirit wrote, “if such an order [the KKK] does exist in Tennessee, that they will vastly neglect their calling if they fail to wait on this old sinner – he deserves to be

quietly sent home to glory.” One can only hope that there was some element of humor intended in this chilling advice.⁴

These efforts to help the freedpeople in the South took away some of Pennsylvania’s abolitionists and reformers who otherwise might have worked to ameliorate the condition of local blacks. Probably most did not realize that in some border areas, like south central Pennsylvania, there would be an influx of freedpeople who might need assistance and support as much as emancipated slaves on the Southern plantations. Others did make efforts to help freedpeople relocating to the area. A school for African Americans was started in Adams County by J. Howard Wert; his father, Adam Wert; and a local female teacher, Sallie Broadhead. This rural county could not retain many of its ambitious young men, however, and ultimately J. Howard Wert moved to Harrisburg, where he desegregated that city’s school system in 1898.⁵

Emigration was a regional trend which affected the abolitionist community significantly. As a result of the war and a prolonged recession which struck the area from 1867-1868, numerous merchants and businesses in the region were devastated, and many farmers on marginal lands simply gave up. Due to political pressure by the area’s residents, a Border Claims Commission had been established to recompense south central Pennsylvanians for their wartime losses. It became tied up in politics and squabbles about who should be considered “loyal,” however, and few residents received compensation until 1870.⁶ Many could not wait that long, and farmers, merchants, artisans, and town professionals all moved west, to make a fresh start in a new area. The great westward

⁵ Personal communication, G. Craig Caba, curator of the J. Howard Wert Gettysburg Collection, 2004.
migration out of Pennsylvania is generally considered not to have started until the 1870s, but there is strong evidence that it started in south central Pennsylvania well before then. As early as 1838, one correspondent noted how many of his south central Pennsylvania schoolmates had departed to “the distant west.” Area newspapers routinely carried pieces touting the West’s fruitfulness or remarking on the large number of emigrants headed that way from Carlisle, Hanover, and other places. As was the case in other rural areas, the need for land to establish children on their own farms was a significant motivator, and south central Pennsylvanians had easy access to the routes west.

After the war, this outflow increased. Perhaps emblematic of the region as a whole, Emmitsburg, Maryland, just south of Adams County, Pennsylvania, experienced a 27 percent loss in population between 1860 and 1870 – and only a small percentage of that was due to forced relocation from an 1863 fire. Most was due to voluntary migration. In the early 1870s, there was a massive move west from Cumberland County. As wealthy, prospering businessmen and farmers might have few reasons to move, and the poor probably could not afford it, this migration was mainly made up of middle class families. This is the class from which came many abolitionists, and much Republican party support. The migration likely sapped energy from local relief for freedpeople and any drive for African American equal rights. Joel and Lydia Wierman,

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stalwarts of the region’s Underground Railroad, migrated to Illinois shortly before the Civil War. William H. Wright, a Quaker who helped rescue the Payne family and prosecute Thomas Finnegan, moved to Nebraska in 1857. The descendants of Thomas Creigh, the Franklin County minister who helped win the release of a Mercersburg free black who was captured during the Gettysburg campaign, also migrated to Nebraska. Meanwhile, it appears that southern Pennsylvania families of German descent, who were often a source of strength for both the Democratic party and for resistance to abolitionists, tended to stay and persist to a greater extent than some other rural ethnic groups.

Recently, historian Bruce Laurie has identified rural conservatism and responsiveness to racist appeals as a factor working against long-term growth of the Massachusetts’ Free Soil party. Such conservatism is not a given, however, but a product of historical circumstances. The migration of ambitious, educated rural Pennsylvanians to larger cities and to the West may have had a significant impact on turning the social environment more conservative in rural south central Pennsylvania from 1850-1875.

In addition to the area farmers and businessmen who did not want to rebuild or who sought the opportunities of the west, there must be added some of a mobile group of veterans. The war had opened up a whole new realm of experience and opportunity for rural Northern soldiers. Many of these may not have traveled further than thirty miles

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from home as a boy, and they had now seen thousands of miles of America. One area regiment, the 77th Pennsylvania, had served and fought in Tennessee, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. After having seen new parts of the country, many veterans wanted to move elsewhere instead of return home permanently. Sometimes their land had lain fallow for years. Rather than undertake the difficult task of restoring to productivity land which may have been marginal to begin with, many soldiers determined to move west and expend that same effort on “virgin lands” with sod-busting plows and mechanical reapers, if necessary. Others moved south to buy distressed land at low prices, or moved to the opportunities of the larger cities. War bounties gave these soldiers the cash to get started. This class of migrants undoubtedly included some south central Pennsylvanians who had enlisted with antislavery sentiments.

In addition to the departure of zealous friends of the fugitive and the migration of a significant part of the rural middle class, there were other changes at work. Nationally, there was a split between the followers of William Lloyd Garrison, who considered the work of the American Antislavery Society finished with the war’s successful conclusion, and those of Wendell Philips and Frederick Douglass, who considered it imperative to continue to agitate for African Americans to receive full citizenship. Garrison was a tired sixty when the Civil War ended, and the other abolitionist leaders were aging as well. In the word of Garrison’s latest biographer, the 1870s were “the decade of funerals” for the

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15 Marvel, “A Poor Man’s Fight: Civil War Enlistment Patterns in Conway, New Hampshire.” Marvel shows that farm families, short on labor, often left the poorest fields lie fallow during the war. Sometimes these fields were to be the land of one of the sons, and on returning to the war, he might head west rather than undertake the arduous task of clearing this marginal land. See also Dixon Wecter, When Johnny Comes Marching Home (Cambridge, 1944), pp. 201-207.
movement.\textsuperscript{16} With the loss of the clear-cut goal of abolition, and the aging of the leadership, the drive for abolitionists to fight for equal rights was losing momentum.

Death and aging were laying their hand on south central Pennsylvania abolitionists as well. Most of the leading abolitionists and figures in the Underground Railroad were approaching late middle age or older or dying. For decades, perceptive historians have suggested that considering the impact of aging may help illuminate our understanding of political, social or military leadership.\textsuperscript{17} Different stages in life bring different concerns and energy levels. With the westward migration of many younger abolitionists, the core of abolitionists in Adams County was dwindling and aging.

William Wright and Cyrus Griest died in 1865, and Wright’s widow, Phebe Wright, was 80 at the time of the 1870 census. Most of their daughters had married or moved away as well; one had divorced and married a non-Quaker. One son, Isaac, had died in 1850 in his early 20s, and the other, a noted general of the engineers, would die an alcoholic in Philadelphia in 1882. While the Wrights tried to do their part – shortly after the war, they had reportedly rehired a former fugitive who had worked for them, at her request – they would not have had the energy to lead a new crusade after seeing their lifelong battle against slavery successful.\textsuperscript{18} Benjamin Lundy, a leading light to many abolitionists in south central Pennsylvania, had died in 1839; his sons had moved west from Adams County in the 1830s. John B. McPherson, a key local ally of Thaddeus Stevens, and a
man whose farm was reportedly a stop on the Underground Railroad, died shortly before the war. His son, Republican Congressman Edward McPherson, never moved back to Adams County after he was voted out of office in 1862. Mill owner James McAllister, another abolitionist and Underground Railroad worker, had also died. James Cooper was a moderate antislavery figure at best, but he had prosecuted kidnappers in Adams County courts. He died in Ohio in 1863. Warner Townsend, one of the youngest members of the Adams County Antislavery Society to have his name frequently appear on documents and in the press, had gone through a difficult divorce from William and Phebe Wright’s daughter, Rachel. He was ultimately disowned by the Quaker meeting, and may not have been as involved in the antislavery movement.\footnote{Minutes, Menallen Monthly Meeting of Women Friends, November 20, 1861, Microfilm, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore University. Minutes, Menallen Monthly Meeting, April 15, 1863, September 24, 1863, January 21, 1864, February 18, 1864, Microfilm, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore University. See also Margaret B. Walmer, Menallen Minutes, Marriages, and Miscellany, Quaker Records, 1780-1890 (Bowie, MD: 1992), p. 135.}

This impact of migration and death on the abolitionist community is reflected by John G. Brinkerhoff’s response to C. W. Griest, who wrote to him, inquiring after his antislavery companions. Brinkerhoff’s reply is telling:

\ldots I have made inquiry in regard to the names of your old Antislavery friends, and was unable to learn no more than from my own memory, Josiah Benner was one of your party then, and his son William Benner, who I am acquainted with, now resides in Gettysburg. The others [of] his family have all removed West, so I have lost all sight of them. Robert Youngs [family], from inquiry, have all left. One of his sons left Gettysburg about two years ago and [I] was unable to learn where he went, him to[o] I was acquainted with, Michael G. Clarkson, left Gettysburg many years ago, and removed to Chambersburg Pa, his children were then young, have not heard any thing from him since, R. W. Middleton I also knew, he too left Gettysburg many years ago, and my impression is he removed to Harrisburg Pa [the former editor of the Star had first gone to Lancaster], Charles Epley I know nothing about, H. Denwiddies son Hugh, left Gettysburg years ago for the west and none of the name left here that I can learn, William A. Wadsworth, I can learn nothing of any of
them left here, W. J. Sloan, I knew a John Sloan, now Deceased., who had
two sons and several Daughters but I have not seen or heard any thing
about the sons for several years. Adam Werts who was also one of your
party then is now deceased, his widow is living in Gettysburg. They had
one son, Professor John [Howard] Werts, who resides in Harrisburg, Pa.…
Some of Josiah Benner’s sons and one Daughter went I think to Kansas,
but I do not know their Post Office address…

Granted, this letter was written in 1891, many years after the antislavery agitation,
and only covered some of the movement in Adams County. Still, it shows how not just
single individuals, but entire families moved to the west or to larger cities.20

In addition to the migration of a noteworthy proportion of the white population,
there had been a significant outmigration of African Americans during the Civil War.
Hundreds of African Americans were forced to flee Lee’s invasion, and some were seized
by Lee’s army and carried away in 1862 and 1863. Peter Vermilyea’s research suggests
that for Gettysburg, if the African Americans did not own real estate (only about 27% of
the African Americans on the tax rolls did), they were not likely to return to the region
after the danger from the Confederate army passed. Many area African Americans had
very portable job skills: agricultural day laborer, barber, hostler, carriage driver, artisan,
domestic, laundry woman, and boarding house keeper. If needed, they could start again
in other places. Because of the repeated rumors of invasion, and actual incursions by the
Confederate army until the summer of 1864, some who fled during the Gettysburg
campaign may not have felt safe returning to south central Pennsylvania until after the
war ended. By then, they may have set down roots elsewhere.21

20 John G. Brinkerhoff to Charles W. Griest, April 4, 1891, Adams County Historical Society, Folder 190
(Anti-Slavery Movement 1828-1865), 190.05, Members, Anti-Slavery Movement.
21Peter C. Vermilyea, “The Effect of the Confederate Invasion of Pennsylvania on Gettysburg’s African
American Community,” Gettysburg Magazine 24 (2001), pp. 112-125. Gerald Eggert discusses similar
Some of those seized in the raids also did not return for many years, if at all. In 1863, a local minister claimed that several Franklin County African Americans had been seized by Confederate forces, including two young men named James Filkill and Findlay Cuff. Filkill never reappears in the Franklin County census, although there is a James Filkill listed in Philadelphia in 1870. Findlay Cuff is not in the 1870 Franklin County census either, although he does reappear in the 1880 census. This suggests that either he was missed in 1870, or he was elsewhere: in the South, perhaps, or in Philadelphia.22

Jack Hopkins, the Pennsylvania College janitor whose flight had forced the school to appoint another person to ring the bell, did return. But he owned a house in town.23

Captures and flight, however, were not the only factors weakening the post-war African American community in south central Pennsylvania. Many of its leading young men had joined the Union army – over 80 in the Mercersburg area joined the prestigious Massachusetts 54th and 55th Infantry alone.24 A number of the recruits were temporary migrants, but many were sons of the area’s African American families. Jack Hopkins’ son Edward joined the U.S. Colored Troops. Some of these returned if their families had solid roots in the area – Edward did. But others, like their white brethren, may have wished to make a start elsewhere. An 1873 historical novel by Ellwood Griest, an abolitionist journalist from Lancaster, suggests that some of southern Pennsylvania’s

African American troops chose to stay in Florida at war’s end, at least temporarily.\textsuperscript{25} Whether African American Union soldiers chose to return and stay after their service ended is important, because in other eras, African Americans veterans played a key role leading the community to struggle for equal rights. After World War II, they were significant in preparing the soil for the civil rights movement of the 1960s; Civil War veterans may have been able to play a similar role. For example, the noted underground railroad conductor Harriet Tubman, who had served in the Union Army in a combat capacity and was traveling on a government pass, had a violent confrontation with a conductor trying to force her into a baggage car on a train from Philadelphia to New York. She also spoke out against Philadelphia’s segregated streetcars when she lectured. African American soldiers in south central Pennsylvania may have also been able to confront injustices, we are just not sure whether enough returned to form a critical mass.\textsuperscript{26}

The migration of African Americans created a void at the lower ends of the socioeconomic ladder that was soon filled. Many African Americans relocated to the region after the war; some from Maryland and Virginia, especially from the Shenandoah Valley, but others came from North or South Carolina.\textsuperscript{27} Just as before the war, fugitive slaves would enter Pennsylvania as the first free state north of the Mason-Dixon line, now after the war, Pennsylvania would be the first historically free state that freed people would encounter as they moved north. South central Pennsylvania would be the first part

\textsuperscript{25} Ellwood Griest, \textit{John and Mary: The Fugitive Slaves} (Lancaster, PA, 1873), pp. 153-163.
\textsuperscript{27} Peter Vermilyea has found that 90\% of the African Americans who moved to Gettysburg from 1863 to 1870 were natives of Maryland or Virginia. Vermilyea, “Jack Hopkins’ Civil War,” p. 14. See also Eggert, \textit{Harrisburg Industrializes}, p. 252.
of the state that many would enter. For ex-slaves from the Shenandoah Valley and North Carolina, the region had a familiar form of agriculture. As new arrivals, however, they did not have the established relationships of their predecessors. It may have been harder for them to push for equal rights and full citizenship in the North after many of them had just come out of slavery. Furthermore, these newcomers were also divided. Some migrants from Virginia resented those from the Carolinas and vice versa. In 1847, Aaron Constant had organized a petition which claimed to include the names of every African American resident in Gettysburg. In 1867, it may not have been possible to gain such unity, although the need for it was just as great.28

Through all of this transformation, the region’s border character remained. Ties to the South persisted, and many within the border community desired rapid rapprochement with Southern customers, kin, and friends. In addition to these long-standing connections, the aftermath of the war brought a new one. Gettysburg’s emerging status as a tourist destination, a pilgrimage site for visitors and mourners from both North and South, also helped contribute to a desire for sectional reconciliation which ignored African Americans. Evidence of this conciliatory sentiment appears very early; the “romance of reunion” identified by scholars as an important later expression of reconciliationist sentiment in the North came early here.29 For example, Levi Mumper, a former Union soldier and the owner of a Gettysburg photography studio, promoted a vision of reunification in the year the war ended, shown in Figure 9.1:

Figure 9.1: Levi Mumper’s Post-War Reconciliationist Photograph


William Frassanito, a distinguished historian of Civil War-era photography, believes that Mumper created this image to sell to tourists visiting the town’s battlefield. It is a fascinating picture of reconciliationism. In place of wartime images of Gettysburg, such as Alexander Sullivan’s photograph of the dead laid out in rows on the battlefield, Mumper’s picture shows South and North coming together again, acknowledging each other’s dignity and valor. The Union is upheld and preserved, of course, as the presence of some young daughters of the town posing as Union maidens assures us. African Americans, although freed, are represented in the supplicating figure of a child, gazing imploringly at its Union liberator.\(^{30}\) Such a pose would not be threatening to many town

\(^{30}\) William Frassanito, *Early Photography at Gettysburg* (Gettysburg, 1995), p. 403-405. Little is known about Levi Mumper or this picture. Mumper himself was a Union Civil War veteran who had returned to Gettysburg to take up photography. The Mumper name is Germanic in origin, and he was born in the southern part of the county, where many Germans lived. Most of Adams County’s German population voted Democratic.
residents who saw African Americans as inferior and child-like figures of Northern benevolence. Looking carefully, it can be observed that the Confederate soldier in the picture is not armed. In perhaps a menacing portent to the region’s African Americans, however, the Confederate “child” is armed with the saber of his presumed father. Perhaps Mumper believed that such arming of the next generation was needed to keep local African Americans, threatening as soldiers and “contrabands” during the war, in their place of child-like docility.

Mumper’s portrait presents one version of the future; the anti-black rhetoric in the pages of the Democratic newspaper the Republican Compiler contributed another. The same invective employed against “wooly head” John C. Fremont in 1856, and then against “nigger regiments,” “contrabands,” and emancipation during the war, was now turned against African American aspirations to full citizenship. This rhetoric broadly reflected the views of the area’s now dominant political party, the Democrats. In one example, the Compiler gleefully recorded details of a Democratic celebration in 1868. One display in a parade had come from southwest of Gettysburg. According to the paper,

Among other things, they had a “Freedman’s Bureau,” consisting of an old case of drawers, with two persons representing negroes sitting on top and enjoying themselves with a fiddle, whilst a white man was at work sawing wood in the rear part of the wagon. An accompanying banner stated that while African Americans would not work, “White Men Work! White Men Pay Taxes!,” therefore, “White Men at the Ballot Box!” The paper stated it was a “good hit” enjoyed by all.31

In short, the social and political atmosphere of the region was transitioning. Residents were weary of the war and its death and destruction. With the war’s end, the

slavery issue was gone and the sectional crisis was over. The coalition of former Whigs, Republicans, Freesoilers, antislavery Democrats and Know Nothings that had put real political power behind at least moderately antislavery positions in the 1850s was finished. While the Republican Party was strong, the party as a whole in Pennsylvania was gradually shifting towards a support of business and mercantile interests and away from the concerns of the Northern farmer or African Americans. It also faced a powerful state Democratic party, who wrote into their 1866 and 1869 Pennsylvania platforms their support for continued, complete disenfranchisement of African Americans. They were willing to contest the election on it.

The Republican party favored African American men’s voting rights, but in southern Pennsylvania their support was tepid at best. African American men were not granted the right to vote in Pennsylvania until the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870. Along the border, the social position of African Americans had long been contested, and the war, the contrabands issue, and fears that emancipated slaves would move north had increased tensions over Pennsylvania’s sizable African American population. Pennsylvania’s Democrats opposed the Fifteenth Amendment, claiming that it infringed on the traditional right of a state to control “the privilege of suffrage within it.” When the state finally did pass it, some Dickinson College students wanted to attend a dual purpose public gathering to celebrate the amendment’s passage and to memorialize recently deceased former professor John McClintock. While he had resigned as professor


several years after the riot associated with his name, McClintock had served as a trustee at Dickinson until 1859. His name still had abolitionist associations, however, and the school forbade the students to go. When they did so anyway, scores were suspended. That led to a student strike, which became known as the “Rebellion of 1870.” Eventually the school, facing ruin, had to restore most of the suspended ringleaders. Their actions had exceeded much of local sentiment, however.34

While some members of the Republican party were keenly interested in African American civil rights, in bitterly contested southern Pennsylvania, the party was not willing to risk swing voters by taking a radical line. Political considerations also worked against the achievement of equal rights for African Americans.

Thaddeus Stevens was the great exception. The Republican congressman from Lancaster who had lived several decades in south central Pennsylvania and maintained life-long connections and business interests there. Soon death came to Thaddeus Stevens’ door too, however. Stevens passed away in August 1868, refusing to be interred in cemetery which did not permit the burial of African Americans, and with his commitment to the “Equality Of Man Before His Creator” inscribed on his tombstone.

Within days of Stevens’ death, Jack Hopkins, the College’s African American janitor, died as well. The Pennsylvania College trustees, at their August 1868, remembered both of them. The resolutions passed to commemorate Hopkins lauded his demeanor and his service to the College. Hopkins had been a beloved figure on campus

and respected by the administration. The resolutions were to be published in the local papers, and Hopkins was honored by a procession for his funeral, a rare honor for Gettysburg College.

The resolutions for Stevens, reported by Edward McPherson, only acknowledged his efforts to further education generally. They said nothing about his lifetime of service, about the thousands of dollars he had raised in state appropriations to the College in some of its darkest days. They also did not acknowledge that much of the land for the college had been sold to them by Stevens. While 20,000 turned out for Stevens’ funeral in Lancaster, in what may have been the largest funeral held in Pennsylvania to that time, the College administration wanted to distance themselves from Stevens’ Reconstruction policies. They had made this abundantly clear when they dedicated Stevens Hall on campus, a year before.

Stevens had reportedly helped fugitives in person and in the courtroom in his Gettysburg years; later, he represented area abolitionists like Daniel Kaufman. Hopkins, too, had reputedly worked on the Underground Railroad in Adams County, helping in particular when fugitives needed to be spirited through Gettysburg. His name is affixed to the 1847 Gettysburg petition, asking that the state legislature protect fugitive slaves.


37 August 13, 1868, Minutes, Board of Trustees, Gettysburg College, v. 2, 1854-1879, pp. 113-114, Gettysburg College Special Collections. “Funeral of Thaddeus Stevens,” Mercersburg Journal, August 28, 1868, p. 2 c. 2. “Addresses Delivered at the Laying of the Corner Stone of Stevens Hall,” Gettysburg, August 8, 1867 (Gettysburg, 1867), pp. 16-22, 23-26, 30; Charles H. Glatfelter, A Salutary Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985 (Gettysburg, 1987), p. 115
Hopkins’ and Stevens’ deaths, along with those of William Wright, James McAllister, Cyrus Griest, removed five key individuals with links to the prewar aid to fugitives.

Over time, the character of the region changed - or perhaps it did not progress while so much around it changed. So many links to the South still existed that ex-Confederates found the larger region congenial. Several of them created resort homes in the 1880s. Colonel Walter Taylor, Gen. Robert E. Lee’s trusted aide, purchased a home in Cascade, Maryland just yards from the border with south central Pennsylvania. Many other Confederates came to visit the area during the summer.\textsuperscript{38} In Gettysburg, the town tried consciously to attract Southern tourists, both to the battlefield and to the springs that were briefly popular with northern and southern visitors.\textsuperscript{39}

Even local literature reflected a growing conservatism. In southern Pennsylvania, early post-war work memorialized the Underground Railroad and the acknowledged the agency of local African Americans. Ellwood Griest, a Lancaster resident who had participated in an anti-Fugitive Slave Law meeting in 1850, penned a novel set in the area. In Griest’s \textit{John and Mary: The Fugitive Slaves}, it is a party of local African Americans, not white Quakers, who rescue the fugitives of the title. They also intimidate a local slave catcher into leaving the region – an incident based on a real pre-war event in Pennsylvania. A decade later, George Alfred Townsend, a noted Civil War correspondent, settled in Maryland’s Catoctin region, below south central Pennsylvania. In \textit{Katy of Catoctin} (1884), he celebrated the Underground Railroad. For literary reasons, Townsend moved many of the events from south central Pennsylvania to north-central

\textsuperscript{38} “Summer Home of Lee’s Trusted Staff Officer for Sale,” \textit{Battlefield Journal}, July 2001.
Maryland. An important character based on Thaddeus Stevens is present, as well as a fictional daughter of Pennsylvania Governor Joseph Ritner, a sort of “white witch” who helps fugitive slaves. Unlike in Griest’s novel, African Americans are ciphers in Townsend’s book, but they make their own decisions, as one black character shows when he refuses the entreaties of the protagonist to abandon the Harpers Ferry raid.40

As the distance to the events of the war increase, however, the area’s literary output grows more romanticized, such as in Elsie Singmaster’s A Boy at Gettysburg (1924). Singmaster’s family had moved to Seminary Ridge around the turn of the 20th century, and she spent much of her life producing novels and short stories about the area. Swords of Steel (1934) included a fictional account of the capture of Kitty Paine. In A Boy at Gettysburg, the hero, Carl Mottern, works at a mill that is a station on the Underground Railroad, a fictionalized version of James McAllister’s mill. He hides fugitives from slave catchers and leads them to the Quaker settlements deeper in the county. A fictionalized Mag Palm is present, as “Maggie Bluecoat,” an African American guide to fugitives. She cooks for a local family and is definitely not the “Mistress/Harlot” the Gettysburg census taker recorded her as. In the novel, Mag does not fight off the attack of her kidnappers, as she did in 1858. Instead, she requires the aid of Carl and another white boy to rescue her.41 In sum, in Singmaster’s well-meaning book, African Americans have become part of the local color – with embarrassing details like prostitution removed, and folksy songs added - and the real events they were involved in have been subtly altered to emphasize the agency of the white characters.

40 George Alfred Townsend, Katy of Catoctin (New York, 1886).
John W. Appel’s *The Light of Parnell* (1916) shows a complete reversal of sentiment from the earlier novels of Griest and Townsend. While the book is ostensibly about the Franklin County’s Underground Railroad, it actually condemns the institution as illegal. The hero, Tom, cannot be tempted to join this illicit activity or aid the Harpers Ferry expedition. He only lifts a finger to help free slaves once the Civil War begins. The illegal activities are primarily engaged in by a weak-willed woman easily swayed by abolitionist rhetoric. The African American characters are caricatures; Frederick Douglass is reduced to a nameless “distinguished colored gentleman” who says little in a pivotal conference on the Harpers Ferry raid. The book’s leading African American character, light-skinned Moses Preston, tries to pass himself off as white, is wracked with guilt over this deception, and dies a horrible death.42

Unlike the other books, *Light of Parnell* has little literary merit, but it is significant because it shows shifting attitudes towards African Americans and the region’s legacy towards the fugitive slave. The Appel family was prominent in antebellum Franklin County, and John Appel’s father, Theodore, had written an essay advocating African colonization as a class project in 1840. The family relocated to Lancaster in the 1850s, where Theodore and later John were presidents of Franklin and Marshall College. The attitudes expressed in *Light of Parnell* may have been typical, and they did not support equality for the region’s African Americans. Instead, through the character of Moses Preston, they condemned attempts by African Americans to assimilate into the larger white society. They also show how, in the racial environment of the early 20th century, an emphasis on “law and order” was now being used retrospectively to

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condemn the Underground Railroad. Helping fugitive slaves is now portrayed as a crime against the Constitution, and even noted figures like Frederick Douglass become nameless bit players in a drama of white soldiers upholding the Union and law and order.

This fictional limitation of African Americans reflected what was actually occurring in south central Pennsylvania. As time passed, the lack of opportunity for region’s African Americans caused some to despair. In the 1879, Mag Palm, now almost blind, was rescued from a pond where she had nearly drowned while attempting suicide. Was she trying to escape her physical sufferings, or the diminished role that this significant Underground Railroad figure likely had after the war?43

As early as 1869, huge mobs had attempted to lynch an African American in Franklin County. By the 1920s, in many ways the area was little different from parts of the Jim Crow South. Cross burnings accompanied that decade’s battle to integrate Adams County’s schools. In Gettysburg, the Ku Klux Klan held a massive rally, with little condemnation from the area residents – in fact, many are believed to have joined in. The Klan rallied at a campground near the national cemetery – in short, in one of the most visible locations near the battlefield. In a bizarre piece of local theater, the Klan members even showed up – in robes and hoods – at a local A.M.E. church meeting to donate $115 to help pay off the church’s mortgage. The money may have been welcome, but their action reinforced racial hierarchies. In the early 1930s, the appointment of Dr. Louis King as an archaeologist at the National Battlefield Park met with pronounced resistance because, according to the National Park Service, the white people of Gettysburg were not used to socializing with black people. During the 1950s,

43 “Attempted Suicide,” Newspaper Clipping, Folder 140, Blacks in Adams County, Adams County Historical Society. A reference to the upcoming school year for Pennsylvania College dates this to 1879.
none of the town’s thirty-six boarding houses or hotels accepted black lodgers, and only
three of fourteen restaurants would serve African Americans food, and then only on a
case-by-case basis. Even in the 1970s, only threatened action by the town’s African
Americans resulted in employment opportunities in the drugstores and stores in the
“white” part of town. As recently as the 1980s, long time African American residents
complained that there was still little black presence in the retail areas.44

Similar conditions existed in Franklin County. Educational and social
opportunities for African Americans were sharply limited through much of the twentieth
century. Football teams would not play opponents with African American players. After
World War II, African American children from Waynesboro still traveled to Hagerstown
for haircuts because the local barbershop was “whites only.” Even into the late 1960s
real estate agents would steer black and white clientele to their proper parts of town.45

The cost of these policies was significant lost potential. For generations, Franklin
County’s African Americans could do little more than run “colored boardinghouses,”
haul bricks, work in the Frick factory, or be a minister to the local African American
congregation. Sometimes the racial tensions spilled out into open violence and murder,
as during the fatal 1969 race riots in nearby York, Pennsylvania, which convulsed the

44 Joseph Santora, “Race and Violence in the Valley: The 1869 Attempted Lynching of Cain Norris,” in
Church Gets Klans Gift Sunday Evening,” Star and Sentinel, [1921], Adams County Historical Society,
Black History File. Clark Foreman to Harold Ickes, 8 September, 7 November, 9 November 1933, New
Deal Agencies and Black Americans, papers, microfilm, reel 14, cited by Patricia Sullivan, Days of Hope:
Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era, p. 54. Shelley Jones and Harry Stokes, “Black History in Our
Community,” Pamphlet, January 15, 1987, Adams County Historical Society. One master’s student did an
extensive, 150-page study of de facto segregation in Gettysburg. Donald H. Becker, “Trends in Negro
Segregation in Gettysburg from 1900 to 1953,” (Master’s thesis, University of Maryland, 1953), Adams
County Historical Society, Black History File.
45 Oral History interview with Rev. Philip Lowman and Earl “Cookie” Johnson, Waynesboro,
whole region. Those riots received national attention, but locally, they were only a flare-up of what one writer described as a “two-year intermittent war.”46 This area, that magic land across the Mason-Dixon line, had always been dangerous for fugitives and free blacks alike. With the Civil War’s conclusion, many of those who had helped fugitives were gone or leaving, but at least one hundred years of living “on the edge of freedom” remained for the area’s African Americans. This time the “edge” was not the border between north and south, but the sharp political divide between a grudgingly extended second-class citizenship and full and equal political and civil rights.

### APPENDIX A: SELECTED FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS, 1818-1828

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Ad Placed/First Run</th>
<th>Date of Escape</th>
<th>Owner Name/Location</th>
<th>Slave Name/Sex</th>
<th>Age (about)</th>
<th>Build/Demeanor</th>
<th>How Left</th>
<th>Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/17/18 (3/18/18)</td>
<td>Sunday night</td>
<td>Edward Stevenson</td>
<td>David (M)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Slender</td>
<td>“Had on… other clothing which it is deemed unnecessary to mention, as he may change his dress—having a free mother living who has very likely furnished him with the means to do so.”</td>
<td>$40. $10 if caught within 10 miles, $20 twenty miles, if caught out of state and brought home, or secured in jail, the above $40.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1818-19 not completed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Escape</th>
<th>Owner Name/Location</th>
<th>Slave Name/Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Build/Demeanor</th>
<th>How Left</th>
<th>Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/14/20 (3/15/20)</td>
<td>George Shield</td>
<td>Moses (M)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$50 if secured in any jail where he can reach him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/18/20 (4/19/20)</td>
<td>Isaac Peirce</td>
<td>Sam Dover (M)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Genteel</td>
<td>Extensive new clothing described; “He stole a very fine bright sorrel horse in Georgetown… and was seen near Frederick, on the evening he went away, with a … young black woman, who had went off him, and who has free papers – both on the same horse. It is supposed they will pass for man and life. SAM has been used to the care of horses, driving wagon and carriage – and will probably seek for such employment.”</td>
<td>$50 for securing in jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Ad Placed/First Run</td>
<td>Date of Escape</td>
<td>Owner Name/Location</td>
<td>Slave Name/Sex</td>
<td>Age (about)</td>
<td>Build/Demeanor</td>
<td>How Left</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/17/20 (10/18/20)</td>
<td>9/18/20</td>
<td>Philip Graft Straban Township, Adams Co., PA</td>
<td>Sam Armstrong (M)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Stout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/5/20 (12/6/20)</td>
<td>10/30/20</td>
<td>Peter Shriner Liberty Town, Fred. Co., MD</td>
<td>Thomas Brown (M)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2/21 (1/10/21)</td>
<td>9/2/20</td>
<td>Levy Phillips Hyattstown, Montgomery Co., MD</td>
<td>Sophia (F)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Can read print “No doubt she is somewhere in Adams County, Pennsylvania, as she has been there before.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/9/21 (1/10/21)</td>
<td>12/23/20</td>
<td>Daniel James Daniel Kiler Near Liberty-Town, Fred. Co., MD</td>
<td>Bob (Robert Brookes) (M)</td>
<td>Not given</td>
<td>stout</td>
<td>“It is supposed he has procured a pass from some free negro.” “most likely he will change his dress.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/8/21 (5/16/21)</td>
<td>4/15/21</td>
<td>James A. McCreary Gettysburg</td>
<td>John Hubbard (M)</td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>Light mulatto boy</td>
<td>Unclear if slave or indentured servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/5/21 (6/27/21)</td>
<td>3 years ago</td>
<td>Evan Dorsey Linganore, Fred. Co., MD</td>
<td>Philip (M)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Strong built</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Ad Placed/First Run</td>
<td>Date of Escape</td>
<td>Owner Name/Location</td>
<td>Slave Name/Sex</td>
<td>Age (about)</td>
<td>Build/Demeanor</td>
<td>How Left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/5/21 (6/27/21)</td>
<td>12/23/21</td>
<td>Daniel James Near Liberty, Linganore, Fred. Co., MD</td>
<td>Bob (Robert brooks) (M)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Ambidextrous</td>
<td>“He is supposed to be some where in the State of Pennsylvania”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/14/21 (6/27/21)</td>
<td>Saturday night last</td>
<td>John Clabaugh Middleburg, MD</td>
<td>Walter (M)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Singular walk</td>
<td>“He has no pretension to freedom except while running away.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/28/21 (9/12/21)</td>
<td>7/21/21</td>
<td>Ephraim Gaither Brookeville, Mont. Co., MD</td>
<td>John Trip (M)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Light made</td>
<td>Raised on Eastern Shore; may get there via Balto. or Annapolis; “The Editors of the Harrisburg Chronicle, York Recorder, and Lancaster Journal will insert the above to the amount of $1…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/1/21 (9/19/21)</td>
<td>8/25/21</td>
<td>Thomas Kernan Carroll’s Manor, Tuscarora, Fred. Co., MD</td>
<td>Harrison (M)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brought from Eastern shore; “As he as lately been much with persons from Taney-Town, and is ignorant of the country, it is possible that he may have got direction that way into Pennsylvania.” Ran away from Mr. Patterson’s farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/8/22 (1/9/22)</td>
<td>12/26/21</td>
<td>Lloyd Luckett Near Newtown, Fred.Co. Md</td>
<td>Frank Hill (M)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I have no doubt he has made for Philadelphia” “It is supposed said Negro is in the neighborhood of Gettysburg.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Ad Placed/First Run</td>
<td>Date of Escape</td>
<td>Owner Name/Location</td>
<td>Slave Name/Sex</td>
<td>Age (about)</td>
<td>Build/Demeanor</td>
<td>How Left</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
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<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/8/22 (1/9/22)</td>
<td>12/29/21</td>
<td>Peter Wolford</td>
<td>Isaac (Cato) (M)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Stout Plays violin Speaks German &amp; English</td>
<td>“He has perhaps fifteen or twenty Dollars of money with him – and will probably endeavor to pass for a free man.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Franklin Township, York Co., PA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/5/22</td>
<td>12/25/21</td>
<td>Stephen G. Wooden</td>
<td>Caleb Bladen (M)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Stout</td>
<td>Took coat and clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/23/22</td>
<td>Reisterstown MD (20m from Balto.)</td>
<td>Kinsey Bladen (M)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Not so stout</td>
<td>Took coat and clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Caleb Bladen (M)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/16/22</td>
<td>Before 10/5</td>
<td>Henry Frazier</td>
<td>Peter (M)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Not very dark</td>
<td>Peter took a variety of clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/5</td>
<td>(Adm. of James Fenley) Frederick Co., MD</td>
<td>Nat (M)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/25/22 (12/11/22)</td>
<td>4/1/22</td>
<td>Wm I. Johnson</td>
<td>Luke Adams (M)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>Burnt barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6/15/22</td>
<td>Barnsville, Montgomery Co., MD</td>
<td>Samuel Adams (M)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td>Supposed to have stolen horse. Coins counterfeit money – 400 half dollars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luke Adams (M)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Ad Placed/ First Run</td>
<td>Date of Escape</td>
<td>Owner Name/ Location</td>
<td>Slave Name/Sex</td>
<td>Age (about)</td>
<td>Build/ Demeanor</td>
<td>How Left</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/30/22 (12/11/22)</td>
<td>11/30/22</td>
<td>Roger Johnson Bloomsbury Forge (near Sugar Loaf Mtn), Frederick Co. MD</td>
<td>Alick (M)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Stout</td>
<td>$60 for securing so I may get him again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4/23 (4/9/23)</td>
<td>3/1/23</td>
<td>Vachel W. Dorsey Near Liberty, Fred. Co., MD</td>
<td>Jesse Chub (M)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I think it probable he will change both name and clothing; possibly he may have a counterfeit pass.” $50 for securing out of state; $30 within state; reasonable charges if brought home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/23 (10/1/23)</td>
<td>9/6/23</td>
<td>Dennis Plummer Montgomery Co., MD</td>
<td>Dennis Plummer (M)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Stout</td>
<td>$10 in Mont. Co.; $30 in Balto. or MD; (ad says $50 reward)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/9/24 (11/10/24)</td>
<td></td>
<td>James Stephens Frederick Co, MD (about 10 miles from Frederick)</td>
<td>Stephen (M)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Mulatto</td>
<td>Went off in company of Charles, belonging to Jacob Whip $40 reward for lodging him in jail. (believes $50 reward issued for Charles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Ad Placed/First Run</td>
<td>Date of Escape</td>
<td>Owner Name/Location</td>
<td>Slave Name/Sex</td>
<td>Age (about)</td>
<td>Build/Demeanor</td>
<td>How Left</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21/25 (5/4/25)</td>
<td>4/17/25</td>
<td>Peter Gardner</td>
<td>Sam Taylor (M)</td>
<td>Stout</td>
<td>“it is supposed that he may be lurking… in the neighborhood of Boonsborough, MD., but will, in all probability, make for Pennsylvania. He may… have obtained forged papers and will endeavor to pass for a free man.”</td>
<td>$50 for securing him in jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/12/25 (7/13/25)</td>
<td>7/12/25</td>
<td>C. Birnie</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>“… no doubt he will change his dress.”</td>
<td>To be lodged in Balto. or Frederick Co. Jail. $50 if taken in state, $100 if out of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/13/25 (9/28/25)</td>
<td>9/7/25</td>
<td>John Brien</td>
<td>James Johnston (M)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Stout</td>
<td>$50 for securing in jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/25/25 (11/2/25)</td>
<td>10/1/25</td>
<td>Wm A Carter</td>
<td>William</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>slender</td>
<td>$50 for securing in jail out of state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/1/26 (3/1/26)</td>
<td>2/19/26</td>
<td>John Sheets</td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Stout</td>
<td>$25 for securing in jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Ad Placed/First Run</td>
<td>Date of Escape</td>
<td>Owner Name/Location</td>
<td>Slave Name/Sex</td>
<td>Age (about)</td>
<td>Build/ Demeanor</td>
<td>How Left</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/1/27 (5/2/27)</td>
<td>4/16/27</td>
<td>Leonard Smith</td>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Stout</td>
<td>Lengthy description of clothes. Took with him a small dog “He has no doubt made for Pennsylvania.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40 mi W of Cumberland, Allegheny Co., MD</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/30/28 (11/12/28)</td>
<td>10/18/28</td>
<td>John Harry</td>
<td>Jim Hall</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Well built</td>
<td>“He went away with three other Negroes, and it is supposed that he and a boy belonging to Mr. John Waggoner, separated from their companions somewhere about Gettysburg, Penn.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Sat. night)</td>
<td>Hagerstown, MD</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency falls off markedly after 1828
Appendix B  1828 South Central Pennsylvania Petition Opposing Slavery in the District of Columbia

Of the United States of America, in Congress Assembled:

The Memorial

Of the undersigned, Citizens of the State of Pennsylvania

Respectfully Represents —

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THAT they, in common with their fellow-citizens, greatly deplore the rapidly growing evil of African Slavery, which pervades a large portion of our otherwise happy Country. There being at least two millions of a colored population in the United States, most of them held in a state of abject slavery, in such a degraded situation as is more likely to make them enemies, than friends to our government; and nearly doubling in number every 25 years – These are considerations, sufficient to rouse the energies of every true Patriot, to unite in adopting suitable measures to remove the evil, before it becomes too great to admit of a remedy. The slave trade was declared Piracy in the early part of the present century, by the united declaration of the American States; and certainly the crime can be no less, to deprive our natural born citizens of their freedom, than persons born on the coast of Africa. If the Africans had been reduced to slavery as a punishment for crimes, of which they had been fairly and legally convicted, that could not have effected the rights of their offspring, for our Constitution declares that “no attainder,” even “of treason shall work corruption of blood, or forfeiture, longer than during the life of the person attain[t]ed.” And seeing it is a duty enjoined on us by the highest authority, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to do unto others as we would that they should do unto us, which clearly implies that our rights and privileges are equal; it is evidently a continuation of the same Piratical practice, to deprive our American born Citizens of that state of liberty and equality, which they [sic] unanimous declaration of the United States has declared to be their unalienable right.</th>
<th>Such a situation as to make them become the natural enemies of our government and institutions, and thereby laying as many of our white citizens, liable every day of their lives, to be called to arms, in order to awe, or compel them to remain in subjection. Many of the latter having no interest in the system which lays them under that liability; &amp; receiving no equivalent for the dangers, and difficulties of their situation. And seeing that this system of oppression is tolerated to a considerable extent in the district of Columbia, which is placed under the exclusive jurisdiction of Congress; in this spot, which above all others, ought to be dedicated to freedom, and purged from all unwarrantable oppression; in the District, where the Representatives of a free republican people meet in council; where travelers from distant parts, and Ambassadors from Foreign Nations, come to transact business at the Capitol, or Temple of Liberty: that they should find the District, not only abounding with this species of oppression, but made the mart; or emporium of slavery, is highly disagreeable to the American People. For these reasons, and many others that might be given, your memorialists solicit the attention of Congress to the subject; praying for the enactment of a law; that all children born in the District of Columbia after a certain day, shall be free. And as the law prayed for, only applies to unborn posterity, to prevent more persons from being enslaved and debased: to persons unto whom the claim of purchase can by no means extend, and far less any principle of right; it can therefore, of course, be no infringement of right. The undersigned, therefore, earnestly entreat your honorable body, to take this subject under serious consideration, and adopt such measures for removing the evil, as its importance demands.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmon</td>
<td>[Illegible – torn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Illegible, pencil signatures – prob. 6]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel Wierman</td>
<td>[Illegible, torn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Harris</td>
<td>Sam...[torn]... stock[Samuel Fahnestock?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm C. Wierman</td>
<td>Thos. John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. E. Pearson</td>
<td>John Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Harris</td>
<td>Saml White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saml Hendricks</td>
<td>Wm R Stewart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Ocker</td>
<td>Daniel Wickes (Fickes?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis Fickes</td>
<td>Wm Gardner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Snider</td>
<td>Jacob Gardner Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Wilby [Willey?]</td>
<td>John Wierman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Danl Sheffer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter Ferree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jno. Howard Sheffer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix C
1847 Gettysburg African American Petition

House File, 71st Session –1, 1847
RG-7, Ser. 11, Folder 7
[January 15, 1847]

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Pennsylvania
The undersigned, inhabitants of Gettysburg Adams county, in the state of Pennsylvania, earnestly desirous to free this Commonwealth from all connection with Slavery, respectfully ask:
1. That you will repeal all laws which permit the holding of slaves for any length of time within the limits of this State.
2. That you will repeal all laws of this Commonwealth which direct or authorize our judges, magistrates, sheriffs, constables, jailors, or other officers, to aid in the capture and removal from this State of persons claimed as fugitive slaves.
3. That you will propose such measures to Congress as will have the effect either to abolish Slavery in the United States, or release this Commonwealth from the legal obligation to aid in its continuance. [Printed].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAMES</th>
<th>NAMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Sibbs</td>
<td>Jesse A. Sibbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Sibbs</td>
<td>Benjamin Devan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry William</td>
<td>Isaac Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Palm</td>
<td>Nathaniel Russel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Palm</td>
<td>Ephraim Palm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan Dashett</td>
<td>John Hopkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony McClure</td>
<td>Samuel Rilly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Disnick</td>
<td>Patty Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Caucus</td>
<td>Trecy McCibins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremibah</td>
<td>Margart Disnick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Armstrong</td>
<td>Isabella Russel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca McClure</td>
<td>Samuel Armstrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Consey</td>
<td>Martha Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parasilla Consey</td>
<td>Emanuel Crage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Freeland</td>
<td>Judy A. Wagoner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Freeland</td>
<td>Sarah Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissaia Thomas</td>
<td>Dicey Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy A. Dorcas</td>
<td>Sarah Armstrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Madock</td>
<td>Joseph Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Williams</td>
<td>Rebecca A. Sibb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Williams</td>
<td>Amy Devan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane A. Thomas</td>
<td>Benjamin Devan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Thomas</td>
<td>Henderson Brian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAMES</td>
<td>NAMES</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary M. Pearman</td>
<td>William Harris</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen Harris</td>
<td>Ephraim Hopkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Harris</td>
<td>Samuel Cole</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abram Brian</td>
<td>Margaret Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinah Butler</td>
<td>Jesse A. Sibb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Pearman</td>
<td>Solomon F. Sitt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Constant</td>
<td>Sarah E. Armstrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Butler</td>
<td>Harriet Palm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upton Johnson</td>
<td>Angeline Armstrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Carnel</td>
<td>Manerva A. Williams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank Thomas</td>
<td>Emily G. Q. Cole</td>
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<td>William H. Williams</td>
<td>Abram Brian</td>
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<td>Judy A. Roberson</td>
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<td>Elizabeth Brian</td>
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<td>Sarah A. Williams</td>
<td>Mary J. Skelly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams Myers</td>
<td>Elisha J. Devan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Myers</td>
<td>Ann L. Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Palm</td>
<td>Dennis M. Washington [Williams]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred Palm</td>
<td>John Stanton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harriet Drowary</td>
<td>Nathaniel Harris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Harris</td>
<td>Greenberry Stanton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Cole</td>
<td>Moses Brian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hetty Brian</td>
<td>William Hopkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanamary Jackson</td>
<td>Edward Hopkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses Brian</td>
<td>William Devan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet Drowary</td>
<td>Catharine Miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary J. Brian</td>
<td>Asburry Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisha Devan</td>
<td>Thomas Armstrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John M. Constant</td>
<td>Elizabeth Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah A. Thomas</td>
<td>Joahab Chiler</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“These are the names of the colored people of Gettys Burg Adams county. Aaron Constant.”

Endorsement: Aaron Constant & 110 others.
Appendix D
1846 Adams County Petition  [Data from 1850 Adams County population census]
House File, 70th Session –1, 1846
RG-7, Ser. 11, Folder 7

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

The petition of the undersigned, inhabitants of Pennsylvania, respectfully asks,
that you will be pleased to enact a law making it a penal offense for citizens of
Pennsylvania to aid Slaveholders, or their agents, in arresting fugitive Slaves. [Printed]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Dwell.</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Age '50</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Real Est.</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>1383</td>
<td>1491</td>
<td>William Wright</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>Quaker (Q)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1471</td>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Warner Townsend</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York/Lancaster</td>
<td>48a</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>Wm W. Wright (of Columbia)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>101a</td>
<td>1369</td>
<td>1477</td>
<td>Oliver Garretson</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Wheelmaker</td>
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LEGEND:
Q = Quaker (as identified in the Menallen Meeting Minutes)
Q? = Possible Quaker, sharing the same last name as a Quaker family identified in the
Menallen minutes

NOTES
1 = William Wright of Adams County's only son was named William Wierman Wright. He would have been 22 at the sign of this petition signing. Because I have seen the signature of William Wright of Columbia, I believe that this signature may represent him instead.
2 = According to genealogical records, there appears to have been a William Mendenhall married in Adams County in 1844 (he would have been 46 at the time of this petition. His father, Aaron Mendenhall, would have been 77. It is not clear that these are the two individuals here, however – they are not in the 1850 Adams County census.
3 = This is the only Isaac Tudor listed in Latimore in 1850 census. However, in 1870, there is a listing for an Isaac Tudor, age 45, $7000, who would have been 25 in 1850 census if living in Adams.
4 = Possibly Martha Tudor, d. of Isaac and Mary, 19, but she would have only been 15-16 at the time of the petition.
5 = Possibly Susan Robinette, 43, married to George, farmer, 60., $4500, both also on page 107b. I judged Sarah more likely because Allen Robinette, who she lived with, did sign, but George did not.
6 = The census gives the last name of these two individuals as “McCleary,” but in the absence of a Jane and John McCreary, these seem plausible.
- Most of names come from Menallen, Latimore, or Huntingdon Townships
- Many Myers families in this area – impossible to identify specific ones
- Some McCreary’s in area, some Garretsons. Barzillae Garretson is listed in York in 1860.
- Josiah Penrose appears retired. His son, Elisha, has $4000 in real estate and lives with him.
- One of the L. Robinettes could be Laura, who lives with Allen, listed as 22 in 1850.

APPROXIMATE AGES OF SIGNERS IN 1846

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Approximate age of signers = 43 years old.

Approximate ages calculated by subtracting four from the 1850 census figure.
Appendix E
1861 Franklin County Pro-Colonization Petition

RG-7, Senate File, Folder 85, Petition 484 (sent in with identical petition from Adams County) [Not dated, but petition is from March 1861]

To the Honorable, the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Pennsylvania

The undersigned, citizens of Pennsylvania, take the liberty respectfully, but earnestly, of requesting you to make an appropriation toward the passage and settlement in Liberia of such of the colored population of this State as are desirous to remove to that interesting and successful African Republic.

During the years 1859 and 1960, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society colonized in Liberia one hundred and eight of the colored residents of this State. At this time there are ninety of the same class impatiently awaiting to avail themselves of the like boon. The Society has not the means to respond favorably to the applications of these and others constantly reaching it.

This population should be liberally assisted to escape from their depressed condition here, and become citizens and freemen of Liberia. There they attain a position in which they benefit themselves and their race; demonstrate their capacity, advance African civilization, suppress the foreign slave trade, and open to this country an extensive theatre for a legitimate, peaceful and valuable commerce. [Standard pro-PCS form petition][Data from 1860 Franklin County population census]

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--- All signers born in Pennsylvania except for Jacob Lortz (Germany), James King (Scotland), and George R. Colliflower (Cauliflower), Maryland


**APPROXIMATE AGES OF PETITION SIGNERS**

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Average approximate age = 40

Approximate ages calculated by adding one to the figures in the 1860 census.
Appendix F
1861 Adams County Pro-colonization Petition (with #484, identical petition from Franklin)

RG-7, SENATE FILE, Folder 85, Petition 484(B)
No endorsement, but petition is March 1861

To the Honorable, the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Pennsylvania

The undersigned, citizens of Pennsylvania, take the liberty respectfully, but earnestly, of requesting you to make an appropriation toward the passage and settlement in Liberia of such of the colored population of this State as are desirous to remove to that interesting and successful African Republic.

During the years 1859 and 1960, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society colonized in Liberia one hundred and eight of the colored residents of this State. At this time there are ninety of the same class impatiently awaiting to avail themselves of the like boon. The Society has not the means to respond favorably to the applications of these and others constantly reaching it.

This population should be liberally assisted to escape from their depressed condition here, and become citizens and freemen of Liberia. There they attain a position in which they benefit themselves and their race; demonstrate their capacity, advance African civilization, suppress the foreign slave trade, and open to this country an extensive theatre for a legitimate, peaceful and valuable commerce. [Standard pro-PCS form petition]

[Data from 1860 Adams County Census, genealogy.com]

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**NOTES:**
- There are a number of other John Scotts in Adams. This one seemed plausible.
- Moses McLean was a one-term Congressman from Adams in the early 1840s.
- Two possible John Culps: one that is listed (168/89/109), and John Culp of MI., listed in census index as John M. Culp, 43, Merchant, 1500 1850 born in PA.
- Individual indicated as T. R. Russell maybe J. R. Russell. In which case, could be John Russell (107/274/278), 22, Farm Laborer, or James Russell (105/259/261), 61, Surveyor, both in Franklin Township.

APPROXIMATE AGES OF PETITION SIGNERS

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Average approximate age = about 40 years old.

Approximate ages calculated by adding one to the figures in the 1860 census.
Appendix G
ADAMS COUNTY 1861 Pro-colonization Petition
(Second petition, shorter, includes some of same names as 484B)

RG-7, SENATE FILE, Folder 85, Petition 486

McClure
Mar 22/61
Fin

To the Honorable, the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Pennsylvania

The undersigned, citizens of Pennsylvania, take the liberty respectfully, but earnestly, of requesting you to make an appropriation toward the passage and settlement in Liberia of such of the colored population of this State as are desirous to remove to that interesting and successful African Republic.

During the years 1859 and 1960, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society colonized in Liberia one hundred and eight of the colored residents of this State. At this time there are ninety of the same class impatiently awaiting to avail themselves of the like boon. The Society has not the means to respond favorably to the applications of these and others constantly reaching it.

This population should be liberally assisted to escape from their depressed condition here, and become citizens and freemen of Liberia. There they attain a position in which they benefit themselves and their race; demonstrate their capacity, advance African civilization, suppress the foreign slave trade, and open to this country an extensive theatre for a legitimate, peaceful and valuable commerce. [Standard pro-PCS form petition]

[Data from 1860 Adams County population census]

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<th>NAME</th>
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401
- Samuel Forney has a Maryland born wife, Eliza

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**APPROXIMATE AGES OF PETITION SIGNERS**

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Average approximate age = 41.5

Approximate ages calculated by adding one to the figures in the 1860 census.
Appendix H
1861 Doyleston, Bucks County Pro-colonization Petition (#358)
RG-7, SENATE FILE, Folder 8-, Petition 385
March 1, 1861

To the Honorable, the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Pennsylvania

The undersigned, citizens of Pennsylvania, take the liberty respectfully, but earnestly, of requesting you to make an appropriation toward the passage and settlement in Liberia of such of the colored population of this State as are desirous to remove to that interesting and successful African Republic.

During the years 1859 and 1960, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society colonized in Liberia one hundred and eight of the colored residents of this State. At this time there are ninety of the same class impatiently awaiting to avail themselves of the like boon. The Society has not the means to respond favorably to the applications of these and others constantly reaching it.

This population should be liberally assisted to escape from their depressed condition here, and become citizens and freemen of Liberia. There they attain a position in which they benefit themselves and their race; demonstrate their capacity, advance African civilization, suppress the foreign slave trade, and open to this country an extensive theatre for a legitimate, peaceful and valuable commerce. [Standard pro-PCS form petition][Data from 1860 Bucks County population census]

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<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>Doylestown B (327/156/156)</td>
<td>W. W. H. Davis</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Ed. Of paper</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHK</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thos Crump?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Edward L. Rogers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil.</td>
<td>14th Ward (101/647/740)</td>
<td>Enos Prizer</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Furniture Cars</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES:
- All data from 1860 census. For approximation of ages at the time of the petition, add one year to values above
- There is another possible Lewis Worthington, living in Bucks County, a 30 year old farmer, worth ---/1500. As this L. Worthington lived in Doylestown, he was chosen.
- Another possible John Beatty, 158/809/843, 50, Farmer, 1000, 100, Pa., lives in Falls township. Above Beatty was chosen because he lived in Doylestown.
- Two possible Edward Rogers, one, 52, Shomaker, 3000 --- born in England, lived in the 22nd Ward of Phil. (23/148/146). A second, 21, Clerk, born in Pa., lived in 8th Ward of Phil. (442/359/422).
- Two possible George McCoy’s live in Philadelphia as well.

APPROXIMATE AGES OF PETITION SIGNERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Average approximate age = 39 years old.

Approximate ages calculated by adding one to the figures in the 1860 census.
Appendix I
1861 Newtown, Bucks County Pro-Personal Liberty Law Petition
RG-7, SENATE FILE, Folder 8-, Petition 375

[Handwritten] To the Senate & House of Representatives of the State of Pennsylvania

The undersigned inhabitants of the State of Pennsylvania respectfully ask that you will
repeal no part of the Antikidnaping [sic] Law: and that you will not reenact the old
Comity Law --- [The Comity Law is a name for the law which allowed Southern
slaveholders to hold their slaves in Pennsylvania for up to six months]

[Data from 1860 Bucks County population census]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co.</th>
<th>Township/Brgh</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Age ’60</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Real Est.</th>
<th>Pers. Prop.</th>
<th>Birth-place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(541/290/325)</td>
<td>Hannah A. White</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>H(?). B. Linton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(591/290/325)</td>
<td>Anna L. White</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>Halis (A?)H. Trego</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>H A Trego</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
<td>Elizabeth Y. Linton</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Wife of farmer, 54, 10,000/3000</td>
<td>Pa.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>Lwr Makefield</td>
<td>Isaac B Brown</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>2800</td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(558/420/420)</td>
<td>Emma Linton</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
<td>Smith Stradling</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>N? W? Willard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>Sev. Mariann Vanhorn’s</td>
<td>Maryann Vanhorn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co.</td>
<td>Township/Brgh (Pg/House/Fam)</td>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>Age ‘60</td>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>Real Est.</td>
<td>Pers. Prop.</td>
<td>Birth-place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>Newtown (534/238/264)</td>
<td>John Linton</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Gentleman</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emily H. Stradling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jane Linton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>Newtown (533/238/263)</td>
<td>Anna M. Linton</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Wife of farmer, ---</td>
<td>2800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(240/290/315)</td>
<td>Abbie A White</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(541/290/325)</td>
<td>Lydia White</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(533/239/265)</td>
<td>Joseph Cunningham</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>7800</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(541/290/325)</td>
<td>Oscar White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(534/239/265)</td>
<td>Rach(a)el Cunningham</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>[Prob. mother of farmer]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(235/197/206)</td>
<td>Richard Janney</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>Pa.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>Newtown (542/292/326)</td>
<td>Mary C. Cunningham</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>[w/ farmer]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>(533/239/265)</td>
<td>Mary J. Cunningham</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>[d. farmer]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>Newtown (542/293/327)</td>
<td>Silas Car(e)y</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mont gomer y?)</td>
<td>Plymouth (741/481/495)</td>
<td>Elijah Lukens</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Farm Hand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pa.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thos Janney</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pa.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES:
- All date from 1860 census, except on two Thomas Janney’s. For approximation of ages at the time of the petition, add one year to values above.
- Two Thomas Janney’s not found in census, but information on them found in genealogical records.
**APPROXIMATE AGES OF PETITION SIGNERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
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<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average approximate age = 41 (average age of male signers 47)

Approximate ages calculated by adding one to the figures in the 1860 census.
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“The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War,” an electronic archive (http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu)
David G. Smith received his B. A. in American Government from the University of Virginia in 1986, and his Master’s Degree in History from the University of Virginia in 1992. He received his Ph.D. in American History from Penn State University in 2006. He was the recipient of a prestigious University Graduate Fellowship from Penn State. He has also received funding from the George and Ann Richard Civil War Era Center at Penn State, and an Albert J. Beveridge travel grant from the American Historical Association. He was chosen to be a participant in the Pew Graduate Summer Seminar on the American Civil War at Notre Dame University.

Mr. Smith has published a scholarly essay, “Race and Retaliation: The Capture of African Americans During the Gettysburg Campaign” in B. Wyatt-Brown and P. Wallenstein, eds., Virginia’s Civil War (University of Virginia Press, 2005). He has written two scholarly book reviews, has been the lead author on three technical market studies and the co-author of another, and has also written for the Baltimore Sun. In addition to his academic conference presentations, he has presented his work on the Underground Railroad and the capture of African Americans during the Gettysburg campaign to audiences of the interested public and amateur historians. He has also taught American history at Penn State University, and lectured on the British Industrial Revolution and the Second World War.

Mr. Smith is married to his wife, Valerie, and has a daughter, Caroline. He currently works for Booz Allen Hamilton, a Northern Virginia strategy and technology consulting firm.