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DETROIT AND MICHIGAN

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The Metropolis Illustrated

A CHRONOLOGICAL CYCLOPÆDIA OF THE



PAST AND PRESENT

INCLUDING A FULL RECORD OF TERRITORIAL DAYS IN MICHIGAN
AND THE ANNALS OF WAYNE COUNTY

By *SILAS FARMER, City Historiographer*

"native born, and to the manner born"

Second Edition—Revised and Enlarged

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

SLAVERY AND THE COLORED RACE.

SLAVERY began almost with the settlement. The Indians who gathered near the fort brought with them captives taken in battle, and some of these were transferred to the French. In 1760 there were both Indian and African slaves in Detroit. Most of the Indian slaves were from the Pawnee tribe, and a few from the Osage, Choctaw, and other western tribes, who had been captured in war and sold to French and English residents. The Indians made excellent servants and commanded good prices. At the time of the capitulation it was stipulated that the French inhabitants should keep their negroes, but they were to restore those belonging to the English. The following copies of letters from an old manuscript letter-book of Phyn & Ellice, in possession of the Buffalo Historical Society, give an idea of the spirit of these olden times, and detail the methods of sale and the prices paid for slaves for this market :

SCHENECTADY, 7 July, 1760.

Mr. H. Levy,—

Before this reaches you we hope every former order will be completed. Above we send you a small memorandum which we beg you 'll execute immediately on receipt. * * * We shall be pleased to hear how beaver is selling. * * * If you have wampum, pipes and moons, you may send 'em by first opportunity, and we 'll make a trial of them at Detroit this winter. * * *

Yours, &c.

P. & E.

P. S.—Do not fail to purchase the blacks by first opportunity, as the person for whom they are, has contracted to deliver them at Detroit early in the fall.

SCHENECTADY, 23d Aug., 1760.

Mr. James Stirling, Detroit.

Sir,—

Your favor, 29th June, attending your order, we had the pleasure to receive, and immediately thereon J. P. made a jaunt to New York, with a view to be particular and expeditious in making up the goods. We now inclose you Invoice per L—, the loading of six boats is under the direction of James McDonald, who is engaged to proceed with them to Detroit. * * * We have tried all in our power to procure the wenches and negro lads, but it 's impossible to get any near your terms. No green negroes are now brought into this Province. We can purchase negroes from eighty pounds to ninety pounds, and wenches from sixty pounds to seventy pounds. If such will be acceptable, advise and you shall have them in the spring, and perhaps under, if we can meet with Yankees in the winter.

With great esteem, yours,

P. & E.

SCHENECTADY, 13 August, 1770.

Mr. Levy :

Sir,—

We have received two negro boys ; the oldest will do for Mr. Stirling, at Detroit, and is entered in our Order book. But we are entirely at a loss what to do with that fat-gutted boy, having orders for none such for any of our correspondents, and we don't by any means want him for ourselves. * * * Pray, are not bills of sale necessary with these African gentlemen ?

We are, &c.,

P. & E.

SCHENECTADY, 22 March, 1771.

Mr. Carpenter Wharton :

Sir,—

Upon your arrival at Philadelphia, please advise us by letter addressed to the care of Mr. Samuel Franklin, Jun., if you can purchase for us two negro lads from fifteen to twenty years, for about fifty pounds, New York currency, each. They must be stout and sound, but we are indifferent about their qualifications, as they are for a Frenchman at Detroit. * * *

Yours,

P. & E.

To Mr. John Porteous, Detroit :

DEAR SIR,—

We have contracted with a New England gentleman for some green negroes to be delivered here the first of August, and then your wench will be forwarded, together with a negro boy, in case she may some time hereafter choose a husband. We apprehend he will be useful to you, or advantageous about the sloop, or you can dispose of him as you find best. The price is fifty pounds each.

Yours, &c.,

P. & E.

The official returns made to the governor-general in 1773 showed that there were then ninety-six slaves at the settlement along the Detroit ; five years later there were one hundred and twenty-seven. After another interval of five years the number was reported at one hundred and seventy-five, and in 1782 there were seventy-eight male and one hundred and one female slaves.

Among other old records at Detroit there is a document given by John Askin, grandfather of the late E. A. Brush, dated September 9, 1766, and saying, " I set at liberty and give full freedom unto my Pawnee slave Monnette, which I had from Mons. Barrussa at Michilimackinac." On October 19, 1794, the same Mr. Askin bought of James May a negro man Pompey, for forty-five pounds, and on January 3, 1795, he sold him to James Donaldson for fifty pounds.

The American State Papers (Volume I., page 146) contain an interesting account of an effort to have slavery legalized in this region. The facts were as follows: On November 22, 1802, Governor Harrison issued a proclamation notifying the people of an election to be held in the several counties on December 11. Delegates were then to be elected to a convention called for December 20, at Vincennes; the main object of the convention to be the consideration of the question of securing the repeal or suspension of Article VI. of the ordinance of 1787, which prohibited the holding of slaves in the Territory. No representation was solicited from Wayne County, probably because it was so well understood that Michigan would soon be a separate Territory that it was deemed unnecessary to consult its citizens on a question of this character. Governor Harrison presided over the convention, and it was decided to petition Congress to suspend the said article for ten years. It is an interesting fact that the celebrated John Randolph of Roanoke, the chairman of the Congressional Committee to whom the petition of the delegates was referred, made a report declaring that "the labor of slaves is not necessary to promote the growth and settlement of colonies in that region. * * * The committee deem it highly dangerous and inexpedient to impair a provision wisely calculated to promote the happiness and prosperity of the northwestern country and to give strength and security to that extensive frontier." After hearing the report, Congress refused to suspend the articles, and the Territory was preserved to freedom.

In tracing the question through the years, we find, in a letter, dated April 2, 1803, that William Elliott, of Sandwich, requested James Henry, of Detroit, to keep Mr. Ormsby's man in jail a few weeks until he could sell or dispose of him.

At the time of the fire in 1805 there were six colored men and nine colored women in the town. That their numbers increased is evident, for in 1807 Governor Hull organized a company of negro militia. Many of the older citizens had one or more slaves. Joseph Campau owned ten at one time. One of them, nicknamed Crow, used to ascend the steeple of St. Anne's Church and perform numerous gymnastic tricks for the amusement of those who gathered beneath.

The importation of slaves was discontinued after September 17, 1792, the Canadian Parliament, by law of that date, directing that no slaves should thereafter be introduced, and that all born thereafter should be free at the age of twenty-five. The ordinance of 1787 had previously provided that slavery should not exist in the Northwest Territory. At that time, however, this region was not under control of the American Government, and there was

no barrier to the holding of slaves at Detroit. After its surrender in 1796, slave owners at Detroit continued to hold their slaves under the Jay treaty of November 19, 1794, which provided that the inhabitants of the Territory surrendered to the United States should be protected in their property. The question as to whether slaves could be legally holden was adjudicated in 1807.

A case came before the Supreme Court of the Territory in which Richard Patterson, of Sandwich, sought to apprehend as slaves Joseph Quinn and Jane, then residing in Michigan. The case was tried, and on September 26, 1807, Judge Woodward delivered an elaborate opinion against the claimant, on the ground that slavery was not admissible in Michigan "except as to persons in actual possession of British settlers within this Territory on the 11th day of July, 1796." Those who had possessed slaves under British rule continued to hold them, and the official census for 1810 shows that, at that time, seventeen slaves were held in Detroit. On March 11, 1818, the assessor of taxes for Wayne County gave notice that the Court of General Quarter Sessions of the peace for said county had made negro and mulatto slaves ratable for taxes for the current year. The census for 1830 showed that there were thirty-two slaves in Michigan, but by 1836 all the slaves were either dead or manumitted. Advertisements for runaway slaves appeared in the Gazette as late as 1827.

The feeling of a portion of the citizens in regard to the colored race found expression in the Act of April 13, 1827, which provided that after May 1 the names of all colored persons should be registered in the county clerk's office; and no blacks were to be permitted to reside in the Territory unless they could produce a certificate that they were actually free. The certificate was to be placed on record, and twelve and one half cents paid therefor. The colored people were also required, within twenty days, to file bonds, with one or more freehold sureties, in the penal sum of \$500, for their good behavior; and the bondsmen were expected to pay for their support in case they were unable to support themselves. If this law was not complied with, the blacks were to be sent out of the Territory. The same law provided penalties for kidnapping. No attempt was made to enforce the law until after the riot of 1833, and then the colored people fled to Canada. The history of that riot is as follows: On June 14, 1833, Thornton Blackburn and his wife, who had resided here nearly two years, were claimed and arrested as fugitive slaves from Kentucky. They were taken before a justice of the peace, who directed an officer to take charge of them and deliver them to the claimant. During their examination before the justice, a crowd of colored people

collected in great excitement, and threatened to resist the execution of the law. The alleged slaves were, however, conveyed to the jail, and the crowd dispersed. The next day, which was Sunday, the agent of the owner sought to have the slaves delivered up, but the sheriff, fearing a disturbance, declined. During the day a number of colored persons were permitted to have access to the prisoners, and one woman was allowed to remain in the cell with the female slave till after dark. The latter exchanged clothing with her visitor, and thus made her escape. Meantime the colored people, armed with clubs, assembled in large numbers on the common near the jail, and showed a determination to attempt a rescue; but after the departure of the steamboat in the evening they dispersed, as it was evident that the slaves would not be removed. On Monday they again assembled in increased numbers, gathering in groups in the neighborhood of the jail, armed with clubs, stones, and pistols. There was also a large number of them on the wharf where the steamboat lay. A little before four o'clock in the afternoon, the sheriff went to the jail, and a carriage was driven up to convey Blackburn to the boat; but he was hardly seated before the negroes attacked the carriage; the sheriff then attempted to convey him back to the jail, but as he was going in the negroes made a rush, rescued the slave, put him in a cart, and he escaped to Windsor. He was then arrested by the Canadian authorities and lodged in Sandwich jail. They were requested by the State authorities to deliver him up, but refused to do so, and he was soon set at liberty.

During the *mélée* Sheriff Wilson was dangerously wounded. The excitement in the city was intense, and several colored persons were arrested. There were no sufficient means of preserving order, and Governor Cass, then Secretary of War, who happened to be in the city on a visit, ordered a company of troops from Fort Gratiot to proceed to Detroit to "aid the civil authority in support of the laws." As affording further and more permanent protection, the citizens, at a public meeting, on July 10, decided to establish a city watch, "to consist of sixteen persons, to continue until the trial or discharge of the colored persons who are now under arrest for riotous conduct."

Public sentiment became increasingly opposed to slavery, and on April 26, 1837, the Detroit Anti-Slavery Society was organized. The constitution contained the following articles:

Article 1.—This association shall be called The Detroit Anti-Slavery Society, and shall be auxiliary to the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society.

Article 2.—The object of this society shall be the entire abolition of slavery in the United States of America, and the elevation of our colored brethren to their proper rank as men. While it admits that each State alone has, by the constitution of the

United States, the exclusive right to legislate with regard to slavery within its own limits, its aim shall be to convince all our fellow citizens, by arguments addressed to their understanding and consciences, that slave-holding is a crime in the sight of God, and that the duty, safety, and best interests of all concerned require its immediate abandonment.

Article 3.—Any person not a slave-holder, or engaged in the traffic of slaves, may become a member of this society by signing its constitution. * * *

Article 7.—The annual meeting of this society shall be held on the anniversary of the emancipation of the British West Indies.

The officers of the association for 1837 were: Shubael Conant, president; Edward Brooks, Edwin W. Cowles, and Cullen Brown, vice-presidents; Charles Henry Stewart, secretary; George F. Porter, treasurer; William Kirkland, Alanson Sheley, and Peter Boughton, executive committee. In 1839 Robert Stewart was president, and A. L. Porter, corresponding secretary. The society was in existence only a short time, but its spirit remained, and its principles grew increasingly popular.

In January, 1842, the ex-slave, Henry Bibb, came to Detroit, and in 1844 and 1845 he lectured in Michigan under the auspices of the Liberty Association, a political organization which sought to promote the election of anti-slavery candidates. Horace Hallock was president, Cullen Brown, vice-president, and S. M. Holmes, secretary.

On September 18, 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act. It provided that slaves might be arrested in any State, appointed special officers to secure their arrest, and directed that the testimony of fugitives, in any trial growing out of their arrest, should not be admitted. This law greatly incensed many citizens, and increased the strength of the anti-slavery sentiment. The proximity of Canada, where slaves became free men, caused Detroit to become a noted point of departure, and fugitive slaves were constantly passing through the city, and frequent, and sometimes successful, efforts were made by their owners to capture them. In October, 1850, the arrest of a colored man named Rose created so great an excitement that, at the request of the mayor, General Schwartz called out three volunteer companies to preserve the peace; and on October 8, 1850, the thanks of the Council were tendered to John Ladue, then mayor, for his action in the case.

The attempts to retake fugitive slaves were in the main unsuccessful, for the majority of the people were opposed to slavery, and though the law upheld them, the slave-holders were foiled and outwitted. There was a complete chain of persons, extending to the slave States, who were organized for the relief and transportation of fugitive slaves. A paper in their interest, called the *Voice of the Fugitive*, was published, first at Sandwich and then at Windsor, by Henry Bibb. The issue of November 5, 1851, contained the following notice:

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD.

This road is doing better business this fall than usual. The Fugitive Slave Law has given it more vitality, more activity, more passengers, and more opposition, which invariably accelerates business. We have been under the necessity of tearing up the old strap rails and putting down the regular T's, so that we can run a lot of slaves through from almost any of the bordering Slave States into Canada, within forty-eight hours, and we defy the slaveholders and their abettors to beat that if they can.

We have just received a fresh lot to-day of hearty looking men and women, on the last train from Virginia, and still there is room.

In order to aid the runaway slaves a Refugee Home Society was organized at Detroit, and officered by the active members of the Liberty Association. The society bought a large quantity of land back of Sandwich, and aided in settling nearly fifty families. Its operations covered the period from 1854 to 1872.

In order to hinder the working of the Fugitive Slave Law, the Legislature of Michigan, on February 13, 1855, passed a law prohibiting the use

STOCKHOLDERS OF THE UNDERGROUND R. R. COMPANY

Hold on to Your Stock!!

The market has an upward tendency. By the express train which arrived this morning at 3 o'clock, fifteen thousand dollars worth of human merchandise, consisting of twenty-nine able-bodied men and women, fresh and sound, from the Carolina and Kentucky plantations, have arrived safe at the depot on the other side, where all our sympathising colonization friends may have an opportunity of expressing their sympathy by bringing forward donations of ploughs, &c., farming utensils, pick axes and hoes, and not old clothes; as these emigrants all can till the soil. N. B.—Stockholders don't forget, the meeting to-day at 2 o'clock at the ferry on the Canada side. All persons desiring to take stock in this prosperous company, be sure to be on hand.

Detroit, April 19, 1853.

By Order of the
BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

FAC-SIMILE OF HAND-BILL OF UNDERGROUND RAILROAD. (Half size.)

On December 3, 1851, the paper contained this item:

PROGRESS OF ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY.

In enumerating the arrivals of this week we can count only seventeen, ten of whom came together on the Express train of the Underground Railroad. This lot consisted of a mother with six children, and three men. The next day there came four men, the next day two men arrived, and then one came alone. The latter tells of having had a warm combat by the way with two slave catchers, in which he found it necessary to throw a handful of sand in the eyes of one of them; and while he was trying to wash it out he broke away from the other, and effected his escape.

The above fac-simile reduced, half size, of a hand-bill of that day, shows the spirit and humor that were sometimes indulged in.

of the county jails to detain persons claimed as fugitive slaves, and directing the prosecuting attorneys in the several counties to defend them. On March 12, 1859, John Brown arrived in Detroit, with fourteen slaves from Missouri. One of these slaves gave birth to a son while on the journey, who was named John Brown, and lived for many years in Windsor. Besides the slaves, John Brown had five of his own men with him. By a most remarkable coincidence, or as the result of a pre-arranged plan, Frederick Douglass, the colored orator, was present in Detroit, and lectured on the same evening that Brown arrived. After the lecture Douglass and Brown, with George De Baptiste, William

Lambert, John Richards, Dr. J. Ferguson, William Webb, and a few others, met at the house of William Webb, who was then living in the building now known as 185 Congress St. East, and held a preliminary meeting which resulted in the organization of the Harper's Ferry raid. Their plan was to make the vicinity of Harper's Ferry a place of rendezvous, and there assemble the fugitive slaves in sufficient numbers to protect them in their freedom. The treachery or folly of one of their number, who made known their plans, forced them to make a premature movement, and the result is a matter of general history.



THE JOHN BROWN HOUSE.

The Emancipation Proclamation was one of the legitimate results of the meeting in Detroit. The first celebration in honor of the day of its issue was held on January 6, 1863, at the colored Baptist Church.

One of the darkest pages in the history of Detroit is the record of March 6, 1863. The events that led to the doings of that day are as follows: A mulatto named William Faulkner, had been arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to prison for life for an alleged outrage on a little girl. The war with the South was then in progress; a draft was feared, and the ignorant and vicious were glad of an opportunity to vent their ill-nature on a race which was

claimed to be the cause of the war. Faulkner was arrested on February 26. His trial began on March 5, and on that day, while he was being conveyed back to jail, he was struck on the head with a paving-stone and knocked down. The mob which surrounded him then sought to seize him, but the officers succeeded in getting him inside the jail. The next day he was again taken to court. The trial was concluded and he was sentenced. While he was being conveyed back to jail, a squad of the provost-guard, who were aiding the sheriff, were attacked. They fired, and one man was killed. The mob now became infuriated, and an attack was begun on the colored people. Many of them were fearfully beaten; their buildings were set on fire for the purpose of burning those who were inside; and paving-stones were torn up and thrown at those who tried to escape, thus driving them back into the flames. Many had always doubted Faulkner's guilt, and after seven years had passed, the doubt becoming almost a certainty, a pardon was procured, and on Friday, December 31, 1869, greatly to his surprise, he was released. A number of gentlemen contributed a sum of money, and he was established at a stand in the market, which he occupied until his death, about seven years after he was pardoned.

This riot caused great excitement, but it was the last manifestation of the prejudice against the colored people, who were soon after made citizens and clothed with full power of self-defense. Their efforts to obtain citizenship began in 1843, in which year a State convention was held on October 26 and 27, at the church on Fort Street, and they petitioned for the privilege of citizenship. In November, 1850, the question of conferring the right of suffrage on colored people was voted on, and the vote in Wayne County was 608 for and 3,320 against conferring such right. On January 25, 1865, a second State convention was held at the Croghan Street Baptist Church, and the Legislature was petitioned to grant the right of suffrage. The petition was not granted, but the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which, on March 30, 1870, the Secretary of State declared fully ratified, made them citizens and voters. The restrictive word "white" was stricken from the Constitution of Michigan by a vote of the people on November 8, 1870, and the votes of the colored citizens were first cast in Detroit on the same day.