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The Key to OLD KENT

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**A Journal of the Historical
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**A Special Edition Dedicated to
African-American History**

The Key to Old Kent

Normally a biannual publication of the Historical Society of Kent County, in 2013 this single expanded issue of *Old Kent* will focus on the history of Kent County's African-American residents. The two lead articles are important works of original scholarship. The other essays have appeared elsewhere but are included because they are now difficult to find.

Members will receive a free copy; additional copies may be purchased for \$5.

Members of the Society are invited to contribute articles, photographs, family letters, or any other materials relevant to our regional history. Please contact Old Kent's editor, Sheila Austrian, at 410-778-8164, if you would like to discuss a possible submission. Contributions should be sent by email to: director@kentcountyhistory.org or mailed to The Historical Society of Kent County, PO Box 665, Chestertown, MD 21620.

Please contact the Society's Director, Karen Emerson, at 410-778-3499 for information about membership, the Geddes Piper House Museum, the Bordley History Center or the Society's programs, genealogical resources, and volunteer opportunities.

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIFE IN KENT COUNTY

By Davy McCall

This paper is divided into two sections. The first addresses the historical conditions prevalent from early Colonial days until Maryland ended slavery in 1863. The second section focuses more narrowly on Kent County's enslaved and free African Americans, with an emphasis on biography, material culture and contributions to the local community.

THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES

Slavery Begins in the Chesapeake Region

Kent County's economy, as in the rest of Tidewater Maryland, at first depended on tobacco as its cash crop, and tobacco cultivation required heavy inputs of hard hand labor. During the seventeenth century the colonists relied upon indentured servants, mostly from England, to supply this need. The English Civil Wars of the 1640s and 1650s, as well as the continued eviction of small tenant farmers through the enclosure movement, created an ample supply of impoverished immigrants and political refugees willing to indenture themselves for five years in order to gain passage to America and its new opportunities. Landowners received a 100-acre grant (later 50-acres, then restored to 100-acres) for each person they brought to Maryland, another incentive that encouraged the importation of indentured labor. Colonel Joseph Wickes, who arrived on Kent Island in 1650, entered a Caveat of land for 15 servants for rights due to him for people he brought to the colony. Among them was a widow with two children whom he subsequently married. Wickes also claimed rights for a Negro, indicating that Wickes was probably the first slave owner in Kent County.¹

By the early eighteenth century, when more settled conditions in England somewhat reduced the pressure to emigrate, Chesapeake area plantation owners turned increasingly to slave labor. A Dutch vessel brought the first slave cargo to Virginia in 1620 but, until the early eighteenth century, the numbers grew slowly. The colonies' slave population was 55,850 in 1714, of whom 30,000 were brought directly from Africa, with the remainder from the West

Indies.² Slaves were initially a much more expensive investment than indentured servants, although slaves, who served for life rather than five or seven years, were a better long-term investment. In any case, the sugar planters in the West Indies had both a much higher demand for slaves and greater wealth to pay for them, so a majority of Africans were shipped to the Caribbean.

The slaves imported from Jamaica and the other Caribbean Islands to North America were more desirable for the American colonists than those coming directly from Africa. They had already experienced a generation or two of adjustment to the life of slavery in America and, to some degree, had learned agricultural and other skills, as well as the language. Undoubtedly, some Kent County African-Americans came from the Caribbean. Frederick Douglass's ancestor "Baly," later called Bailey, probably had been brought to Maryland from Jamaica. Bailey first appears in a 1746 inventory compiled by his owner, Richard Skinner of Talbot County.³

The slave population in British America grew steadily during the colonial period. Slaves were imported into all the colonies, but in much greater numbers in the south, where the principal crops and agricultural system created the greatest demand. An American expert on African-American history, Peter Kolchin, in *American Slavery 1619-1877* states: "By the end of the colonial era, a mature slave society with several noteworthy features had coalesced. These features included an American-born largely resident master class; a creole, self-reproducing slave class, relatively small slaveholdings; and a large white population, a high proportion of which was composed of non-slave holders."⁴

Slavery in Kent County

All of these conditions were found in Kent County. Judging from the names of Kent's major slave owners listed in the 1790 census, it is evident that most were descendants of families whose first immigrant ancestors had been in America at least since the early eighteenth century. Ringgold, Pearce, Gale, Beck, Ricaud, Tilden, Hynson, Wilmer, Browne, Williamson, Spencer, Gresham, Carvil,

² U.S. Census Records, 1850, Chapter IV, "Free Colored Population," and Chapter V, "Slave Population of U.S."

³ Dickson J. Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 4-6.

⁴ Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1618-1877* (New York: W.H. Hill and Wang, 1993), 40.

¹ George A. Hanson, *Old Kent: The Eastern Shore of Maryland* (Baltimore: Regional Publishing Co., Baltimore, 1967), 90.

Wroth, Medford, Kennard, Rasin, Worrell, Hanson, Massey, Brice, Wickes, Boyer, Woodland, Blackiston, Scott, Mansfield, and Tilghman are a few of the names. These families lived on their farms, near their slaves, or nearby in Chestertown or Georgetown.

The size of the American-born African-American population, or "creole" in Kolchin's term, was stabilizing during the latter half of the eighteenth century. American born slaves were reproducing their numbers, in contrast to African-born slaves, who did not. Some statistics from All Hallows Parish across the Bay in Anne Arundel County probably apply as well to Kent County. They indicate the normalization of African-American reproduction patterns during the Colonial period. In the early days of slave importation, males greatly outnumbered females, a major reason why first generation Africans failed to reproduce their numbers. Subsequently the ratio of males to females fell steadily, from 1.8 during the 1690s to 1.5 during the 1740s and to 1.1 in 1776; during the same period, the ratio of adults to children declined from 2.9 to 1.3, and then to .99. American-born African women bore on the average six children each, while the African immigrant women bore only half that number. From the 1740s on, natural reproduction was a much grater source of African-American population growth than the importation of slaves.⁵ The 1850 census, the first to record a resident's place of birth, shows that by that date nearly all local African-Americans were born in Maryland.

By 1790 many of Kent County's slaves were held in small groups. One third of the households held five slaves or fewer, and nearly one-half owned no slaves at all. Nearly three-fourths of Kent County's free African-American population lived in the households of these small holders. Accordingly, by the end of eighteenth century, many African-Americans in Kent County were living in close personal contact with the white population, a circumstance that probably facilitated their adjustment to the general pattern of living standards, albeit at a much lower level, of the majority local white population.

As might be expected, Kent County was a relatively small market for slaves. Most transactions were probably between local owners or from occasional auctions of slaves direct from Africa sold in the port of Annapolis. In any case, the *Maryland Gazette*, the newspaper serving Maryland's Chesapeake citizens in the eighteenth century, carried no notices of auctions of newly imported Africans in Kent County, although there were frequent announcements of sales of

locally owned slaves to settle estates. For example, in 1782 the *Maryland Gazette* ran an announcement from the Office of Confiscated Estates in Annapolis (possibly established to dispose of property seized from British Loyalists) that "pursuant to an Act of the last General Assembly will be sold at a public auction—at Kent County a valuable tract of land late the property of Lloyd Dulany, also a number of fine slaves, with stock of every kind." In 1793, Thomas Smyth, who before the Revolution had been one of Kent County's richest merchants and planters, announced his bankruptcy (largely brought on by his financial support of the American Revolution). When his property was sold to satisfy his creditors, included were "ten negro men of different ages, four negro women, ditto, eight negro boys and nine girls." James Wroth offered a "stout, healthy negro boy" for sale in 1793. Skilled African-Americans commanded a strong market. For example, Isaac Perkins, the leading miller of Kent County and owner of White House Farm north of Chestertown, advertised in 1777 "to purchase or hire two negro or servantmen, that are good coopers by trade."⁶

In Colonial Maryland, indentured immigrants met a critical need for both unskilled and skilled labor, although slaves were increasingly a source of unskilled labor. Life was hard for both African-Americans and indentured servants in Colonial Kent County. There were many attempts by both to escape. For example, John Bolton, a prominent merchant of Chestertown and Commissary for the Kent County Militia during the Revolutionary War, advertised in the *Maryland Gazette* for "an escaped negro man, Isaac Wallace. He can write a good hand and understands arithmetick." Wallace had escaped out of a Baltimore jail (where runaways were usually kept until retrieved by their owners). Bolton noted that he was probably on a ship to London. Edward Worrell offered \$3 for a runaway Negro woman in 1782. Three runaways were advertised for in April, 1793: "Hagar, a negro woman" for whom James Ringgold offered an \$8 reward; another Negro woman owned by Isaac Cannell; and a Negro man owned by William Embleton.⁷

No more indentured servants were imported after the Revolution; although until the 1760s Maryland imported many skilled indentured servants. Captain Lambert Wickes, Kent's first naval hero, brought in a shipload of 55 in 1774. This group included a

⁶ *Maryland Gazette*, April 14, 1774, February 12, 1777, February 21, 1782, April 5, 1793, October 10, 1793.

⁷ *Maryland Gazette*, April 6, April 10, November 9, 1775; April 3, May 3, September 1, 1777; May 3, 1793.

⁵ Kolchin, 39.

variety of skills, including a shoemaker, several blacksmiths, a peruke maker, carpenters, silversmiths, gentlemen's servants, etc. Over half were under 23 years of age, presumably apprentices who had just completed their training. Only three were women, one of these the wife of a tailor. Only two were "husbandmen." Captain Wickes's cargo is an indication of how the demand for indentured farm labor had declined, no doubt replaced by native born and imported African-Americans.⁸ Given the skills and hoped-for opportunities open to white indentured servants, runaways were even more frequent among them than among the slaves, as suggested by the much greater number of advertisements for white runaways during the same period. For example, owners advertised in the *Maryland Gazette* during 1779 for "A convict servant man," for whom the miller, Isaac Perkins, offered a reward of \$100, a group of four runaway men held in jail by the sheriff, "two Irishmen," "an apprentice boy,"⁹ etc. In any case, both slaves and white indentured servants showed their desperate desire for freedom by trying to escape despite high odds for recapture, particularly for the African-Americans.

Early in the Colonial period, slave owners were skeptical of converting Africans to Christianity. They feared that conversion might lead to slaves' dissatisfaction with their status and foment a rebellious spirit among them. There were exceptions, however. A notice from Baltimore in the *Maryland Gazette* of May 19, 1774, stated: "Last Monday morning arrived from Chestertown the Rev. William Boardly, an Ethiopian preacher of very distinguished merit, who proposes (God willing) to preach every Thursday and Sunday afternoons at 5 o'clock."¹⁰ By the end of the eighteenth century, the evangelical Baptists and Methodists began actively to convert African-Americans to Christianity, a movement that resulted in the first African-American Christian congregation in Kent County, whose meeting house was adjacent to the white Methodist'

⁸ *An account of all persons who have taken their passage on Board any ship or vessel to go out of the Kingdom from any Port in England, with a description of their Age, Quality, Occupation or Employment, former residence, to what port or place they propose to go, and for what purposes they leave the country from the 5th to the 12th of September, 1774, distinguishing each Port*, Public Record Office, London..

⁹ *Maryland Gazette*, April 1, 6, 10; November 9, 1775; April 3, September 1, 1779.

¹⁰ *Maryland Gazette*, May 19, 1774.

Hynson's Chapel. The new site is just off Route 20 en route to Rock Hall.

Increase in Free African-American Population

The first U.S. census in 1790 recorded 6,088 African-Americans in Kent County, 47 percent of a total population of 12,836. By 1860 the county's total population had grown to 13,167, about a 3.4% increase. The African-American share had declined slightly to, 44 percent of the total, as well as in absolute numbers — to 5,920 persons.

But while the total African-American population remained almost stable from 1790 to 1860, the number of free African-Americans increased enormously. In 1790 only 11% of the African-Americans in Kent County were free; by 1860 58% were free. In absolute terms, free African-Americans in Kent County numbered only 655 in 1790; by 1860 the free population had increased five fold to 3,411. The enslaved population was less than half of what it had been in 1790.¹¹

This increase in the free African-American population began in the late eighteenth century. Between 1790 and 1800 the number of free African-Americans in Kent County nearly tripled, and subsequently grew about 10% per year, except for the period 1810-1820, when a depression and the British invasion of the Chesapeake disrupted the local economy.

A variety of factors led to the surge in the free African-American population from 1790 to 1800. The same increase occurred in Delaware and, to a much lesser extent, in Virginia and further south. One factor was the declining economic benefit of slave ownership in an area of relatively small farms without large-scale commercial plantations of cotton, rice or tobacco. In Maryland, slaves were valued more as assets to be resold in the Deep South than for their labor product. Furthermore, the religious and moral convictions of slave owners increasingly led them to question the ethics of slave ownership. Some owners also allowed the enslaved to earn a little extra money on their own time, slowly accumulating the funds to purchase their freedom. Once freed, African-Americans worked to buy their relatives. This great expansion in the number of free African-Americans materially changed their living conditions.

¹¹ U.S. Census, 1790, 1860.

Although the census of 1790 counted most slaves and free African-Americans as members of the households where they served, there were some seventy African-American separate heads of households. Of those, forty households consisted entirely of free persons. Twenty-two households included both free persons and slaves. These likely were families in which two or three members might be free, but the others remained enslaved. In general, this situation occurred when a free family member was buying a wife or children who were still slaves. Eight households consisted entirely of slaves, possibly situations in which an owner allowed members of an enslaved family to live together as a separate household. Some of these, in which six or seven slaves lived together (one such had eighteen slaves in one household) might have been dormitory-like arrangements for work crews or field hands living on a farm separate from the owner's home farm.

Moral Misgivings about Slavery

Among the earliest religious groups to condemn and outlaw slavery among their members was the Society of Friends or Quakers. Initially, however, Friends bought and owned slaves, as did their Anglican neighbors. From the mid-eighteenth century the minutes of the Maryland Yearly Meeting of the Society convening at the Third Haven Meeting in Easton indicate a growing disapproval of slave ownership. Friends belonging to this meeting, whose members came from Talbot, Caroline, Dorchester, and Somerset Counties, were questioning "slave keeping." Slavery was much less widespread in Pennsylvania and opposition to it was earlier and stronger there than in Maryland. The Society of Friends in Germantown, (known as Krefelders from their home in Germany), many of whom were German immigrants, as early as 1688 bore testimony in their Monthly Meeting against slavery.¹² Kent County had strong ties to Philadelphia and perhaps local Friends were influenced by their co-religionists to the North.

Isaac Whitelock, the earliest Kent County Quaker to free his slaves, manumitted thirteen slaves in 1768. However, many local Quakers continued to buy and hold slaves. Stronger action was taken in 1773 when the Yearly Meeting notified the Kent Friends that those members still holding slaves should be visited to persuade them to free their slaves. Robert Clothier and George Browning of the local meeting were charged with this mission and their efforts bore fruit, for in the next decade a number of local Quakers manumitted their

slaves. These included the Pearce family, George and Joshua Lamb, Samuel Wallis, John Steward, Rebecca Brown, John and Martha Corse, James Maslin, Sarah and Mary Rasin, Joshua Vansant, Henry Troth, James Norris, Elizabeth Thomas, Hannah Warner, Margaret Stockett, William Trew, Joseph George, Sarah Simmonds, Mary Mifflin, Jesse, Edward, Joseph and Mary Comegys, and James Woodall.¹³ When this movement began, frequently only two or three slaves would be freed at one time, but later some families freed as many as 7, 8, 16, or 15, as did Mary Mifflin. Interestingly, almost half of the owners were women, possibly reflecting their freeing of their own inherited slave property—or consciences more aroused against slave holding.

Not all local Friends accepted the testimonies against slave ownership. Some who resisted were eventually disowned by the Meeting. Others even slipped back into slave holding, and they too were disowned. For example, in 1830 Peregrine Wethered, who had "attached himself to the (Episcopal) Church and received the appointment of Church Warden" was charged with administering oaths, holding slaves, and neglecting meetings.¹⁴

Often the Kent Friends expressed concern over the economic welfare of their freed slaves. Edward Comegys provided that one of his, aged over 50 years, be clothed and supported "in meat drink and apparel benefitting an aged infirm person." In 1781 Hannah Warner gave "security" for "the Incouragement and Instruction of Negroes." The Friends Monthly Meeting appointed a committee in 1791 to "Extend Care in Redressing Said People Aggrevances and Labour with these amongst us who hold slaves under any pretense whatsoever." Cassandra Rigby Corse, a well-known Kent County Friend who travelled among other Meetings to encourage them to follow Friends' policies, paid a "Religious visit to such of the Black People as have Been Set free by the Friends," and she noted that her visit was "accomplished to a good degree of satisfaction." Several local Friends accompanied her and made subsequent visits. Among these Friends active in liberation of slaves and concerned with welfare of former slaves were members of the Caulk and Wallis families.¹⁵ The free African-Americans who founded Joshua Chapel in 1839, bought their initial small plots of land from the Wallises,

¹³ Carroll, 139-140.

¹⁴ Carroll, 142.

¹⁵ Carroll, 142.

¹² Kenneth H. Carroll, *Quakerism on the Eastern Shore* (Baltimore: The Maryland Historical Society, 1970), 132.

and Oliver Caulk was one of those visiting the freed slaves, some of whom took the surname "Caulk."

As the nineteenth century continued, local Quakers were active as helpers in the Underground Railroad. Early in 1859 James L. Bowers of Cecil Monthly Meeting, "one of the most respectable Quaker citizens" was arrested and indicted in giving a pass and inciting one of Dr. Davidson's slaves to run away.¹⁶ Joseph Townsend Turner, of the same Meeting, "worked for the Negroes' freedom and saw it accomplished. But his attitude was at variance with accepted southern traditions and caused him much suffering." His friends persuaded him to move across the Bay to Harford County in order to avoid the spies that were set to watch his house. Arthur Leverton, a Quaker living in Dorchester County, was said to have assisted a slave woman and her children to escape and was warned to leave the state or be lynched.¹⁷

The early Methodists also opposed slavery. In 1785 the Methodist Discipline denied "communion and membership to those unwilling to free their slaves," and the Philadelphia Annual Conference (of which Kent County was a part) during 1807-08 "directed that slaveholders be treated as 'contumacious persons' " if they didn't follow a "delayed manumission schedule based on age" for at least recently purchased slaves.

In the early days of the Methodist movement, slaves and free African-Americans attended religious services along with their white neighbors. For example, at Hynson's Chapel near Rock Hall, in 1835/36 there were 44 white members and 88 black. Worton Chapel had 43 whites and 24 blacks in 1836.¹⁸ This equality of status before God sadly did not last very long. African-Americans were obliged to sit separately in the rear or in the galleries and the whites' unwelcoming attitude gradually pushed the African-Americans to form separate congregations. In contrast to the Quakers who merely discouraged their members from owning slaves, the Methodists went further and actively sought to convert slaves to Christianity.

William Williams, in his *Garden of American Methodism*, explains the appeal of Methodism to the black population: "...Methodism, by stressing the conversion experience more than religious

¹⁶ *Cecil Democrat*, "Arrest in Kent Elkon, MD", June 7, 1853, repeated from *Centreville Times*.

¹⁷ Carroll, 143.

¹⁸ Kent Circuit Conference Reports, 1834 and 1836.

instruction, made itself easily accessible to illiterate blacks and whites. In addition, no other religious group on the Peninsula treated blacks better. Early Methodist itinerants worked very hard to make black converts and spoke out in a clear voice against slavery. By contrast, at least some clergy of other denominations seemed disinterested in blacks, and a few supported slavery. Even the Quakers and Nicholites, who spoke out vehemently against slavery, showed little interest in recruiting black members." In addition, "... Peninsula Methodism attracted blacks through the content of its sermons, hymns, and prayers. The Methodist message that men are responsible for their own spiritual destiny and that after death the kingdom of God was open to all men regardless of race and previous condition of servitude was a heady tonic." ¹⁹Although in the early nineteenth century the Methodist stance against slavery seemed to soften, blacks (especially those who were slaves) had no other more satisfactory religious alternatives.

Some self-serving motives appear among Methodists' zeal to convert African-Americans. Thomas Rankin, an itinerant Methodist preacher, reported a conversation with Mrs. John Carvill Hynson, wife of the man for whom Hynson's Chapel was named. She told Rankin that before the arrival of Methodism it had been impossible to keep slaves from stealing everything in sight. But now, slaveholders "could leave every kind of food exposed and none (was) touched by any of them." A pleased Rankin responded "that the gospel, in its purity and power, could perform that which the laws faintly attempt to do."²⁰

In Kent County the first Methodist Meeting house, visited by Francis Asbury and Cokesbury in the late 1780s, was Hynson's Chapel near St. Paul's Church. Here a separate meetinghouse was later built next door for the African-American worshippers. In Chestertown itself, two African-American congregations were established. In 1828, Thomas Cuff, a free man owning land on Cannon and Front Streets, and others established Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and may have built their meeting house next to Cuff's house. Cuff established a cemetery there. In the 1980s there were still traces of it: a stone step/lintel, short wooden pickets, and large old trees with ivy. In 1831, James A. Jones, William Perkins, and others founded Zion Methodist Church, now Janes Church. Its meetinghouse was also located in Scott's Point. In

¹⁹ Margaret Fallaw, *Old Hynson's Chapel*, Survey No. K-591, p. 112, and William Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism*, 118.

²⁰ Williams, 166.

succeeding decades, other African-American churches were established, including Joshua Chapel in Morgnec Village, one near Chesterville, and others. These churches became the focus of African-American religious and social life and were in the forefront of bettering the lives of African-Americans.

Not only Quakers and Methodists manumitted their slaves during this period. Samuel Hodges, a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, specified in his will that an aged woman slave should have her house on his farm in perpetuity. Other slaves he freed or specified should be freed upon his widow's death. In 1718, Simon Wilmer's widow had freed one of her slaves trained as a carpenter.

Abolition Societies

While Kent County's free African-American population was growing and African-Americans were forming their own church-focused communities, two other efforts to right the injustices of slavery were growing in influence. One was the abolition movement, the other the African colonization program. Both of these had active adherents in Kent County.

The abolition movement was grounded in the growing conviction among whites that slaveholding was morally wrong. The Quakers, although small in number, continued to be the most active proponents of this viewpoint. Reinforcing the religious questioning of slavery was the egalitarian republicanism that stimulated the American Revolution. As Kolchin states this issue, "if all men were created equal, how could some hold others in bondage?"²¹ This dilemma was resolved by some with the argument "that blacks were not fit for freedom" because of inherently inferior intellectual capacity and consequent inability to survive successfully without the guidance and care of their masters. Some defenders of slavery even went so far as to claim that infringement on their right to own slaves was a violation of their own liberty.

Nevertheless the abolition movement gained strength during the early years of the nineteenth century. Anti-slavery associations proliferated in New England and the movement spread in the border states of Maryland and Delaware as well. In the 1780s and 1790s the state legislatures of Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia revised their laws to make manumission of slaves easier. In the upper Chesapeake participation in abolition societies meant much more than attending meetings or giving small contributions. Members freed their own slaves at personal financial loss. As noted

²¹ Kolchin, 90.

above, many Kent County residents followed this course. By the mid-nineteenth century, Delaware was virtually a free state.

A Delaware case early in the century gives some idea of the activities of local abolition societies. A slave, Molly Evans, who was supposed to be freed eight years after the 1794 death of her owner, was sold to a new owner, who "made some generous protestations without being solicited thereto that he himself was a member of the Abolition Society and had the cause of the blacks at heart, and pledged his honour several times for the faithful performance of agreement (to free Molly) and that if she was a good girl he would release her sooner. Thereupon Molly chose to go with him in preference to all others, merely for his humanity and generosity."²² Molly's buyer refused at the end of the eight years to free her, and members of the Abolition Society sought out witnesses of the previous owner's intent, but there was no written proof. Consequently, the Society's lawyer did not believe that a petition to free Molly would be upheld in the courts and her case was given up. Molly had several children, one named Cuff, who may have been connected with Thomas Cuff of Chestertown, and possibly to one of the sons or nephews of Paul Cuff, the Massachusetts African-American merchant whose ships traded with Wilmington. Paul Cuff's ships were manned by his brothers, sons, and nephews. Shortly after Paul Cuff's death in 1817, Thomas Cuff had enough money to buy for \$225 half of Lot Number 5 in Chestertown. Thomas Cuff also owned land in Wilmington, which he sold for \$250 in 1852.²³ His daughter Maria Bracker moved to Chestertown from Wilmington.

An abolition society existed in Chestertown as early as 1793, when the following notice appeared in *The Maryland Gazette*: "The members of the ABOLITION SOCIETY are requested to meet at the Methodist Meeting House in Chestertown on Friday, the 3rd day of May next, precisely at Eleven o'clock A.M. By order of the President. Abraham Ridgely, Secy" A subsequent meeting was announced for August 3, 1793.²⁴ No records of the society's subsequent activities have been found.

²² Delaware Abolition Society, *Original Minute Book of Proceedings* 9th month 24, 1802, in Delaware Historical Society, Wilmington, DE.

²³ New Castle County Deed Book R-6-45, 1854

²⁴ *Maryland Gazette*, April 23 and July 30, 1793.

African Colonization Program

Many whites, fearing that freed slaves would become a social burden, advocated their transportation to Africa, where they could be established in an independent colony. Liberia grew from these origins, and in fact still has a Maryland County. Similarly, Sierra Leone was founded by British anti-slavery groups as a colony for freed slaves.

Baltimore, in the thirty years preceding the Civil War, was a center of colonization support, led by the Maryland Colonization Association. Several African-American colonization societies had been established on the Eastern Shore by the 1830s, in Somerset, Dorchester, and Kent counties. At a meeting of the Auxiliary Colonization Society of Kent County in the 1840s a committee was chosen to address the public on the purposes and goals of the colonization movement. The committee's members were Ezekiel F. Chambers, a prominent local lawyer and former senator, William Jackson, and Dr. Peregrine Wroth, a leading local doctor, professor of Chemistry at Washington College, an essayist, historian, and poet, and a patron of Thomas Cuff, the well-known local African-American. Dr. Wroth gave an address representing the Society and explaining the purposes of the colonization movement, stating that the Society's aims are "grounded on the principles of Christianity, patriotism, and humanity and sound political policy and self-interest." The aim of the Society is "to establish a colony of free people of color, by their own consent [his underlining] on the shores once inhabited by their fathers and now by their kindred, to wipe away the reproach so justly thrown upon our political institutions by the nations of the old world; to blot out the crying sin of the land, and to remove the curse which, unhappily, we inherit from our fathers, are the objects for the accomplishment of which we are associated."

Wroth argues that colonization will encourage manumission of slaves since the freed slaves will be transported to Africa and "rid us of a population which eats into the produce of our lands, beggars their masters, corrupts their children and preys on the vitals of the Commonwealth!" Wroth extols Liberia's success: "The colony has advanced already greatly in the road to improvement. The salubrity of the climate (to the blacks) is equal to that of almost any part of this wide-spreading territory. They are actively and prosperously engaged in agriculture and commerce; they have churches, schools, vessels, and ports, and many live in a style of neatness and comfort approaching to elegance...A family twelve months in Africa and destitute in the means of furnishing a comfortable table is unknown. We call on you for assistance by subscriptions; by

preparing the free black people to emigrate, and by your prayers. Africa will embrace her long lost children; the United States will contain only freemen; the foulest blot upon our escutcheon of liberty will be wiped away and then- and not till then, shall we be free and happy."²⁵

A convention of free blacks was held in Baltimore in 1850 to promote colonization.²⁶ Chestertown attendees were William Perkins and James Jones. A hostile environment flamed at the convention, as the *Baltimore Sun* reported that "several hundred evil disposed and riotous blacks" gathered outside the hall protesting the concept of African-American emigration. The Eastern Shore representatives had expected a broad consensus favoring colonization. Jones took the floor and spoke unequivocally in favor of emigration. He also announced that he had just received a threat "that his head, if not his life was in danger" were he to leave the convention hall....and that "the colored man could never rise to eminence except in Africa—the land of his forefathers." After considerable controversy, the convention toned down its pro-colonization resolutions and recommended concentrating on support of free schools and improving immediate conditions. Perkins "castigated the apprenticeship system in Kent County whereby—upon a county official's determination that the children of free blacks were not properly tended to—the children were bound out to the whites and used as servants." Perkins also criticized the legal prohibition against a colored person returning to the state once he had left it.²⁷

The colonization movement in Africa was supported by churches, particularly the Episcopalians.²⁸ Anna Barroll, daughter of Richard Barroll, a Chestertown attorney in the early nineteenth century, had married Bishop Payne of Petersburg, VA, who became Bishop of Liberia. They sailed from Baltimore with five or six missionaries in May 1852. Mrs. Payne died in Liberia.

²⁵ Peregrine Wroth, Wroth *Notebooks*, Manuscript Collection, Maryland Historical Society Library, Baltimore, MD>

²⁶ Christopher C. Brown, Maryland's First Political Convention by and for its Colored People," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vol. 88, Fall, 1993, 327-328.

²⁷ Brown, 322.

²⁸ Sarah J. Hale, *Biographies of Distinguished Women* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1873), 907-917.

During the 1840s and 1850s one or two ships each year sailed for Liberia carrying emigrants, including some from the Eastern Shore. Despite Dr. Wroth's rosy report on conditions in the Liberian colony, the volume of emigrants to Liberia was not great. Discouraging reports on difficult living conditions deterred many, as well as the conviction that born in America, they wanted freedom in America. By the Civil War, when migration ceased, only 10,545 emigrants had gone to Liberia.²⁹

The Underground Railroad

Given the conditions under which many slaves lived, particularly harsh masters or mistresses and the ever-present threat of separation from families through sale by their owners, many attempted to run away. Men in particular were runaways, some alone or some with others, often with the help of the Underground Railroad. This informal network assisted fugitives by providing hidden refuges en route and by guiding them along routes to freedom and safety. Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave from Dorchester County, Maryland, was a particularly successful "conductor" on the Railroad. Between 1850 and 1860 she guided more than 300 slaves to free territory north of the Mason Dixon Line. Both whites and free African-Americans assisted escapees on the Railroad, at the peril of attack from pursuing slave-owners and legal action including fines and imprisonment. After Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, escape became even more perilous. Under its provisions, any African-American accused of being a runaway could be brought before a federal judge or special commissioner. The alleged runaway was not allowed to testify and could be returned to slavery on the basis of a sworn statement from a white person claiming to be the African-American's owner.³⁰

Free African-Americans were kidnapped and sold into slavery under this law. They were particularly suspect as helpers of runaways. One wonders if Thomas Cuff, the land-owner of Cannon Street, was involved. He owned a sizable stretch of the Chester River front at the edge of town and, at the rear of his house, swampy land stretching back to what is now Railroad Avenue. These could have provided shelter to those fleeing north. Among the items found beneath his house during a 1987 archeological dig, was a pistol identified as the late 1850s version of a "Saturday

²⁹ Barroll Family book.

³⁰ M.W. Taylor, *Harriet Tubman* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991), 40.

Night Special," as well as two iron files which could have been used to cut shackles.

One very active "station master" was William Still, a free African-American and an officer of the Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia. He collected a number of runaways' stories that he subsequently published.³¹ Some of his interviews were with escapees from Kent County. Their stories shed light on the conditions that moved them to run away and how they fared. Asbury said, "I run away because I was used bad; three years ago I was knocked dead with an axe by my master; the blood run out of my head as if it had been poured out of a tumbler; you can see the mark plain enough—look here, (with his finger on the spot). I left Millington, at the head of Chester in Kent County, Maryland, where I had been held by a farmer who called himself Michael Newbold. He was originally from Mount Holly, New Jersey, but had been living in Maryland over twenty years. He was called a Hickory Quaker, and he had a real Quaker for a wife. Before he was in Maryland five years he bought slaves, became a regular slave-holder, got to drinking and racing horses, and was very bad—treated all hands bad, his wife too, so that she had to leave him and go to Philadelphia to her kinfolds. It was because he was so bad we all had to leave."³²

Susan Jane Boile, who came from New Market (now Chesterville) said "she had been held to unrequited labor by Hezekiah Masten, a farmer. Although he was a man of fair pretensions, and a member of the Methodist Church, "he know how to draw the cords very tightly, with regard to his slaves, keeping his feet on their necks, to their sore grievance."³³ Susan endured his bad treatment as long as she could, then left, "destitute and alone." On the contrary, another slave, Amarian Rister, aged 21 years, said "I have been used very well; have had it good all my life." She could read, write, and play the piano.³⁴ Leeds Wright and Abram Tilison from Georgetown Cross Roads (Galena) had a grimmer story. They had belonged to Samuel Jarman, "a big tall, old man, who drank and was a real wicked man; he followed farming; had thirteen children. His wife was different; she was a pretty fine woman, but the children were all bad; the young masters followed playing cards." No chance at all

³¹ William Still, *Underground Railroad* (Chicago: Ebony Classics, Johnson Publishing Co., 1970).

³² Still, 506-7.

³³ Still, 453.

³⁴ Still, 453.

had been allowed them to learn to read, although Abram and Leeds both coveted this knowledge. As they felt that they would never be able to do anything for their improvement by remaining they decided to follow the example of Abram's father and others and go to Canada."³⁵

Abe Fineer "spoke with feelings of some bitterness of a farmer known by the name of George Spencer, who had deprived him of the hard earnings of his hands. Furthermore, he had worked him hard, stinted him for food and clothing and had been in the habit of flogging him whenever he felt like it. In addition to the above charges, Abe did not hesitate to say that his master meddled too much with the bottle, in consequence of which, he was often in a 'top-heavy' state. Abe said, however, that he was rich and stood pretty high in the neighborhood—stinting, flogging and drinking were no great disadvantages to a man in Georgetown, Maryland."

A Miss Wilson from Georgetown Cross Roads came to Philadelphia in search of her escaped slave Butler. An abolitionist from the Vigilance Committee posing as a slave catcher offered her his help and obtained all particulars concerning the runaway from her. He then found the fugitive, who went into hiding. The Vigilance Committee circulated posters with the following message: "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN BEWARE OF SLAVE-CATCHERS Miss Wilson, of Georgetown Cross Roads, Kent County, Md., is now in the city in pursuit of her alleged man, Butler. J.M. Cummings and John Wilson, of the same place, are understood to be here on a similar errand. This is to caution Butler and his friends to be on their guard. Let them keep clear of the above named individuals. Also, let them have an eye on all persons known to be friends of Dr. High, of Georgetown Cross Roads, and M. D.G. Cummings, who is not of Georgetown Cross Roads." When Miss Wilson found her name thus publicized, she "unhesitatingly took her baggage and started for 'My Maryland.'" The bogus slave-catcher described Miss Wilson as "a tall, and rather fine-looking well dressed lady." He concluded his escapade with the words "Thus ended one of the most pleasant interviews that ever took place between a slave-hunter and the Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia."³⁶

The Still escape accounts frequently mention Georgetown Cross Roads which may have been a final stop for Eastern Shore fugitives heading for Philadelphia. Also once they reached northern Cecil County they found many abolitionist sympathizers.

³⁵ Still, 560.

³⁶ Still, 457

A number of the escapees continued on to Canada, and a considerable colony developed in the Ontario towns of St. Catherine's, Amherstburg, Windsor and Toronto. Often men had escaped alone, leaving behind wives and children still in slavery. Still published some of their pathetic letters to him, asking the Vigilance Committee's help in rescuing their families. There is a story of a Chestertown family who fled to Canada via the Underground Railroad; the husband was free, his wife still a slave. After the end of the Civil War, they returned to Chestertown. It may have been William Cotton's family, who brought Maria Bracker's house on Cannon Street in 1866.

Government Restrictions on Activities and Employment

Despite the slowly improving conditions for African-Americans, their lives were circumscribed by restrictions, both by law and custom, and in severely limited opportunities. During the antebellum period, Southern lawmakers passed many laws designed to maintain the subjugation of both slaves and free African-Americans to white authority. Limits were placed on slave movement and assembly. Slaves were forbidden from hiring themselves out without white supervision. Laws prevented slaves from trading, possessing liquor or unauthorized weapons.

Many states imposed severe restrictions on teaching slaves to read and write. The evidence of this can be seen in Kent County's Land Records. Most African-Americans were illiterate, including those who were free, and generally showed their agreement to legal documents, such as land purchases, by making "his" or "her mark" instead of a signature. Another evidence of widespread illiteracy is the lack of written church records, such as births and marriages, for African-American parishes before 1860. Some few families were literate, however. Materials found in the Bracker-Houghton house, owned before 1866 by Thomas Cuff, his daughter Maria Bracker and later by the Cotton family, included books on home medicine, arithmetic, readers, and rent records (they rented out one side of their house) dating from the 1850s and 1860s.

While Maryland and Delaware laws were generally less restricting than those of the Deep South, they nevertheless were onerous. An Act of the General Assembly of Maryland of January 27, 1806, gave the Commissioners of Chestertown authority to pass laws and ordinances requiring licenses for "dogs at large in Town, prohibiting firing guns within Town, playing 'bandy or shinny' in the streets of the town, swimming in the river opposite the town, riding or driving a horse or mule through town at a speed exceeding 8 miles per hour, etc." A number of these ordinances

were specifically directed against African-Americans. An Ordinance of June 5, 1826, was to prevent "disorderly gatherings of negroes and others about the Free School Spring (near the beginning of Washington Avenue) and Smith's Spring. The ordinance stated, "It has been represented to the Commissioners that a practice prevails among the servants of collecting in an unlawful and disorderly manner about the spring "to the great injury of the same" and inconvenience to the owner." The "Bailiff shall disperse collecting forthwith, and if they see sufficient cause for so doing to inflict such punishment as is in their opinion merited, not exceeding five stripes for a slave and for a free person \$0.25 forfeit to the Bailiff."

³⁷ On May 10, 1806, the commissioners enacted an ordinance "that no negro or slave—shall be permitted to remain in the streets after ten o'clock at night without a note from their master or mistress." The bailiffs were to punish offenders by inflicting ten stripes on the bare back of such persons for the first offense, fifteen for subsequent offenses.³⁸ No Negro or slave residing out of Chestertown was permitted to remain in town without the master's/mistresses' note after seven o'clock p.m. from November 1 to March 1, or after nine o'clock in the other months.³⁹ Again, the punishment was ten lashes. For African-Americans who violated the other ordinances, the punishment was five to ten stripes, for others \$5-10, depending on the offense. For some of these offenses, free African-Americans could pay the fine instead of suffering the whip.

With freedom, new opportunities with numerous and difficult challenges faced Kent County's African-Americans. Aunt Heaster, a Somerset County slave, but the housekeeper and source of comfort and common sense knowledge for her white owners, expressed the meaning of freedom. She had always carried scissors attached to the belt of her dress. The family noticed that after Emancipation, Aunt Heaster no longer carried the scissors. When they asked her why not she replied, "I'm free, I don't have to cut my bonds no more."⁴⁰

³⁷ Chestertown Journal Book

³⁸ Chestertown Journal Book

³⁹ Chestertown Journal Book

⁴⁰ Family papers of Davy Family, Upper Fairmount, MD, in possession of Mrs. Elizabeth Walters, Baltimore, MD.

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN KENT COUNTY

Living Conditions for Kent County African-Americans

While there are few documents describing the daily life of African-Americans before the Civil War, record keeping improved after emancipation and growing literacy. Slowly, through research, archeology and oral histories, we are improving our understanding of the material and social culture of Kent County's African-American residents during the nineteenth century.

Living conditions for the African-Americans in Kent County may have been somewhat better than for those in the Carolinas and Georgia. Since the majority lived in small groups in close contact with whites, they probably had more access to a varied diet, the produce of local vegetable patches, small game, fish, and shellfish. Nonetheless, Frederick Douglass reported "the field hands took their ash cake (called thus because baked in the ashes) and pieces of pork, or their salt herrings where they work."⁴¹ Most had lives of long and hard agricultural labor, not so different from most of their white neighbors.

Lack of educational opportunities effectively excluded African-Americans from the professions. The employment possibilities that remained open to free African-Americans were unskilled labor, some crafts (Frederick Douglass worked as a ship caulker), and service jobs. The Census of 1860 lists "Black Estate Holders" in Baltimore and includes their occupations. For men, other than "Laborer," frequent occupations were barber, carter, drayman, wagon driver, caulker, brick maker, waiter, coachman, porter, sailor, sawyer, butcher, a few musicians, storekeepers, preachers and teachers. For women, most were listed as washer woman, chamber maid, huckster, and servant, with a few dressmakers and teachers.⁴²

The 1860 census for Kent County lists most Free African-Americans simply as "Laborer." On a reduced scale, a pattern of occupations similar to that for Baltimore probably prevailed in Kent County. For example, from other sources we know that James Jones was a grocer, William Perkins a restaurant owner, Levi Rogers a saloon-keeper, and Isaac Boyer a carter or drayman.

⁴¹ Kenneth H. Carrol, *Quakerism on the Eastern Shore* (Baltimore: The Maryland Historical Society, 1970), 132.

⁴² Ralph Clayton, *Slavery, Slaveholding, and the Free Black Population of Antebellum Baltimore* (Heritage Books, Inc., 1993), 259-325.

As for housing, few, if any, traces of separate African-American housing remain from the colonial period in Kent County. Two possible examples still exist. One is a building on Napley Green Farm on East Neck, not far from the main house, on the bank of Gray's Inn Creek. There is some tradition that this small dwelling is a relic of New Yarmouth, Kent County's seat in the late seventeenth century. In any case, it could well have become a slave dwelling later. It is a primitive one story, plank structure, set up on stone piers. The main room is possibly 12 feet square, with a chimney across one wall, and a window on each side and one outside door. Another small shed-like room is attached. The interior walls are now plastered. Another slave cabin still exists as a chicken coop on Columbia farm near Melitota. Perhaps a prototype for Kent County is the slave cabin at Sotterly Plantation in St. Mary's County, recently the subject of in-depth architectural and archaeological investigation.

In towns, attics or lofts over kitchen wings or simple outbuildings on larger properties were African-Americans' usual housing. With the rapid increase in the number of free African-Americans in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, separate houses owned and/or occupied by them became much more common. By 1860 a number of African-Americans owned their own houses in Scott's Point, along the creek at the northern edge of town, and around the intersection of Cross and Maple Streets. In the county, several small communities developed, often centered around a Methodist meeting house or church.

In Chestertown two African-American leaders bought small amounts of land, lived on it themselves and sold to other African-Americans, usually members of their churches. Thomas Cuff bought several acres on Scott's Point, and then sub-divided his land, selling mostly to members of Bethel Church. The 100 block of Cannon Street remained an integrated neighborhood, however, with Senator James Alfred Pearce occupying what is now the Hynson-Ringgold house on the northeast corner of Cannon and Water. Samuel Baker, a well-to-do farmer from Fairlee owned the building on the southwest corner of Queen and Cannon. Mrs. Jean Crowding, a resident of 110 Cannon Street since childhood, remembered the remains of an old well back of her house, possibly for common neighborhood use.⁴³ James A. Jones bought land on Cannon Street between Mill and Kent Streets, and also sub-divided. In both cases, the white sellers were prominent local men concerned with the welfare and future of African-Americans. Cuff bought land on

Scott's Point from Dr. Peregrine Wroth, with whom his family had a long association. Cuff's mother had been the cook for Wroth's parents. Wroth re-sold land to Cuff within two months after Wroth himself had bought the Cannon Street property. Later Cuff bought adjoining land from James Edmondson Barroll, his neighbor across the street. James A. Jones purchased land from Judge Ezekiel Chambers and sold lots to other African-Americans.

By 1860, the living standards for the most prosperous of the local African-Americans provided modest comforts, as evidenced by the archaeologists during a 1987 dig at the Cuff House, where chicken bones, oysters, and animal bones were found. Some of the latter were from choicer cuts, suggesting a varied and nutritious diet.⁴⁴ Living conditions at the Cuff House were probably equivalent to the lower ranges of white middle class living.

Some impression of the interior furnishings of the better-off African-Americans houses can be derived from the inventories filed with their wills. The Inventory and Valuation of the Goods, Chattels and Personal Estate of Thomas Cuff among other items include the following: a brass clock valued at \$3.00, two looking glasses, one cupboard, nine chairs, one bureau, one "desk drawer", one feather bed, and bedstead at \$5.00, the most expensive item, one small stove, 15 yards of carpet, one easy chair, one rocking chair and a number of other chairs, tables, a small bedstead, dishes, candlesticks, andirons, shovel and tongs, oven-tops and ovens, etc. The total valuation was \$27.52.⁴⁵ Isaac Boyer's inventory of June 30, 1870, included one dozen chairs, two dozen plates, one dozen cups and saucers, a sugar dish, creamer, a set of casters, a teapot, one dozen spoons, one half dozen knives, two forks, other dishes, etc. Other items included one 24 hour clock, the dining room and parlor carpets, and stoves, a rocking chair, sofa, pictures and vases, 50 window curtains, blinds, etc. Boyer's household items totaled about \$135; in addition he owned an "old bay horse, cow and calf, an old carriage, a cart, and an old wood wagon."⁴⁶

Where houses were already standing in these neighborhoods, free African-Americans purchased them and moved in. For example, the Cuff, Bracker, Boyer-Hurley and Rogers houses on Cannon and

⁴⁴ W. Catts and D. McCall, "A Report on Archeological Investigations at the House of Thomas Cuff, A Free Black Laborer, at 108 Cannon Street, Chestertown, MD," *North American Archeologist*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1991, 155.

⁴⁵ Kent County Wills, October 13, 1858.

⁴⁶ Kent County Wills, June 3, 1870.

⁴³ Jean Crowding, Conversation with the author in December, 1987.

Water Streets had been originally owned and occupied by white people. These houses were simple frame, two or three-bay houses with gable roofs and large central chimneys. They had generally two rooms on each floor. The Cuff and Boyer-Hurley houses typify these dwellings. No houses from the community on the creek at the northern edge of Chestertown and only one at Cross and Maple, (now moved to the Kent County Farm Museum near Kennedyville), survive, but they may well have preexisted African-American occupancy as well.

The houses in James Jones' development on upper Cannon Street were evidently built in the 1850s and 1860s, but in a simple style similar to the earlier buildings. The original Bethel Meeting House of *circa* 1830, now relocated to Calvert Street, is larger than the dwellings, but in the same general style.

In the countryside, African-American communities developed in a similar fashion. A free African-American bought a few acres and resold small tracts to his friends. The settlement frequently centered on a church, usually A.M.E. or United Methodist, as in the Joshua Chapel in Morgnec Village. A few of these church-centered settlements developed in the 1840s and 1850s and several more in the 20 years following Emancipation. Martenet's Map of 1860 shows an African-American Meeting House near Golts, possibly the Wesley Henry Church (A.U.M.P.) that exists today. An "African M.E." church was located just west of Chesterville; the building has disappeared, but there are some tombstones nearby dating from the 1860s. This congregation, as Asbury Church, moved around 1900 to Chesterville Forest. Another, now called Fountain Church, was west of Urieville. Neither of the Scott's Point churches, Bethel or Zion (Janes) is shown on the Martinet Map. Bethel's first congregation may have become inactive by 1860. When their second church was built in 1879, the church records state that the old congregation had died out and that new members had been recruited to revive the church. Possibly other small local chapels were also omitted.

In any case, in the post-Civil War years several other African-American chapels were established throughout the county; their architectural style dates them to the 1870s and 1880s. Possibly they grew after Emancipation when former slaves moved off the farms of their former owners to farm their own communities, sometimes moving on to purchased land, sometimes as squatters on swampy or poor soil. These churches are Holy Trinity (AME) Edesville, Asbury Church in Georgetown, Aaron Chapel in Sharptown (near Rock Hall), and John Wesley Chapel at Sandy Bottom near St. Paul's Church, long derelict and now demolished.

Probably all of these African-American Methodist congregations in the lower county were descendants of the original Hynson's Chapel congregation. St. George's, near Green Point (where members of the Hynson, Somerville and Lively families have been active for several generations), Mount Olivet near Galena, Butler's Chapel in Butlertown, and the church in Coleman also probably had their origins during the post-Civil War period.

Some Prominent African-American Leaders in Kent County

By 1860 some local African-Americans had achieved a degree of economic progress and were among leaders in their community. Information on them is scarce, but the following sketches give some indications of their lives.

Thomas Cuff was born about 1785. Whether born free or a slave is unknown, but he was associated with the prominent Kent County Wroth family. He was classified as a "Laborer" in the 1850 Census, but, as a free African-American purchased in 1820 "all that western-most half of lot Number 5", fronting "90 feet 9 inches on Cannon Street and running back 148 feet 6 inches together with all singular improvements." On April 18, 1828, the *Chestertown Telegraph* advertised that he and Samuel Perkins had established a shad and herring fishery "to furnish the citizens of Kent and others." In succeeding years he bought additional adjoining tracts, including the waterfront between Cannon Street and the dead end of Front Street from James Edmondson Barroll, a prominent lawyer who by then was living in the Hynson-Ringgold House, Henry Tilghman, and Joseph Gordon. Four small frame houses stood on his property, probably the four houses mentioned by Dr. James Murray in his 1767 will. Over the years Cuff sub-divided his land, selling to other free African-Americans. Cuff eventually owned the land running from Cannon Street, along Front Street (now South Water) to the swamp and freshet now under Railroad Avenue, as well as the adjoining waterfront lots. Evidently he also kept some livestock, for he advertised that his pig had escaped. In the 1840s he leased his water lots to the Town to take out sand and gravel.

Cuff evidently had a long-standing relationship with the Wroth family, as Dr. Wroth wrote that Cuff's mother was their family cook. Cuff also made Dr. Wroth the executor of his will. Along with other free African-Americans, Cuff was a founder of Bethel Church, which purchased its site from Wroth through Cuff.

Cuff gave the house next to his own to his daughter, Maria Bracker. In the 1840s and 1850s Bracker lived there and conducted an ice cream shop, advertised in the *Kent County News* on June 6, 1857. Bracker had come to Maryland from Delaware; she was arrested

and charged \$20 under the Act of 1839, Chapter 38. The case was subsequently discharged since the violation was more than one year past. "Maria Bracker is now prepared to accommodate ladies and gentlemen with ice cream, cake, and lemonade, prepared every day from 11 a.m. until 10 p.m. Her saloon is on Cannon St., between Queen and Water. Families can be supplied by the quart or gallon, or molds, pound or sponge cake by pound."⁴⁷ On Cuff's death in 1858 he left it to her. After legal difficulties on the settlement of Cuff's will she sold it to William Cotton in 1866.

Cotton's daughter Mary married Jonas Haughton in 1888. They were the parents of five sons who formed a successful jazz band in the 1920s, playing in Baltimore, Atlantic City, etc. The Haughton family had some education, as indicated by their books and written records. After being stored and forgotten for many years, the family books (some dating from the 1840s and 1850s), dresses from the 1890s, china, daguerreotypes, and old photographs were rediscovered in 1991. The boarded up building also contained financial records concerning a part of the house they rented out, musical instruments, hand written music, scrapbooks, and other items from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Unfortunately, the contents were disbursed after the house was opened. Of particular interest were two daguerreotypes of men in high collars and bow ties. One, in an ambrotype ca. 1855-1866, wears a large black apron. He has gray eyes and stiff hair brushed back.

Isaac Boyer was evidently a drayman who owed a horse, carriage, cart, and wagon. He lived near the waterfront and drayage was once of the employments open to African-Americans. He purchased his house from Cuff for \$280 in 1849.

Boyer, along with Cuff, was one of the founders in 1828 of Bethel A.M.E. Church. Boyer was evidently a close friend of Cuff's, who later sold him for \$1 an alley running from Front Street back to Cuff's property, and then in 1858 an additional small adjoining strip for \$10 and "in consideration of sundry acts of service rendered unto (Cuff) by Boyer."

Levi Rogers, Junior and Richard Jones, other free African-Americans, bought part of Cuff's waterfront property and later sold it in 1857 to Captain James F. Taylor, the President and Director of the Eastern Shore Steamboat Company. Capt. Taylor soon built the Italianate mansion with the belvedere that remains on the southwest corner of Cannon and Water.

Rogers operated a saloon on this corner in the late 1850s, possibly in the existing house or in a building nearer the corner of Cannon Street that had been the Ringgold's stable. It was replaced by a Victorian style house owned by Arthur Nichols about 1880. It has recently been restored.

After selling to Captain Taylor, Rogers and Jones agreed to divide the remainder of the land they had held in common and had bought from Thomas Cuff. They retained the right-of-way from Captain Taylor to bring their cattle and teams by way of the road by his property.

Levi Rogers, Jr., with Thomas Cuff, was one of the founders of Bethel Church, located in Scott's Point.

James A. Jones, a grocer, was one of Chestertown's most successful African-American businessmen in the mid-nineteenth century. Born in 1805, he early became a leader in the Methodist Church and the emerging political consciousness of the African-American community. Jones' father was Peter Jones, a sailor from Barbados, who had married an Irish woman there. In 1800 he bought a house on the corner of Cannon and Mill Streets, reportedly with a rear wing built of logs. This house survived until 2006, but was demolished after damage during restoration.

The Martinet Map of 1860 shows Jones owning houses on Cannon Street as well as his residence on Cannon and Mill streets. He also bought and sold land on Scott's Point. According to the Census of 1850, Jones' property was worth \$1,500. In 1842 and 1848 he had bought land on Cannon Street between Cross and Mill from Judge Ezekiel Chambers, a major figure in Kent County and a U.S. Senator from about 1812 to 1820. Over the next 15 years Jones subdivided this tract and sold it to other free African-Americans. These new lots fronted 15 feet on Cannon Street and were 100 feet deep. Buyers included William Ford, William Thomas Demby, John Smith, Russell Ellis, Samuel Smith, and others.

Jones was also a money lender who financed mortgages for free African-Americans, among them William Perkins, the restaurant owner, Levi Rogers, who owned the saloon on the corner of Cannon and Water Streets, and others. Most were members of Zion Methodist Church (Jones), of which Jones was a founder in 1831.

Jones had for many years been active politically. He was a Kent representative at the 1852 Baltimore Convention on the movement to establish colonies for African-Americans in Africa. He strongly supported the colonization project against some strong opposition from other African-Americans. Along with William Perkins, Jones was also an organizer of the local African-American community to

⁴⁷ *Kent County News*, June 6, 1857.

bring out their vote for Republican candidates in the Election of 1870. In order to enfranchise local African-Americans as property owners, Isaac Anderson, an African-American who owned land along the river at the north end of North Water Street, deeded three feet nine inches of his property to forty-four fellow African-Americans in exchange for \$15. Jones, as Treasurer of the First Female United Beneficial Society of Chestertown, had held a mortgage on Anderson's property; he likely was a party to Anderson's political ploy. Jones himself sold to eleven African-Americans one foot square pieces of land along his Cannon Street property in May 1871 for \$25 each. This may have been a similar move to enfranchise more African-Americans.

Jones was evidently a strong family man. In his real estate transactions his wife, Lucinda, is included as a party to the contract. He had four sons and a daughter, and in 1860 he granted for \$1 a house and lot to his sons William M. and John B., "in consideration of natural love and affection for their better support and maintenance." These were houses with a common wall built on his Cannon Street property, and may exist today. Jones himself was literate and signed the legal documents for his transactions, but his wife Lucinda could only make "her mark."

The Rising Sun, one of Chestertown's best restaurants in the 1850s and 1860s, was owned by William Perkins, a free African-American. The building no longer survives, but it was on Maple Avenue, the present site of the Chestertown Fire Company.

William Perkins purchased this site near the southeast corner of Maple (Fish) and Cross Streets in 1855. He and his wife paid \$50 for this property, but on the same date (Oct. 1, 1855), Perkins subsequently bought adjoining land along Cross Street, part of Lot No. 39, and more of Lot No. 38, along Fish Street. Perkins' well-known restaurant, as well as his residence, was located on this property. Recent restoration of a house at 210/212 North Queen Street, moved from the lower end of Perkins' property on Maple, may have been his residence. Perkins' restaurant, The Rising Sun, was probably the largest free African-American-owned commercial enterprise in Kent County in 1860. It was advertised in the *Kent County News* as a "Summer Resort! The East Room is reserved for ladies and no gentlemen allowed except with ladies." The Oyster Salon was for men. Perkins advertised that he would "serve ladies and gentlemen with all the choice articles of confectionery. Cake and ice cream, lemonades in the French style, mineral waters from celebrated fountains, oysters pickled *secundum antem*, diamond-

back terrapins, soft crabs, hard crabs, and deviled crabs."⁴⁸ According to the Census of 1870, he had a net worth of \$10,000, making him one of the Eastern Shore's wealthiest African-Americans.

Perkins was a political as well as economic leader of the local African-American community. Along with James Jones, he represented Chestertown at the first political convention held by and for African-Americans in Maryland, in 1852 in Baltimore. At that convention he spoke out strongly in favor of African-American colonization in Africa, despite some strong opposition from others at the Convention.⁴⁹

Perkins was also very active locally after emancipation in encouraging African-Americans to exercise their voting rights under the Fifteenth Amendment. He became the first African-American Maryland delegate to a National Republican Convention and the Eastern Shore's first African-American Federal grand juror. He was a member of Janes United Methodist Church in Chestertown, to which many of the area's African-American leaders belonged. As one of the organizers of a rally in Chestertown to celebrate the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, he and George Wescott, President of the major Chestertown bank, generated enough additional support among the newly enfranchised African-American community to elect a straight Republican ticket for the local offices.⁵⁰

Two families were prominent in establishing the village of Morgnec and Joshua Chapel (1839). Isaac Cotton and his wife, Nancy, bought two acres along Morgnec Road (Rte. 291), which they mortgaged in 1869 for \$150 with William Ford. Cotton was one of the early trustees of Joshua Church and was a signer of the mortgage the congregation obtained in 1869 from the Church Extension Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The mortgage indenture's description indicates that Joshua Church was already there. The beginning stone for the description was "near the Colored People's Church," and the property consisted of one acre with buildings. The trustees signing the mortgage were Charles W. Jones (the only signer who could actually sign his name, the others merely making

⁴⁹ Brown, "Maryland's First Political Convention by and for its Colored People," 324, 326.

⁵⁰ Brown, "Democracy's Incursion into the Eastern Shore: the 1876 Election in Chestertown," 338-346.

"His Mark"), Marshall Jones, Isaac Cotton, Samuel Gleaves, Isaac S. Jones, Josiah Caulk, John Strickling, Isaac Caulk. The mortgage amounted to \$200 and was to be repaid with 6% interest, and was repaid by 1883. Isaac Caulk, one of the early landowners, had conveyed the church site to the trustees in 1869.

Despite the many obstacles and disadvantages these men faced in building their lives, their energy, initiative and intelligence made possible successful participation in the society in which they lived. They were pioneers in the evolution of African-Americans from enslaved captives torn from their native cultures to citizens of free American society.

Davy McCall earned a PhD from Harvard University, worked and taught as an economist, and has been active in restoring Chestertown's historic district

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A LONG ROAD: THE DESEGREGATION OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN KENT COUNTY, MARYLAND, 1955-1967

By George R. Shivers

INTRODUCTION

On May 17, 1954 Chief Justice Earl Warren handed down the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Brown vs. the Board of Education. That decision sounded the death knell to the practice of segregation in public schools in the United States and to the myth of "separate but equal." In doing so it fired the first shot in a veritable revolution in American public education, but it would take many years for the promise contained in that court decision to transform the practice of segregation in many parts of the country, particularly in the South. Children in Maryland, including Kent County, had been educated in rigidly segregated schools since the Civil War period and before.

The constitution adopted in Maryland in 1864 provided for the establishment of a "uniform system of free public education, by which a school shall be kept open and supported. . . in each school district."¹ The constitution, however, did not provide for the education of African Americans. Fuke notes that Unionist delegates feared that such a provision would jeopardize passage of the document.² Prior to 1864 there is no doubt that free Negroes and some slaves had learned to read and write, primarily in churches, both black and white, or in private schools operated by free Blacks themselves.³

In November of 1864 the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People was established. It was made up of more than thirty lawyers, businessmen, and clergymen, and its purpose was to promote Negro education.⁴ They

¹ Richard Paul Fuke, "The Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People 1864-1870. *Maryland Historical Magazine*. Vol. 66, No. 4, Winter, 1971, p. 369. It was also the Constitution of 1864 which freed all slaves in Maryland.

² Fuke, 370.

³ Fuke, 370.

⁴ Fuke, 373.

first established schools in Baltimore, but very quickly turned their attention to the Eastern Shore, including Kent County, where several schools were established in 1865. The first was in Millington, established on September 27 with 73 pupils. This was followed by a school in Edesville on October 1 with 44 pupils. Two additional schools were created in the county on the same date: one in Fountain Church, with 57 pupils and one in Worton with 61 pupils. The school in Chestertown arrived on October 9 with 82 pupils, and finally one in Quaker Neck on November 1 with 40 pupils.⁵

These early efforts by the Baltimore Association received financial support from both inside and outside the state with contributions from both Negroes and whites. They did, however, confront opposition, including violent opposition. According to Fuke, "The Baltimore Association suffered its most serious losses in October and November of 1865, when within a three week period, arsonists burned the Negro church-schools in Millington and Edesville, Kent County."⁶ The perpetrators of those fires were never discovered. Addie T. Howard, the teacher in Millington described what happened there in a letter to John T. Graham of the Association:

Mr. Graham: I write in great haste to inform you of the calamity which befell us last night. Some malicious person or persons set fire to the church in which we have been holding our school. . . . The fire was set on the north side of the Church and was not discovered until the flames had made considerable headway. Of course, nothing could be done to save the building. It is a great loss to the people here, as they are very poor, and will not be able to build another, perhaps for years. . . . The people here now think that it will be useless to hold school here for sometime, and perhaps for the rest of the year. They were trying to make preparations to put up a school house soon, but it would meet with the same ill luck.⁷

By November of 1867 the federal government's Freedmen's Bureau had assumed responsibility for the local organization of Negro

schools on the Eastern Shore as well as southern Maryland.⁸ Then in 1872 the Maryland legislature passed a law which required that each district establish a school for the education of Negroes at public expense. By the 20th century there were schools for grades one through seven in villages such as Sharptown, Broad Neck, Coleman, Johnstown, Pomona, and Worton Point (Butlertown), all of which were predominantly black communities. The school at Broad Neck (School No. 2, District 7) was established in 1903. Both the building and land were deeded to the Kent County Board of Education by Henry Washington for \$100. It was advertised for sale in the *Kent County News* on December 30, 1939.⁹ The school at Worton Point (Worton Public Colored School No. 2, District 3) was built in 1890.¹⁰



African American Schoolhouse at Worton Point

In 1881 Kent County had 18 schools that served the African American population. In these schools 19 teachers served an enrollment of 878 pupils.¹¹ The names of the teachers were as follows: Eliza D. R. Huett, George L. Phillips, Annie P. Smith, W. H. Coleman, Louis N. Harris, Madora E. Baily, Clara L. Davis, Emma J.

⁸ Fluke, 395.

⁹ Document in the "Education File" in the library of the Historical Society of Kent County

¹⁰ Image downloaded from internet on April 15, 2013. <http://roadtocompromise.wordpress.com/2009/04/12/african-american-schoolhouse-museum-in-kent-county-launches-website/>

¹¹ *Fifteenth Annual Report of the State Board of Education of Maryland for the Year Ending September 30, 1881*. Annapolis: L.F. Cotton, 1882. p. 44. Accessed on line at <http://archive.org/stream/fifteenthannualr1882mary#page/43/mode/1up> on April 8, 2013.

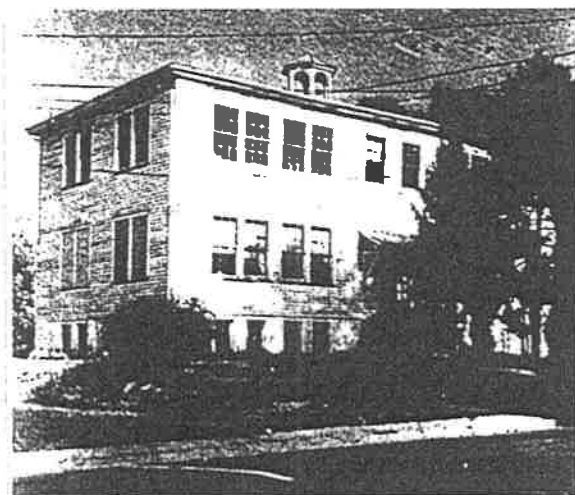
⁵ Fuke, 378.

⁶ Fluke, 382.

⁷ Fluke, 382.

Anderson, Harrison Jenkins, James A. Jackson, George W. Biddle, A.C. Williamson, Lizzie M. Yeates, M.L. Baldwin, George W. Brown, Sarah C. Bainter, George S. Richardson, Sarah H. Arey, and Daniel Williams.¹² It is interesting to note that the report details that the 18 schools that served Negro students were "not the property of the Board."¹³

The Henry Highland Garnett School ¹⁴ was built in Chestertown in 1915-16 to serve African American students in grades one through twelve. It was located on College Avenue. It was a three-story, frame building. In 1959 the old school was replaced by a modern, single-



Henry Highland Garnett School

story brick building, which still stands and serves as an elementary school, still memorializing Henry Highland Garnet with its name. The new building served African American students at all grade levels until the county schools were integrated in 1967-68. According to Mrs. Elizabeth Lively (born 1941) in the 1940s African American children started school in a building that used to be a garage for repairing cars. It was on the corner of Calvert St. and College Ave, where the Garnett School is now. For the fourth grade they went across College Ave. to Garnett School on the second floor. The dining hall was in the basement, as she recalls. For high school they went

across College Ave. once again to the old Bethel Church building, which is no longer there.¹⁵

In oral history interviews taken by Lani Seikaly in 2012-13 several members of the African American community in Kent County spoke about their experiences in a segregated educational system. These testimonials are both positive in some respects and negative in others. The Reverend Clarence Hawkins¹⁶ spoke of his experience

as an elementary pupil in the Sharptown school: "When I went it was a two-room school house with grades 1 to 3 on one side of the folding door and grades 4 through 6 on the other side. So we had an advantage because we could always hear what was going on in the grade above us. We youngsters who came from that type of school system were somewhat ahead of the other kids by the time we got to junior high school." Reverend Hawkins continued by addressing his experience in middle and high school at Garnett in Chestertown: "In middle school and high school, I had many more classmates from across the county that I hadn't known because all of the black kids were funneled into Garnet. We were always bussed.¹⁷ We had a high school in Rock Hall, but of course it was a white school." The old Garnett School, which originally covered grades one through twelve, opened in 1916 and continued in operation until a new high school was constructed and opened for classes in 1959 just across the street (College Avenue & Calvert Street). The old building (pictured above) was razed in December, 1964.



Rev. Clarence A. Hawkins

¹⁵ Oral interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Lively, taken by Dr. Jeanette Sherbondy, May 2013

¹⁶ Photo from oral history of Rev. Clarence A. Hawkins, taken by Lainy Seikeily, p. 1

¹⁷ Oral history interview taken by Lani Seikaly with the Reverend Clarence Hawkins, 2012.

¹² Fifteenth Annual Report, 264.

¹³ Fifteenth Annual Report, 264.

¹⁴ Photo from *Kent County News*, November 18, 1964, p. 8

Mrs. Carolyn Brooks attended elementary school in Coleman. That school, she said, had three rooms with two classes in each. She said that a room was added later to accommodate restrooms, but until she was in the 3rd or 4th grades, students and teachers used outhouses. Mrs. Brooks was born in 1944, which would mean that the outhouses were replaced in about 1952 or 1953. About her experience at Garnett she says:

We didn't have the opportunity the white students had when I was in high school. We were getting books that they had already written in. We were way behind them by three or four years because we were getting books that were written in by them, some pages might have been torn out, and then we would take the test, the counselor say, "you're behind." How could we not be? They usually told us, "You kids aren't going to college." The counselor would tell you, "You're not going to go to college." I said, "Oh, right, I'm going to show you." It was awful. I'm not the only one she told; she told lots of kids this, especially the ones that were college material. And guess what? All of us went to college!¹⁸

VOLUNTARY FREE CHOICE DESEGREGATION PLAN: 1955-1967

The initial reaction of the Kent County Board of Education to the Supreme Court's decision came in the meeting of June 15, 1954. At that meeting the Board decided not to issue any official statement, encouraged the superintendent (Reide W. Corr) to keep abreast of the situation, and concluded that "interested laymen be advised that in September of this year our schools will continue to operate as they have in the past."¹⁹ An article in the *Kent County News* cited a statement by the Board as follows:

"The laws of Maryland specifically provide for segregation in the public schools and in the teachers colleges. In view of this law requiring segregation, no

¹⁸ Oral history interview by Lani Seikaly with Mrs. Carolyn Brooks, 2012.

¹⁹ Minutes of the Kent County Board of Education, June 15, 1954 (Volume that covers May, 1952 to August, 1954). All references to the minutes of the Board of Education henceforth refer to bound volumes in the collection of the Historical Society of Kent County.

program of integration can be put into effect until the decisions of the Supreme Court becomes (sic) final and an effective date is set by the Supreme Court."²⁰

The Board concluded that "the implementation of the Supreme Court's decision would need to be made gradually in a calm, patient manner."²¹ That is exactly what happened; the Board stretched out its implementation of complete desegregation for well over a decade, finally reaching that goal in the 1967-68 school year.

The next step in the road to desegregation occurred a year later, when in June of 1955 the Board of Education appointed a biracial Lay Advisory Committee. The purpose of this committee, as reported in the *Kent County News*, was "to assist the Board in its 'deliberations and formation of policies.'"²² The same *Kent County News* article reported that the Board had "submitted a list of legal and administrative questions to the Attorney General and State Board of Education," and that no action would be taken until advice had been received from those sources.²³ The Board's statement, as reported, went on to say that:

"As a legally constituted public body the Board of Education of Kent County, Maryland, must, of course, proceed to comply with the decision. It will attempt to do so in a fair, decent and legal manner and with good common sense. There are problems of building facilities, transportation, course offerings, etc., which will need to be solved. This will take time and require patience."²⁴

The membership of the Biracial Lay Committee on Integration was reported on June 24, 1955 by the *Kent County News*. The chair of

²⁰ Segregation to be Continued in Kent County Next School Year," *Kent County News*, June 18, 1954.

²¹ Segregation to be Continued in Kent County Next School Year," *Kent County News*, June 18, 1954.

²² "Name Lay Group To Aid Plans for Kent Integration," *Kent County News*, June 17, 1955.

²³ "Name Lay Group to Aid Plans for Kent Integration."

²⁴ "Name Lay Group to Aid Plans for Kent Integration."

that committee was Walter T. Morris, Jr., a Kent County farmer. He was joined by nineteen other county residents:

Paul Bowman, Millington
Mrs. David Bramble, Fairlee
Elmer Campher, Chestertown
Benjamin Durdin, Rock Hall
W.D. Gould, Locust Grove
Rev. W.H. Hudson, Chestertown
Frank L. LaMotte, Sr., Worton
Mrs. Jacob Mason, Melitota
Mrs. Joseph H. McClain, Chestertown
Mrs. Willis Pickrum, Coleman's
Allan Price, Rock Hall
Frank Rudnick, Chestertown
Rev. William Scott, Sharptown
Mrs. Richard Soltys, Betterton
Gene Sullivan, Kennedyville
J. Willis Wells, Chestertown
Elwood Wheat, Worton
Mrs. John Wilson Galena
Slater Wilson, Millington ²⁵

The news article related further that "Among the main duties of the lay committee will be a study of enrollment and school facilities and a recommendation of means to best utilize these in the integration program."²⁶ In the same article the *News* reported that a recently released decision by C. Ferdinand Sybert, Maryland attorney general, had dispelled any doubt as to whether the Supreme Court decision applied to Maryland, since Maryland was not one of the five consolidated cases on which the ruling was made. Sybert stated, "However, the law with respect to public education as laid down by the Supreme Court is crystal clear, and we do not believe that differences in the mechanics of obtaining relief can limit in any sense the legal compulsion presently existing on the appropriate school authorities of the State of Maryland to make . . . a prompt and reasonable start toward the ultimate elimination of racial discrimination in public education."²⁷ Sybert

²⁵ "Morris To Head Lay Committee on Integration," *Kent County News*, June 24, 1955.

²⁶ "Morris To Head Lay Committee on Integration,."

²⁷ "Morris To Head Lay Committee on Integration."

drew up his opinion at the request of Dr. Thomas G. Pullen, State School Superintendent.²⁸ In the same edition of the *Kent County News* the integration of the five State Teachers Colleges (Towson, Coppin, Salisbury, Frostburg and Bowie) was announced. Of these, the enrollment in Coppin and Bowie was exclusively Black.

At its July 19 meeting the Kent County Board voted to request from \$500 to \$1000 in the 1956 budget for the expenses of the Lay Advisory Committee. That committee's recommendation to the Board at its April 17, 1955, meeting was to institute a policy of voluntary desegregation, meaning that African American students could apply to attend formerly all-white schools. Students could register in the spring for the 1955-56 school year. In June that registration period was extended until September 2; however, no African American students registered to attend an all white school at that time, a fact that was reported to the Board on August 23. Other action taken at the June meeting included a unanimous vote that all future meetings of teachers and principals should be conducted on a desegregated basis. All adult education and teacher extension classes were desegregated as well. At the same August meeting the Board re-appointed Mr. Corr as superintendent for a four year term.



Reade Corr, Superintendent of
Kent County Schools

The *Kent County News* reported on July 22, 1955 that Peter W. Jopling, president of the Kent County Board of Education had announced a plan to "move deliberately and consistently, but not hastily with desegregation" in the County.²⁹ The same article reported the resignation of J. Willis Wells from the Lay Advisory

²⁸ "Morris To Head Lay Committee on Integration."

²⁹ "Lay Committee Endorses Plan of School Board for Desegregation," *Kent County News*, July 22, 1955.

Committee. The article noted that Reade Corr, School Superintendent, addressed the body and in his remarks reviewed the Supreme Court decisions and explained the difference between desegregation and integration.³⁰ Unfortunately the article does not quote Mr. Corr's explanation of that difference. According to Martin I. Krovetz, "Desegregation can be defined as the placing of different races in the same physical environment; integration refers to the actual social interaction of different races in some shared environment."³¹ Based on these definitions, we can say that desegregation is the means of moving toward integration.

It becomes very clear as one peruses the minutes of meetings of the Board of Education throughout the remainder of 1955 and 1956 that the mood is one of caution. There seems to be a subtext of fear regarding the white community's response to desegregation. At the second meeting of the Lay Committee, as reported in the *Kent County News*, it was suggested that the Committee "with the concurrence of the Board of Education, would concentrate its efforts on suggesting methods for solving problems and developing policies leading to the desegregation of elementary schools in the County."³² At its meeting on September 20, 1955, the Board concurred with the recommendation of its Lay Advisory Committee on the priority to be given to the desegregation of elementary schools, but then it "reiterated its stand that desegregation in Kent County should be a gradual process based on a careful study of local conditions and according to a fair interpretation of the court's decision."³³ The Lay Advisory Committee regularly reviewed what was happening in other Maryland counties with regard to desegregation and reported to the Board on what they found. The recommendation to begin with the desegregation of elementary schools (still on a voluntary basis) was reiterated by the Lay Advisory Committee at a Board meeting on April 5, 1956, and on April 17 the Superintendent sent a memo to all principals communicating the Board's acceptance of the Committee's

³⁰ "Lay Committee Endorses Plan of School Board for Desegregation."

³¹ Martin I. Krovetz, "Desegregation or Integration: Which Is Our Goal?" Phi Delta Kappa International, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20373472>. Accessed on March 26, 2013

³² "Desegregation Lay Committee in 2nd Meeting," *Kent County News*, September 9, 1955.

³³ Minutes of the School Board of Kent County, September 20, 1955 (Volume that covers October, 1954 to March 1956).

proposal. To implement that policy for the 1956-57 school year he stated that the date for completion of registration would be extended from May 1 to May 18.³⁴ Principals were to submit a summary report of the results of that registration to the Board by June 1. At the Board's meeting on June 19, 1956, members were given a report on the recently completed registration for the next school year: No African American children had requested transfers to all white schools.³⁵

In September, 1956 the School Board endorsed the idea of interchanging teacher observations and certain types of assembly programs on a desegregated basis. The Board president, however, pointed out that "prior to such activities taking place, school personnel should properly prepare and inform the students involved."

The year 1957 brought no major changes to the County's desegregation plans. On March 19 of that year the Board voted that the same policies and procedures instituted in 1955 and 1956 for the registration of students should be followed for the next school year.³⁶ The only significant change was that orientation meetings for all new teachers were integrated. Additionally plans were made for some "intra-visitation" among teachers at various schools. The year 1958 also continued a holding pattern as regards the desegregation of the schools. Judging from School Board meeting minutes, we can conclude that the Lay Advisory Committee was completely inactive in the last several months of 1958 and in January, February and March of 1959. Finally, on April 21 the minutes refer to an April 9 meeting of the Lay Committee with all members of the school board present. Reference is made to a news release to the local press resulting from that meeting. Nothing revolutionary happened, however. Quite the contrary, as the Board adopted a resolution to "continue its present policy of desegregation. In other words, "voluntary desegregation," which, to date, had produced virtually no integration of students at any

³⁴ Minutes of the School Board of Kent County, April 5 and April 17, 1956 (Volume that covers April, 1956 to June, 1957).

³⁵ Minutes of the School Board of Kent County, June 19, 1956 (Volume that covers April, 1956 to June, 1957).

³⁶ Minutes of the School Board of Kent County, March 19, 1957 (Volume that covers April, 1956 to June, 1957).

level.³⁷ In the summer of 1959, however, summer school classes were desegregated.

The Lay Committee once again fell into inactivity during all of 1960 and 1961 with no references to desegregation appearing in the minutes of the Board of Education. That discussion finally appears once again in the Board's minutes on February 14, 1962. At that time Board members were given a copy of the State Board of Education's statement on desegregation, dated January 30 of that year. Superintendent Corr reported on a meeting he had attended on February 7 where that policy statement was discussed. The statement reaffirmed the position held by the State Board for the past six years. At that point the Kent County Board reviewed its own policy and decided to continue on the same path, meaning that they would accept applications for transfer and handle all without regard to race.³⁸ It was clear, reading between the lines, that they would not actively solicit such applications. The Board also decided at that meeting that it was unnecessary to call a meeting of the local Lay Advisory Committee; however, the Superintendent was directed to apprise the committee's chair of the current situation. At the March 21 meeting of the Board, the Superintendent reported that he had met with Mr. Walter Morris, chair of the Lay Advisory Committee, as the Board had directed at its last meeting. The minutes of that meeting give no sense of the content of their discussion. Mr. Corr also reported a news release inviting parents and students to register for the 1962-63 school year.³⁹

For the first time an African American student applied to attend Chestertown High School. Board members were told at the August 24, 1962, meeting that Patricia Bryant's application had been accepted. It is clear from the minutes of that meeting that there was considerable nervousness in anticipation of Ms. Bryant's entrance into the school in the fall, and, I quote: "The principal of the school will take the necessary steps to prepare the teachers and pupils involved. State police will be notified but will not be requested to be in the vicinity of the school but will be asked to be available in the

event they are needed."⁴⁰ On October 17, 1962, the Superintendent reported that Ms. Bryant had begun using a regular Chestertown High School bus on October 1. We are left to assume that her parents had arranged for her transportation prior to that date. Ms. Bryant graduated from Kent County High School the following June (1963). The high school yearbook for 1963 provides the following information about her: her nickname was Pat; she followed the academic course of study; her ambition in life was to be a psychiatrist, she was known for talking, and she was a member of the Glee Club.⁴² Armond Fletcher, a Chestertown resident, alluded to Ms. Bryant's experience, saying:



Patricia Bryant ⁴¹

"Nobody really talked about the Freedom Riders⁴³ until we started talking about it at the diversity group with Peter Heck. So the Historical Society did a YouTube about Reverend Toliver, Milford Murray and myself and someone responded to the YouTube who was a classmate of Patricia Bryant's, I think. She had a little tough time when she went to Chestertown High. She was the first one. I think her father was Rev. Bryant, and he marched with the Freedom Riders.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, August 24, 1962 (Volume that covers October, 1961 to December, 1964).

⁴¹ Photo from *Talon*, the Chestertown High School Yearbook, 1963.

⁴² *Dragon*, 1963. In the collection of the Historical Society of Kent County.

⁴³ See below for further explanation of the Freedom Riders.

⁴⁴ Oral history interview conducted by Lani Seikaly with Armond Fletcher, 2012. Mr. Fletcher alludes here to a group of Chestertown citizens meeting on a monthly basis at Bethel AME Church to promote more intercultural communication in the community. The group is called the Diversity Dialogue Group. He also refers to an event sponsored jointly by that group and the Kent County Public Library (rather than the Historical Society of Kent County) in which he participated along with Milford Murray and Rev. Toliver.

³⁷ Minutes of the School Board of Kent County, April 21, 1958 (Volume that covers July, 1957 to December, 1958).

³⁸ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, February 14, 1962 (Volume that covers from October 1961 to December, 1964).

³⁹ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, March 21, 1962 (Volume that covers from October, 1961 to December, 1964).

Ms. Bryant (later Mrs. Harris) was the daughter of a United Methodist minister, who served churches in Kent County and was a member of the local NAACP. She eventually followed in his footsteps and became a United Methodist pastor, serving a number of churches in the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and several years as district superintendent in the Salisbury District of that Conference.

It seems appropriate at this point to present the bigger picture of racial discrimination as it existed in Kent County. By 1962 interracial tensions were heating up in Maryland and particularly on the Eastern Shore. In January of 1962 there were sit-ins in Cambridge in nearby Dorchester County. Then in February it was Chestertown's turn.

"On February 3, 1962, 145 students (72 from New York City, 20 from Swarthmore College, 4 from Yale University, and the rest from the colleges around Maryland) arrived in the town via two Greyhound buses and roughly a dozen private cars. They were led by Philip Savage, Philadelphia Regional Director of NAACP, with the assistance of the Baltimore Civic Interest Group led by Clarence Logan."⁴⁵

The "Freedom Riders" came to Chestertown, sponsored by the NAACP. Their goal was to desegregate public facilities in the town. The Rev. Frederick Jones of Bethel A.M. E. church offered his church as a staging area for the campaign. The "Freedom Riders" were joined by several town residents, as well as faculty and students from Washington College. Violence broke out when the group attempted to integrate Bud Hubbard's bar and restaurant on upper High Street. The principal of Garnett High School, Elmer Hawkins, left town to avoid the trouble and "warned his teachers not to participate in the campaign. His temporary flight made him lose the respect that he had garnered from the black community in the town."⁴⁶ It should be noted, however, that in recent conversations Armond Fletcher has spoken eloquently of Mr. Hawkins's

⁴⁵"Chestertown, MD, 'Freedom Riders' campaign against racial segregation, 1962." Global Nonviolent Action Database. <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/chestertown-md-freedom-riders-campaign-against-racial-segregation-1962> (Accessed on February 25, 2013).

⁴⁶ Global Non-violent Action Database.

leadership at Garnett School and of the respect with which he is still held by members of the African American community who knew him. There were follow-up demonstrations on February 10, but the backlash became milder. On February 17, 1962, Rev. Jones formed a Kent County regional chapter of the NAACP, and more than 100 people attended its second meeting.⁴⁷

Mrs. Alice Baldwin remembers the visit by the "Freedom Riders." She stated that her then husband, the late Dr. Norman James, a professor of British Literature, and the late Dr. Guy Goodfellow, a neighbor on High Street and professor of American History, both of them at Washington College, went down to Bud Hubbard's to observe what was happening. They learned via the grapevine that someone had taken down the names and addresses of the participating College faculty with the implication that some kind of reprisal would be taken against them and their families. She and her husband were frightened enough that they moved the beds of their young daughters away from the windows that fronted on Queen St. She added further that she overheard some men urging their neighbor, who lived across a narrow alley, to join them in taking some action. Fortunately their neighbor refused and urged his interlocutors to go home and forget the matter.⁴⁸

The town responded to the "Freedom Riders" visit over a year later by creating a bi-racial commission. Its formation was announced in an article in the *Kent County News*: "In an effort to settle any problems that might exist, Chestertown Mayor and Council last week appointed a bi-racial commission which is working now on the question of public accommodations." The article went on to state that the goal of the group was "to achieve voluntary desegregation along the pattern worked out and announced for Easton last week."⁴⁹ The chair of the group was Preston P. Heck, a local attorney. Other members were Elmer T. Hawkins, principal of the Garnett School;⁵⁰ the Rev. F. G. Jones, pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church; Henry Demain, manager of Vita Food Products; Harold Jones, Chestertown barber; William Hamilton, custodian of the Kent

⁴⁷ Global Non-violent Action Database.

⁴⁸ Phone interview with Mrs. Alice Baldwin, Wednesday, February 27, 2013.

⁴⁹ "Chestertown Bi-Racial Group Is Appointed," *Kent County News*, June 28, 1963.

⁵⁰ Photo from *Kent County News*, November 4, 1964.

County Office Building; Norton Bennett, department store owner; and Ernest Cookerly, a lawyer, who served as secretary of the group.⁵¹



Progress was rapid, once the Bi-Racial Commission went to work, and in July the *Kent County News* announced that that all of Chestertown's places of public accommodation, except one, had agreed to voluntarily accept patrons regardless of race, color or creed, beginning July 15. The paper went on to say that the agreement "was being hailed as a tremendous step forward for the good of the community as a whole by all fair-minded citizens of all races."⁵²

Elmer T. Hawkins

Following up the rapid progress made in Chestertown, a bi-racial committee was named for Kent County. The plan was announced by the County Commissioners and reported in the newspaper on July 17, 1963. The news article explained:

It was coincidental that the announcement by the Commissioners came after a delegation of three Negroes had requested an equal accommodation law to be enacted for the county by the Commissioners. The Commissioners had had the study plan under consideration for some time.⁵³

The article goes on to explain that the Commissioners were not empowered to pass laws, since Kent County did not have home rule. Any law applicable to Kent would have to be passed by the State

⁵¹ "Chestertown Bi-Racial Group Is Appointed."

⁵² "Voluntary Integration July 15 For All But One Public Place," *Kent County News*, July 10, 1963.

⁵³ "Bi-Racial Committee For All County, Commissioner's Plan," *Kent County News*, July 17, 1963.

legislature. The Commissioners advised Rev. F. C. Jones of Bethel A.M.E. Church that a bi-racial committee would be established to study the situation throughout the county.⁵⁴ Later, in August, the *News* reported the appointment of twelve members to the Committee of 15. Those appointed were Julian Toulson, of Betterton, Dudley Simpley and Rev. Paul R. Hilton, both of Millington; Rev. Frederick C. Jones, Kenneth Wailey, Stanley B. Sutton, Beatrice Mason, and Irving J. Hamilton, all of Chestertown; Rev. Henry T. Caldwell, of Galena; Mary H. Davis, Rock Hall; Rev. William Tulip, Still Pond; and Rev. Charles E. Hackshaw, Edesville.

Earlier that year, J. Millard Tawes, Governor of Maryland, had signed a public accommodations bill into law on March 30, 1963. That law made Maryland the first state south of the Mason-Dixon line to outlaw discrimination against Blacks in restaurants and hotels. The law did not take effect, however, until after the elections of 1964. A federal Civil Rights Act was passed on July 2, 1964. Despite these actions at the state and federal level, a brief article in the *Kent County News* on July 15 reported that petitions with 41,471 valid signatures had been filed to have the state's public accommodations law put up for referendum in the fall. The article stated that "The signatures were filed by the Maryland Petition Committee, a states rights, segregationist group, first formed in protest against the Supreme Court school desegregation decision."⁵⁵ Since by the time of the fall election, non-discrimination in public facilities was federal law, the effort was fortunately pointless.

Returning to the desegregation of public schools, beginning in 1963, perhaps motivated by the black activism of the previous year and the progress toward desegregation of public facilities locally, the Board of Education also began to speed up its progress toward complete desegregation of the schools. In that year designations of race, religion and nationality were removed from job applications. At the Board meeting on July 19, 1963, there was extensive discussion of desegregation matters. Dr. Joseph McLain, a chemistry professor at Washington College, was serving as president of the Board. In his report he noted that the Board had granted all former transfer requests received from Negroes to date. Of course, there had apparently been only one! He went on to say that "We want our desegregation policy and practices to conform with and not violate

⁵⁴ "Bi-Racial Committee For All County, Commissioner's Plan."

⁵⁵ "Civil Rights Signatures Total 41,671," *Kent County News*, July 15, 1964.

those established and adopted by the Maryland State Board of Education."⁵⁶ He directed Mr. Corr to prepare a summary of said policy as well as implementation procedures for review and evaluation by Dr. Zimmerman (from the Maryland State Board of Education) and his legal advisor. In August 1963 that summary was published by the Board under the title "Desegregation Policies." That statement first instructs all school employees "to treat students attending the public schools without regard to their race."



Dr. Joseph McLain

Secondly, the statement recognizes "the possible problems that may arise in its desegregated schools" and expects all employees "to work at all times toward the prevention of any such problems before they arise, and if the problems have already arisen, that they be quickly resolved in a just and fair manner."

Thirdly, and remarkably in the view of this writer, the statement reaffirms so-called "voluntary desegregation." According to the summary statement on desegregation the Board "advocates and endorses the principle of 'Freedom of Choice' and maintains that this principle is both administratively sound as well as within the rules of desegregation as promulgated in various Court decisions." The statement goes into further detail as to how this policy of "Freedom of Choice" has been and will continue to be administered. The policy also reaffirms the decision to maintain a Lay Advisory Biracial Committee, "composed of representative citizens of the community." That Committee's purpose is "to study problems related to desegregation in Kent County and to advise the Board and county school officials of the committee's judgment regarding the Board's policies in this matter."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, July 19, 1963 (Volume that covers October, 1961 to December, 1964).

⁵⁷ Board of Education of Kent County, "Desegregation Policies," August, 1963, (Volume that covers from October, 1961 to December, 1964).

At its February 28, 1964, meeting, the Board reaffirmed the policies stated in the 1963 document for use during the 1964-65 school year. Minutes of this meeting clearly demonstrated that county officials were acutely conscious of increasing activism on the part of Blacks at other locations on the Eastern Shore. The Superintendent summarized "conferences with various individuals regarding the recent boycott in Cambridge and the situation in Princess Anne . . ."⁵⁸ Despite the violent outbreak at protests in Chestertown two years earlier and recent activities in the aforementioned locations, the minutes state that "Board members feel there is no need to request a meeting of the Lay Advisory Committee at this time."⁵⁹ The year 1964 brought a number of very significant changes on the road to desegregation, but still did not bring a shift away from the policy of voluntary desegregation that had been in operation since 1955. At the October 21, 1964, School Board meeting Superintendent Corr summarized reports from the principals of Galena High School and Chestertown Elementary School regarding pupils who had transferred from Garnett and a student named Kathleen Murray who was in the first grade at the Fairlee School. He reported that the students had adjusted well socially. Two other students were named (also presumably African American) and he reported that they were having scholastic difficulties. A slight change was made in the wording of the Board's desegregation policy by the removal of the words "and approval of the Board of Education." The policy then read, "The Board of Education of Kent County, within its policy of 'Freedom of Choice,' extends to all pupils, regardless of race, entering a county school for the first time, at any grade level, the option of registering at either the school which is closest to them, or consistent with the Board's policy regarding desegregation, at another school with the permission of the Superintendent of Schools."⁶⁰

At the School Board meeting on August 26, 1964, Dr. Joseph McLain, president of the Board, referred to a letter he had received from Mrs. Norman James. As noted earlier in this account, the late Dr. Norman James was a professor of British literature at Washington College for many years from the 1950s until sometime in the 1970s.

⁵⁸ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, February 28, 1964, (Volume that covers from October, 1961 to December, 1964).

⁵⁹ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, February 28, 1964, (Volume that covers from October, 1961 to December, 1964).

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, March 18, 1964, (Volume that covers from October, 1961 to December, 1964).

Mrs. Norman James is now Mrs. Alice Baldwin and is a resident of Lancaster, NH. I spoke with her by phone on February 27, 2012. She remembered that letter very well and stated that she wrote it when her daughter Kathleen was about to enter first grade. She expressed her wish that she might enter a desegregated class and gave the reasons for her request. Mrs. Baldwin told me that, in fact, the first grade was integrated that year. She referred to two African American students, Jackie Johnson and his younger sister Barbara, who entered Chestertown Elementary School at that time. She also said that her daughter's class was taught by an excellent African American teacher. Unfortunately she could not remember that teacher's name. The Johnsons were the children of Mrs. Rosetta Johnson. According to Mrs. Baldwin, she has remained in contact with the Johnson family over the years. As she recalls, Jackie Johnson later graduated from Washington College, went into the U.S. Army and worked at the White House during the administrations of Presidents Carter, Reagan and George W. Bush. Mrs. Baldwin also remembered that at some point in the 1960s it came to the attention of African American teachers that they were being paid less than their white colleagues. Her recollection is that they appealed to the NAACP and Mr. Thurgood Marshall made plans to visit the School Board on behalf of the African American teachers. According to Mrs. Baldwin, the Board took immediate action to equalize the pay scale in order to avoid a confrontation.⁶¹ I have not found documentation of this in School Board records.

Although the basic policy of voluntary desegregation was still being implemented in 1964, by that year a number of significant steps had been taken in desegregating public education in the County. These are summarized below:

- a. County-wide music festivals had been desegregated.
- b. White and African American teachers had exchanged visits in schools.
- c. Assembly programs and concerts had been exchanged without regard to race, color or national origin.
- d. All county interscholastic athletic events had been desegregated.
- e. County Council of Parents and Teachers had held desegregated meetings.
- f. All bus transportation sponsored by the school system was being planned without regard to race, color or national origin.

⁶¹ Phone interview with Mrs. Alice Baldwin, Wednesday, February 27, 2013.

- g. All requests made to the school principals involved for transfer of African American students to a formerly all white school were being honored.
- h. All instructional materials and equipment were being supplied on the same per pupil basis to all schools.
- i. Student teachers from Washington College were being placed in high schools on a desegregated basis.
- j. Desegregation was being discussed during all interviews with prospective teachers.
- k. A class for trainable students⁶² was fully desegregated for the first time.
- l. The County Teachers Association had been desegregated for the 1964-65 school year.

An article published in the *Kent County News* on May 5, 1965, referred to a presentation to the Board of Education by Davis Barus of the U.S. Office of Education. He explained the desegregation requirements the County had to meet in order to qualify for federal school aid under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The article states that "Seventeen other counties in Maryland besides Kent have not achieved satisfactory school desegregation. . . ." as disclosed the previous week by the State Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations.⁶³ Mr. Barus is quoted as follows in a statement to the press after the meeting, "We have given them information on how to develop a desegregation plan which would have the best chances of being accepted."⁶⁴

No doubt in response to that meeting, on May 27, 1965, the Board published a document titled "Initial Compliance Report for Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: Kent County Plan for Desegregation." That report was approved by Commissioner Francis Keppel at the United States Office of Education on May 28 of that year. The *Kent County News* reported that ". . . during the coming month, incoming first and seventh graders will be sent forms on which they may choose the school which they prefer to attend." The article went on to say that "Choices will be granted, according to the limits of the schools and classrooms, so that if an inequitable number appears in

⁶² Today this would be referred to as the special education class.

⁶³ "Kent School Officials Hear 'Musts' on Desegregation," *Kent County News*, May 5, 1965.

⁶⁴ Kent School Officials Hear 'Musts' on Desegregation."

one class, the assignments will then be made geographically."⁶⁵ In July the *News* reported that the School Board had "approved some 99 pupil transfer requests, most of them from Garnett in Chestertown."⁶⁶

Under the "free choice plan," six African American students were attending predominantly white schools in the County in 1965. No white students were attending predominantly African American schools. Enrollment in the Trainable class was six whites and two African Americans. The school system consisted of eleven elementary schools, of which four were all white, three all African American and four integrated. There were four secondary schools, two of which were all white, one all African American and one integrated. Of the eleven elementary schools, the teaching staffs in three were all white and integrated in eight. The teaching staffs of all four secondary schools were integrated.⁶⁷ On June 1, 1965, Superintendent Corr wrote a letter distributed to all Kent County parents advising them that they had the right to choose either the formerly all Negro school or the formerly all white school nearest to their home to register their child. It further stated that transportation would be provided without regard to race, color or national origin.⁶⁸

The minutes of the July 7, 1965, Board meeting suggest that external pressures on the Board were increasing. The Board members were "informed of the presence of some NAACP workers in the county."⁶⁹ The Superintendent also referred to correspondence and a telephone conference with Mr. Parren Mitchell, Executive Secretary of the Maryland Commission on

⁶⁵ "Grades One and Seven Key to Kent School Desegregation," *Kent County News*, May 26, 1965.

⁶⁶ "Schools Shift 99, Most At Garnett," *Kent County News*, July 14, 1965.

⁶⁷ Statistical Reports of the Board of Education of Kent County. (Contained in a file relevant to desegregation, pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County in the library collection of the Historical Society of Kent County).

⁶⁸ This letter is found in the collection of documents relevant to desegregation pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County, found in the library of the Historical Society of Kent County.

⁶⁹ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, July 7, 1965 (Volume that covers from January, 1964 to December, 1965).

Interracial Problems and Relations. He stated that "Arrangements have been made for Mr. Mitchell and several members of his staff to meet with the Board at 10:00 A.M. on Tuesday, July 27. Mr. Heck and members of the staff were invited to attend."⁷⁰

The year 1966 brought significant changes. On March 26 the Board received a letter from David S. Seeley, Assistant Commissioner for the Equal Educational Opportunities Program of the U.S. Office of Education. He advised Superintendent Corr that "free choice procedures are probably no longer appropriate for moving toward complete elimination of the dual school structure for white and Negro students. . ."⁷¹ Mr. Seeley demanded that the district prepare as soon as possible "suitable plans for the total desegregation of your schools" in time for the opening of school in 1966.⁷² On May 5 the Board met with Mr. Dewey Dodds from the U.S. Office of Education regarding Kent's desegregation plan. The president of the Board at that time was Robert F. Irwin and the vice-president was R. Benson DuVall.⁷³



R. BENSON DUVALL

Others present at the meeting were Preston Heck, the Board's legal council, George Toma, Gilbert Watson, Robert Johnson, Mildred Melvin, and Mrs. Arthur Pinder. According to a record of the occasion, Mr. Dodd stated that the plan previously adopted and

⁷⁰ Preston Heck was the legal counsel for the Board of Education at that time.

⁷¹ Letter contained in a file relevant to desegregation, pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County in the library collection of the Historical Society of Kent County.

⁷² Letter contained in a file relevant to desegregation, pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County, located in the library of the Historical Society of Kent County.

⁷³ Photo of R. Benson DuVall from *Kent County News*, May 15, 1968.

submitted by the Board was good, but that his office felt that Kent County could move further by September, 1966," and that full desegregation should be achieved by September, 1967. The Board concluded that "in their considered judgment, it was not practical to make further advances by September, 1966."⁷⁴ The reasons given for this judgment were: (1) the effect that desegregation would have on the Board's long range program and building plans; (2) administrative problems related to teacher assignment and employment; (3) the continuity of a quality educational program; (4) the emotional climate of the community.⁷⁵ Given that twelve years had already elapsed since the Supreme Court decision and eleven since the Board first began to deal with the desegregation issue, this writer is inclined to view the given reasons with some suspicion and to wonder if it is not just further evidence of delaying tactics. With regard to reason three, the minutes state further, "It is the unanimous judgment of Board members and local school officials that to move more rapidly would be detrimental in numerous ways, especially the continuance of a good educational program."⁷⁶

At its May 19, 1966, meeting "in the interest of providing an effective long-range educational program, it was unanimously decided to discontinue the seventh grade at the Garnett High School as of September and to assign those students to the Chestertown, Rock Hall and Galena High Schools."⁷⁷ As reported in the *Kent County News*, the Board voted to discontinue the first grade at Garnett as well, and to continue with "freedom of choice" in all other grades. Additional school teaching and administrative staff would be desegregated and progress in desegregation of transportation would be continued. Finally, the Board voted to assign most special education and trainable classes to Garnett. The same article announced that the Board's plan had met with the

approval of U.S. Office of Education, thereby making the system eligible for federal financial assistance.⁷⁸

The 1965-66 school year ended with the graduation of one African American student from Chestertown High School, the second to do so. Sandra Rebecca Lindsey⁷⁹ completed the Commercial course of study. The year book indicates that her ambition was to become an accountant and that she was known for "her quietness and always being willing to help." She participated in chorus, the Student Council and GAA.⁸⁰ During the following school year (1966-67) eleven African American students were enrolled at Chestertown High School. Sophomores were Norris Commodore, Armond Fletcher, Terry Fenwick, Dorothea Harmon, India Hutchens, Margo Murray and Marshall Williams. Juniors were Darnell Johnson, Sarah Johnson, Frizzell Clayton and Jerome Thompson.⁸¹



Sandra Rebecca Lindsey

On June 21, 1966 Superintendent Corr met with the County Commissioners. At that meeting, "He advised they had received no further public reaction expressing concern in reference to integration."⁸² The minutes of the November 16, 1966 meeting of the Board indicated that the staff desegregation committee would meet later that day. The stated purpose of that meeting being to

⁷⁴ "School Plan on Desegregation Gets Approval," *Kent County News*, June 15, 1966.

⁷⁹ Photo from *Talon*, Chestertown High School Year Book, 1966, p. 22

⁸⁰ *Talon*, 1966.

⁸¹ *Talon*, 1967.

⁸² Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, June 21, 1966 (Volume covering from January, 1966 to June, 1971).

⁷⁴ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, May 5, 1966 (Volume covering from January, 1966 to June, 1971).

⁷⁵ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, May 5, 1966.

⁷⁶ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, May 5, 1966.

⁷⁷ Meeting of the Board of Education of Kent County, May 19, 1966 (Volume covering from January, 1966 to June, 1971).

concentrate "on problems related to teachers working with students in desegregated situations." The minutes state further that "To date there have been no major problems. There have been a number of minor problems which, fortunately, have been handled at the local school level."⁸³ On August 4th the Superintendent received a letter from John Hope II, Director, Area I, Equal Educational Opportunities program, stating that "On the basis of your report it appears that your school system will make adequate progress to both student and faculty desegregation for the coming school year under the guideline requirements."⁸⁴

Armond Fletcher⁸⁵ spoke to Lani Seikaly about his experience entering Chestertown High School along with 10 other classmates from Garnett in 1966:

This is how I got involved. I just heard somebody in the neighborhood say that they are integrating Chestertown High, and they are looking for people to go so I said to myself, "I'm going." I told my mother that I wanted to go to Chestertown High and she then went to the school board to fill out these forms. It was called the freedom of choice act and she had to sign it not knowing what will happen to her child.⁸⁶

Mr. Fletcher described his initial experience as follows:

On the first day, we all assembled and it sticks with me today. The first thing we heard was about 500 kids packed out from the front door all the way back to where our home class was. And someone would always say, "Nigger, Nigger, Nigger." I never heard that before coming from nobody and I pretty much was a street kid . . . I didn't know how to respond. I looked

⁸³ Minutes of the Board of Education of Kent County, November 16, 1966 (Volume covering from January, 1966 to June, 1971)

⁸⁴ Document in a file of materials relevant to desegregation pertaining to the School Board of Kent County in the collection of the library of the Historical Society of Kent County.

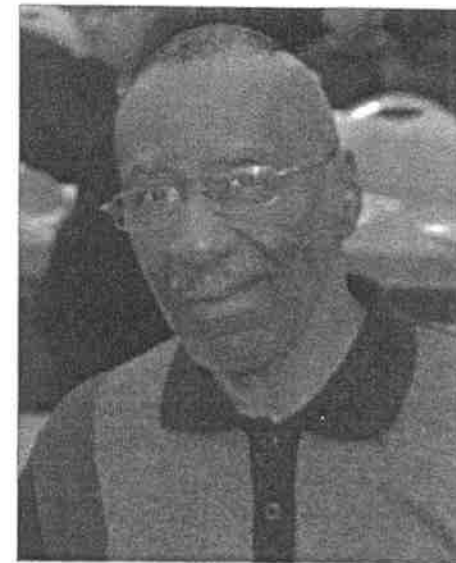
⁸⁵ Photo on page one of oral history of Armond Fletcher, taken by Lani Seikaly in 2012.

⁸⁶ Oral history interview conducted by Lani Seikaly with Armond Fletcher, 2012.

around, but you didn't know who was saying it. It was rough on me. My parents didn't bring me up to be prejudiced.⁸⁷

Mr. Fletcher also related an incident that began in the school cafeteria. A white boy threw food at him. When Mr. Fletcher got up and challenged him, the boy invited him to settle the matter outside. They did, in fact, fight outside until the principal intervened. Mr. Fletcher recalled:

So the principal, I'll never forget him, Mr. Richardson, came and broke us up and took us both to the office. And I said, Mr. Richardson, I want to go back to Garnett. I can't handle this up here, and he said something to me that changed my life. He said, "Armond, stay up here for the remainder of the year. If you don't like it, then go back. Because, he said, the whole town is watching you. And when he said the whole town is watching you, I knew that whatever we were doing up there was bigger than what we were doing, and I stayed up there.



Armond Fletcher

Another of the small group of students who desegregated Chestertown High School in the fall of 1966 was Mrs. Norita Hopkins,⁸⁸ who was born in Rock Hall, MD in 1951. She described her experience at the predominantly white school as follows:

⁸⁷ Oral history interview conducted by Lani Seikaly with Armond Fletcher, 2012.

⁸⁸ Photo on page 1 of oral history interview of Norita Hopkins conducted by Lani Seikaly in 2012.



Norita Hopkins

It was a great experience. First of all, being in an all black community, there was little socialization, no integration, no experience at all. But the main thing, catching the bus on the first day was interesting. I was the first black on the bus and I met some very nice young ladies and I remember their names distinctly after all these years. I found the males weren't as welcoming as the females, at least some of them weren't.⁸⁹

The Reverend Clarence A. Hawkins was one of the first black teachers to teach in predominantly white schools prior to full desegregation taking place. He was an art teacher who taught in schools throughout the county at all levels. When asked in an oral interview if he felt that the desegregation of the schools had been tough for the community, he responded:

Well, if it wasn't for the community, it was tough for me because of what was expected to be done during the day. There were only so many hours. But I don't think it was necessarily tough for the community. In fact, there was just as much reluctance I think in some of the Blacks within these communities, as there was on the whites. This is mine; this is yours. And what's mine is mine and what's yours is yours. I feel I have some control on what's mine. So there's reluctance to give that up. But things change and Kent County was dragging its feet to integrate.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Photo on page 1 of oral history interview of Norita Hopkins conducted by Lani Seikaly.

⁹⁰ Oral History Interview conducted by Lani Seikaly with Reverend Clarence A. Hawkins, 2012.

When Reverend Hawkins was asked if he had had to deal with any ugliness in his role as educator, he responded:

Yes, and I believe one test that I passed perhaps got me to Chestertown Middle School. I was the assistant principal at Kent County High School. Tom Newman was principal. Bruce Fog and myself were assistant principals. I had a problem with one student and asked the parent to come in to discuss the problem. This gentleman, a white gentleman, said to me, "Just because you're Black, you don't have to act like a Nigger." And that was one of the few times that anger rose up in me. Under different circumstances, I might have done more than I did. But I left the room. I had to. And I think that was a turning point for me to be assigned to Chestertown Middle School.⁹¹

In February of 1966 the Maryland State Advisory Committee presented a report to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights. The report was titled *Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties*. The section that deals with Kent County is very interesting in that it presents the official view of the Board of Education along with critiques from some of the leaders of the African American community. Speaking on behalf of the Board, Superintendent Reade Corr stated that "139 of the county's 976 Negro students were enrolled in desegregated schools during the 1965-66 school year." He indicated that these students were divided among five elementary schools and three high schools. He compared these figures with the year 1964 in which "only eight Negroes attended desegregated schools." Mr. Corr pointed out further that Kent County intended to continue its freedom of choice plan until "the county constructs a consolidated comprehensive school."⁹²

The Board of Education's policies were severely criticized in the report by the Reverend Frederick Jones, president of the Chestertown branch of the NAACP and by the Reverend Richard Hicks, also of Chestertown. Both men pointed out that the increase

⁹¹ Oral History Interview, conducted by Lani Seikaly with Rev. Clarence A. Hawkins, 2012.

⁹² Maryland State Advisory Committee, *Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties*. Presented to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, February, 1966.

in enrollment in desegregated schools in 1965-66 had been achieved, not by the efforts of the School Board, but due to a summer campaign soliciting transfers that had been conducted by the Chestertown NAACP. The two leaders criticized not only the Board but also an African American principal, who, they alleged, had discouraged students from transferring to previously all white schools. The principal is said to have told them that, if they transferred, they would "sacrifice school activities, such as band, choir and sports."⁹³ Interestingly enough, Armond Fletcher, cited earlier, did have some initial difficulties pursuing his love of basketball when he transferred from Garnett to Chestertown High School. He stated that the coach wouldn't put him on the first team, but instead on the second team:

So I started playing second string. I was good enough to play first string. I remember these two guys who weren't as good as me. I used to make a lot of shots in practice and all that but they would not put me on the first string. And it kinda got to me a little bit. I said, "I know I can play; I played basketball every day." So they put me in the game. And they saw that the student body responded positively to me, and I started making some shots and started getting some points. I went from 2nd string to 6th man on 1st string. And I broke a record—33 points in one game.⁹⁴

With regard to that same African American principal, Reverend Jones and Reverend Hicks commented that a grandmother had written a testimonial for one of their meetings in which she said that he had advised her grandchildren not to transfer because "they would fail if they attended a predominantly white school."⁹⁵

Reverend Jones also commented that the Board's registration procedures had created confusion in the Negro community. He reported that the Board had issued a limited number of

applications for transfer, since only a small number of students were expected to apply. The report of the Maryland State Advisory Committee goes on to say that during the NAACP's campaign to encourage students to transfer, the group had to duplicate the forms when they ran out, at which point the Board issued a new form bearing their official seal. They then required those who had already filled out the original form to fill out the new one. The report quotes Reverend Jones as saying that "many parents refused or neglected to do this," and that the number "who had applied on the official form was less than those who had originally applied for transfer, and, thus, fewer students exercised a free choice."⁹⁶

The State Advisory Committee report also cites a Mrs. Janice Grant, a Harford County teacher who worked with the NAACP's summer desegregation and voter registration campaign. According to the report:

She said that 230 Negro students had planned to transfer before the Board of Education issued its second official letter but, as a result of the discouragement they encountered, only 120 students actually transferred. Applications for transfer were to be made by June 30, she said, and added that after all 230 applications had been denied, parents were given until July 16 to exercise their choice on the form with the official seal.⁹⁷

Finally, according to the Report, Reverend Hicks spoke of a meeting with Superintendent Corr at which the latter stated that it would be at least five years before the building program could be completed, and that furthermore "... construction plans could not be disclosed because of the possibility of inflated land prices."⁹⁸ Reverend Hicks

⁹³ Maryland State Advisory Committee, *Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties*. Presented to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, February, 1966.

⁹⁴ Maryland State Advisory Committee, *Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties*.

⁹⁵ Maryland State Advisory Committee, *Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties*.

⁹⁶ Maryland State Advisory Committee, *Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties*.

⁹⁷ Maryland State Advisory Committee, *Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties*.

⁹⁸ Maryland State Advisory Committee, *Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties*.

interpreted this as "an appeal to the Negro community to keep its children in segregated schools, at least for the time being."⁹⁹

The School Board did, in fact, announce a major overhaul of the school system in February, 1966. As reported in the *Kent County News*, it included an expenditure of \$3 million in building costs, for example, a new, consolidated high school and a consolidated elementary school, as well as the conversion of the Garnett High School into a vocational-technical, special education and adult center. Also included in the changes, was conversion of the system to provide four years elementary, four years middle school and four years high school, rather than the six, three, three system that was then in place.¹⁰⁰



In March of 1966 Governor J. Millard Tawes appointed two new members to the Kent County School Board, raising the number from three to five. The new members were Gerard K. Bos, a major land owner and the owner of the Kent and Queen Anne's Equipment Co., and Ida D. Wilson, an African American resident of Millington, who had been active in her church and in Republican politics.^{101 102}

⁹⁹ Maryland State Advisory Committee, *Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties*.

¹⁰⁰ "Sweeping School Changes In New \$3 Million Program," *Kent County News*, Feb. 9, 1966.

¹⁰¹ "Two Are Named to School Board," *Kent County News*, March 30, 1966.

¹⁰² Photo of Ida D. Wilson from *Kent County News*, March 30, 1966.

COMPLETE DESEGREGATION ON THE BASIS OF GEOGRAPHIC DISTRICTS: BEGINNING IN 1967-68

The complete desegregation of Kent County schools came with the 1967-68 school year. A headline in the *Kent County News* on January 25, 1967, announced the "Complete Desegregation of Schools In September." The article stated that under the desegregation plan there would be four elementary schools, one each in Rock Hall, Chestertown, Worton and Galena; three middle schools - in Rock Hall, Chestertown and Galena; and one high school at Worton. For the present, however, there would be three high schools in Chestertown, Galena and Rock Hall.¹⁰³

An article published in both local newspapers, *The Kent County News* and *The Chester River Press*, in April 1967, under the title "Desegregation Plan for 1967-68," presented the components of the desegregation plan as follows:

- a. The school which a student attends will depend on where he/she lives with the County divided into zones.
- b. A student may transfer to another school only to pursue a special subject or to permit current juniors to complete their senior year in their present school in Rock Hall, Chestertown or Galena. Garnett High School is closed.
- c. Parents will be sent notification of assignment by April 30 in a letter that will also include school bus service.
- d. Maps showing the attendance zones are available at the superintendent's office.
- e. Any revision of boundaries will be announced in a local paper at least 30 days before it is effected.
- f. All school connected services are open to each student on a desegregated basis.
- g. All transportation provided by the school system will be on a desegregated basis.
- h. The system will not give permission to any student living in the community it serves to attend schools in another school system, where this would tend to limit desegregation or where the opportunity isn't open to all students without regard to race, color or national origin.

¹⁰³ "Complete Desegregation of Schools In September," *Kent County News*, January 25, 1967.

i. Any violation will be reported to the Equal Educational Opportunities Program¹⁰⁴ of the U.S. Office of Education. The name of any person so reporting will not be revealed without that person's consent.

The plan was submitted to the Equal Education Opportunities Program and their acceptance was communicated in a letter to Superintendent Corr from Harold B. Williams, Acting Assistant Commissioner, dated May 31, 1967. Mr. Williams indicated further that "... there will be no further review of compliance during the coming year unless a complaint is received."¹⁰⁵

In June of 1967, the Board announced the appointment of two vice-principals to Chestertown High School, Velois Keefer, white, and Mrs. Marion Niskey, African American. Mr. Keefer was a member of the school's faculty, while Mrs. Niskey had been on the faculty of Garnett School.¹⁰⁶

On September 6, 1967 the School Board produced an Anticipated Summary of Enrollment and Staff, as follows:

Total White Enrollment: 2623
Total Negro Enrollment: 1070
Total Enrolled in non-public schools: 95 (all white)
Total number of full-time teachers: 139 (white), 44 (Negro)
Total number of Central Office staff: 8 (white), 1 (Negro)¹⁰⁷

The actual enrollment as reported to the U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare on October 10 was:

Total white enrollment: 2568
Total Negro enrollment: 1068

¹⁰⁴ Document in a file relevant to desegregation, pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County, in the library collection of the Historical Society of Kent County.

¹⁰⁵ Document in a file relevant to desegregation, pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County in the library collection of the Historical Society of Kent County.

¹⁰⁶ "Name 2 Vice-Principals," *Kent County News*, June 7, 1967.

¹⁰⁷ Document in a file relevant to desegregation, pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County in the library collection of the Historical Society of Kent County.

Total enrolled in non-public schools: 85¹⁰⁸
Full-time instructional staff: 119 (white), 41 (Negro)
Full-time equivalence of part-time instructional staff: 16.2 (white), 3.5 (Negro)
Full-time equivalence of classroom teachers assigned to schools where the majority of pupils are of a different race: 44.5 (Negro)¹⁰⁹

Judging from a letter received by Superintendent Reade Corr in December 1967 from Lloyd R. Henderson, the Education Branch Chief of the Office of Civil Rights, that office appears to have had some confusion regarding the progress of desegregation in Kent County, since the letter contained a memorandum titled "Memorandum for School Districts Operating Under Free Choice Desegregation Plans."¹¹⁰ Mr. Corr responded to that communication on January 18, 1968, stating that the memorandum must have been sent in error, since Kent County schools were no longer operating under a Free Choice Desegregation Plan as of September 1967, when the system changed to a geographical plan, with all pupils living in an area assigned to a school in that area without regard to race.¹¹¹

William P. Harding (Pres) was a member of the class entering Chestertown High School during that first year of complete desegregation. His family had only recently relocated from Dorchester County, where his grandfather was a waterman who employed primarily African American crewmen. When I interviewed Mr. Harding, he commented that he came to Kent County after having interacted with African Americans on a basis of complete equality throughout his childhood in the small, Chesapeake Bay town of Wingate. He told me one story about a childhood trip to Baltimore with his grandfather and one of his

¹⁰⁸ Author's note: It is perhaps not a coincidence that the Kent School, a private K-8 school, was established in Chestertown in 1968.

¹⁰⁹ Document in a file pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County, in the library collection of the Historical Society of Kent County.

¹¹⁰ Letter in a file of documents relevant to desegregation, pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County, in the library collection of the Historical Society of Kent County.

¹¹¹ Letter in a file of documents relevant to desegregation, pertaining to the Board of Education of Kent County, in the library collection of the Historical Society of Kent County.

grandfather's Black crew members, whom he called Lev. He recalled that he was about 8 years old at the time. His grandfather and his companion had been friends and co-workers for many years. One the trip back to Wingate, Mr. Harding said, his grandfather suggested that they stop for food as they drew near to Cambridge. Lev spoke up, saying that he didn't think it was such a good idea, but they did stop at a roadside restaurant that his grandfather was familiar with. Mr. Harding recalled that the noisy restaurant fell into a dead silence as they entered, and the owner approached them to say that he could serve grandfather and grandson, but not Lev. Mr. Harding recalled his grandfather stating that he would never serve them again and they walked out.

Pres Harding was a senior in 1967-68, so was only at Chestertown High School for one year. Like his friend, Armond Fletcher, quoted earlier in this article, he recalled being told by the vice-principal that they were being watched by the whole town, in fact, the whole world! Mr. Harding went on to say that in spite of that, no one was telling them how they should behave. He stated that even at the time he felt that he and his classmates were probably better equipped to handle the situation than the adults were.

Mr. Harding recalled hearing a band formed by some students from the Black community playing in Calvin Frasier's Barber Shop on Cannon St. He went in and they invited him to join them as guitarist, which he did. He also remembered during those years joining a soul band called the Highlanders. That began when they asked to borrow some of his sound equipment for a gig at a well known club in Baltimore. Sometime later they asked for another favor. Their regular guitarist had the mumps and they needed a substitute. He had visions of playing at that club in Baltimore where so many famous musicians had played. It turned out that he was with them for two months, as he put it, "playing in every juke joint" around the area.

In closing, Mr. Harding recalled that Bryan Graves, whose father owned the Uptown Club in Chestertown, graduated in his class. One of his band mates was Mike McBride, who, he said, went on to Nashville and had a career in music. His general sense of the school desegregation, as he experienced it, was that it went relatively smoothly.

A letter to Richard L. Holler,¹¹² recently appointed Superintendent of Kent County schools, written by Dr. Eloise Severinson, Regional Civil Rights Director on March 28, 1969, indicates that the school system was in compliance with the non-discrimination requirement of Title VI and therefore qualified for payment of federal financial assistance. Thus ended the long road to the desegregation of the public schools in Kent Count

Richard L. Holler



African American members of the graduating class of 1968 were Darnell Johnson, Sarah Johnson, Frizzell Clayton, and Jerome Thompson. African American graduates from Chestertown High School in 1969 included Norris Commodore. Mr. Commodore went on to Washington College, from which he graduated in 1973. He became an executive at IBM Credit LLC and, according to the Washington College website, "He manages the worldwide organization with responsibility to develop and negotiate end user and commercial customer financing contracts and establish business practices and operating procedures within IBM Credit."¹¹³ Mr. Commodore has also served on the Board of Visitors and Governors of Washington College. Other African American members of the class of 1969 were Armond Fletcher, India Hutchens, Terry Fenwick, Dorothea Harmon, Margo Murray and Marshall Williams. In an interview on March 8, 2013, Armond Fletcher indicated that he had participated in an integrated band with friends Mike McBride (African American) and Pres Harding (white) while they were in high school. He played drums, while Mike McBride played bass guitar and Pres Harding played guitar.

While desegregation ended in 1967-68, based on testimonials by some African American residents in subsequent years, the county had not achieved true integration as defined earlier in this paper,

¹¹² Photo of Richard L. Holler, cropped from *Kent County News* photo, May 1, 1968.

¹¹³ Webpage, Washington College, <http://1973.washcoll.edu/norriscommodore/> (Consulted on March 11, 2013).



Vivian Roberta Lindsey Isaacs

that is the interaction of members of different races in a particular social environment on a basis of complete equality. Mrs. Vivian Roberta Lindsey Isaacs, who had graduated from Garnett before desegregation spoke to Lani Seikaly about the experience of her children, who studied in desegregated schools:

My kids had to go to Chestertown High School. My daughter had to go to Chestertown High School the last year.¹¹⁴ My youngest son went to Kent County High. It was scary. I don't know what I was afraid of--whether the child wouldn't get along or they might tease him or something. I was scared. Actually, they got along alright. There was never any incident that I know of. Nothing drastic. Maybe some little stuff, maybe some things they didn't even tell me about. But he did fine.¹¹⁵

Mrs. Isaacs illuminated the latter part of the above statement as the interview continued:

I can't think of any direct person, but I believe there were a couple of incidences where they didn't care for the teacher. The teacher must have shown something ---I'm not blaming it on the teacher---but there was some-thing that wasn't just right. The kids didn't really know why they didn't have the same books and for a while not the same curriculum that the others had. Like they say, what you don't know doesn't hurt you. But as time went on, we kept hearing "some of

¹¹⁴ The new, consolidated high school, known as Kent County High School opened in 1971.

¹¹⁵ Oral History Interview conducted by Lani Seikaly with Mrs. Vivian Roberta Lindsey Isaacs, 2012. Photo of Mrs. Isaacs from page 1 of interview.

those Black kids didn't get what the white kids got." But you know, what are you gonna do?¹¹⁶

Mrs. Carolyn Brooks also shared reservations about her daughter's education at Worton Elementary School:

It was traumatic for her. She was very intelligent. She was the most intelligent child in her class, above everybody else. And so I had to be there a lot. And the white parents who lived in other areas in Worton thought it was the best school because they had Black teachers there. So their children were being put in there. So I had to fight for my daughter to get into Mrs. Florence Dorsey's class. . . She was a very good math teacher. I had to fight for my daughter to get into her class because all the white parents wanted their children to be in her class. But my daughter--and I didn't know this until later--told me elementary school was terrible for her because the white teachers were trying to say she wasn't smart or trying to do this to her. . . And I would have the Black teachers coming telling me things that was going on at the school and I would think to myself, "Why aren't you fighting for these Black students? Why are you coming here to tell me?"¹¹⁷

Mrs. Brooks stated further that she later enrolled her daughter in private schools, first in Broad Meadow School in Middletown, DE, later in Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic School in Easton, MD, and finally in St. Andrews, also in Middletown, from which she graduated and went on to Sarah Lawrence College.

In the spring of 1968 Governor Spiro T. Agnew announced the appointment of the Reverend Paul R. Hilton to the Kent County Board of Education for a five-year term.



Paul R. Hilton

¹¹⁶ Oral History Interview conducted by Lani Seikaly with Mrs. Vivian Roberta Lindsey Isaacs, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Oral History Interview conducted by Lani Seikaly with Mrs. Carolyn Brooks, 2012.

Reverend Hilton succeeded Mrs. Ida D. Wilson, mentioned earlier in this account. According to an article in the *Kent County News*, "In addition to being a minister, the Reverend Hilton has been in the personnel department of Vita Food Products for the past 15 years."¹¹⁸



Members of the Kent County School Board, 1968

¹¹⁸ "Paul Hilton Appointed," *Kent County News*, May 8, 1968. Photo from same article.

CONCLUSION

Kent County public schools were among the last in the nation to end segregation. It seems apparent to this writer that the County Board of Education did not act with anything approaching all deliberate speed after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954. As we have seen, thirteen years passed before complete desegregation was achieved. It is certainly understandable that there would be logistical issues, such as building space needs in the changed system as well as transportation issues. Nevertheless, I believe that those issues could have been handled more rapidly than they were. As I studied the minutes of the meetings of the Board of Education over those thirteen years, I sensed clear evidence of delaying tactics along the way. Comments by African American community leaders, by state and federal officials who were overseeing desegregation and by African American residents of the county, who were interviewed recently, provide further evidence that the process was slower than it absolutely needed to be. That there was significant resistance in the white community is evidenced by the opening of the local private school, the Kent School in 1968,¹¹⁹ the year in which complete desegregation of the public schools occurred. In fairness to that school, I would add that it has long ago transcended its origins, has a clear diversity statement, and an excellent reputation in the field of private education. Has full integration of the racial groups in Kent County public education been achieved in the almost 45 years since desegregation occurred? Answering that question goes beyond the purposes of this paper and remains for someone else to undertake.

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¹¹⁹ An article appearing on page 1 of the *Kent County News* on July 31, 1968 announced the opening of the Kent School on September 12. The principal, Mrs. Calvert C. Merriken, stated that one grade was completely filled and that others were from 50% to 80% full.

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"A LIBERAL SHARE OF PUBLIC PATRONAGE": CHESTERTOWN'S ANTEBELLUM BLACK BUSINESSES

By Lucy Maddox

In 1852, the Maryland House of Delegates published a report, issued by its Committee on the Colored Population of Maryland, addressing the situation of free blacks in the state. The Committee noted that there were more free blacks in Maryland than in any other state and that the number was continuing to grow. The statistics for Kent County were particularly revealing—and troubling—to the Committee: by their calculation, there were 10 free blacks for every 100 white persons in the county in 1790, while in 1850 there were 10 free blacks for only 17 whites.¹ Given the conviction on the Committee that free blacks and whites would never be able to "amalgamate" in ways that might "promote the prosperity of the state," the Committee's conclusion was that colonization was the answer. Separation of the races was "the only solution of the political problem to which their present existence together gives rise, and this being conceded there is but one place to which they can remove as a body—and that is Africa."²

What the Committee did not include in its report was any account of the economic status of the free black population, its increasing prosperity, or the history of free black entrepreneurship in the state. The economic competitiveness of an increasing number of free blacks, we can be sure, was no small part of the reason that some white Marylanders argued for the transportation of free blacks to Africa.

In Chestertown, where the population consisted of approximately 350 free blacks, 150 slaves, and 790 whites in 1850, black-owned businesses were commonplace, and many black entrepreneurs were steadily accumulating money and property. Not surprisingly, many of these free black businesses took advantage of Chestertown's location near the Chesapeake Bay. By the nineteenth century, they were also taking advantage of the country's increasing fondness for oysters. The free black population on the eastern shore had always been part of the fisheries business in the region, primarily as watermen and especially as oystermen. Since Maryland law prevented blacks from owning their own oyster beds or oyster boats, some free black watermen emigrated farther up the coast to places with less restrictive laws, while others moved into

other phases of the oyster business, including the operation of oyster bars or saloons. Before mid-century, in 22 Chestertown, as in such oyster-eating cities as New York, the selling of oysters had become almost entirely a black enterprise.³

A letter that appeared in the *Chestertown Transcript* in 1866 suggests the extent to which the black-owned oyster saloons in Chestertown were a threat to white-owned businesses; it also underscores the connection between free black success and the push for colonization. The letter, signed by "A Citizen," complains that the saloons were drawing away a clientele that properly belonged to the local hotels. The writer was particularly disturbed because of the black ownership of the businesses:

Oyster saloons are usually kept by "*colored citizens*," whom the destructives and political abolitionists have attempted to place on a footing with the white man, and they are still endeavoring to extend greater privileges, instead of legislating them to Liberia or some other clime. Under these circumstances, should not the white race endeavor to encourage their own, and especially in a matter which is so palpably proper, and almost essential, to the continuance of good Hotels?⁴

The Citizen's aggrieved letter is one sign of how well-established African American saloon-keepers had become in Chestertown by the 1860s and how well they had succeeded in catering to a clientele of blacks and whites, visitors and local people.

The Perkins family of Chestertown would certainly have been part of the problem that vexed the Citizen. Samuel Perkins and his son William were among the most well-known and most prosperous of Chestertown's nineteenth-century black entrepreneurs. In addition to their successful oyster restaurants, both initiated a number of other enterprises over the course of their careers. Samuel Perkins was placing advertisements for Baltimore beer and oysters in the *Chestertown Telegraph* as early as 1827. In 1828, he was advertising that customers would find his business "to have as many conveniences as any establishment of this kind on the Eastern Shore of Maryland."⁵ In that same year, Perkins and Thomas Cuff, another local black businessman, announced the opening of a shad and herring fishery near Chestertown. While it is not clear how long Perkins remained in the fishery business, he continued to operate his oyster saloon for at least another eighteen years, moving the location of the business from the Masonic Hall to

a private home near the Market House and then back to the Masonic Hall. In 1846, Perkins announced that he had moved to yet another location, in the old Billiard Room, where, he reminded customers, he was drawing on his experience of more than twenty-five years in the oyster-serving business. In addition, he announced, he was prepared both to provide haircuts and to "set" razors for his clientele. Perkins "respectfully" requested "those gentlemen who formerly patronized him, and the public generally, to give him a call, and prove his skill for themselves."⁶

Samuel Perkins's son William was one of the most energetic, entrepreneurial, and successful of Chestertown's mid-century black businessmen. His Rising Sun Saloon, which opened in 1856 on Fish Street (now Maple Avenue) near the Chester River Bridge, probably outlasted all of its competitors, remaining in business into the early 1890s. The Rising Sun was originally billed as an oyster house, and William drew on the Perkins family reputation in his early appeals to customers: "all who have eaten any oysters served up by my father or myself, know that they 'can't be beat.'"⁷ Soon after opening, Perkins expanded his offerings to include crabs, terrapins, and ice cream. His prediction, published in the *Kent News*, that "from his former patronage he flatters himself that he will receive a liberal and generous support" in his new endeavors, was not immodest.⁸ By 1891, Perkins was not only running a busy restaurant but was offering to supply excursion groups with "all kinds of ice cream or water ice."⁹ His restaurant achieved considerable fame in the area; when Perkins died in 1895, his obituary noted that "because of the excellence of his meals, and particularly his oysters, the 'Rising Sun Saloon' became notorious throughout the State."¹⁰

There were many other African-Americans in Chestertown who were serving food and drink, sometimes including oysters and sometimes not, at the same time that the Perkinses were operating their oyster saloons. Perry (or Pere) Chambers was selling "Baltimore and York River oysters" as well as "imported dry fruits" by 1828. James Jones, who signed his first newspaper ads "descendant of Africa," by 1929 was offering customers fresh meat and "Baltimore's best porter and ale," all sold from his house at the corner of Cannon and Kent Streets. Philip Jones was operating an ice cream parlor on Queen Street sometime before 1846; in May of that year, he announced the re-opening of his ice cream business, with the additional offering of pickled oysters in season. In 1852, the brother-and-sister team of Kitty and Thomas Toomey opened an oyster saloon in town, where, according to their ad in the *Kent*

News, "by strict attention to business they hope to receive a liberal share of public patronage."¹¹ Henry and Louisa Harris, a married couple, announced two new businesses in 1857; Henry opened an oyster saloon, and Louisa opened an ice cream and crab restaurant, both located on Cross Street. Edward Graves, the son of a very successful Delaware businessman who made his money in the food business, opened his own oyster house and saloon at the Masonic Lodge in Chestertown in 1860.¹²

Another thriving Chestertown restaurant was the Cape May Saloon, owned and operated by Levi Rogers, which opened in 1849. The following year, Rogers, a former slave, announced the relocation of his saloon to a new building at the foot of Cannon Street, where it seems to have remained at least until 1861.¹³

Samuel Perkins's addition of a barbering sideline to his restaurant suggests that his oyster-house was originally a male preserve. In addition, some of the early advertisements, including Perkins's, specifically promised to "serve up [oysters] for gentlemen in the best manner" or guaranteed that "gentlemen can be accommodated on the most reasonable terms."¹⁴ The omission of women from the gentlemen's saloons obviously provided an opening for black entrepreneurs, both women and men, to fill the gap by offering services designed primarily to attract women. In 1849, Clara Allen and Eliza Rogers (Levi Rogers's wife) advertised that they were offering ice cream, cake, and lemonade to both ladies and gentlemen at the Cape May Saloon. The following year, Levi Rogers advertised that his restaurant was now prepared to serve suppers for ladies upstairs during the summer, while gentlemen could be provided with ham, eggs, and coffee downstairs any time of day. As always, oysters were available upstairs or down.

In 1852, Clara Allen apparently separated from Eliza Rogers and went into business for herself, opening an oyster house in the former offices of the *Kent News*, where she also offered cakes made to order. William Perkins once again altered his business plan, this time specifically to include women customers, advertising in 1857 that he had fitted up a room at the Rising Sun "exclusively for the reception of LADIES, and no gentlemen will be served in that room except in company with ladies." By this point, Perkins seemed intent on gentrifying his business in general: his advertisements emphasized "LEMONADE in the French style, *Mineral Water* from celebrated fountains," and "delicious edibles and refreshments of the season neatly served up."¹⁵ In that same year, both Louisa Harris and Maria Bracker, the daughter of businessman Thomas Cuff,

advertised ice cream and other refreshments to both ladies and gentlemen—Harris at her stand on Cross Street and Bracker at her saloon on Cannon Street, between Queen and Water Streets. William Perkins redecorated the Rising Sun Saloon yet again in 1879, refurbishing the ladies' parlors with new furniture and wallpaper; the *Chestertown Transcript* speculated that the new spiffed-up parlors "cannot be excelled outside our large cities."¹⁶

Many of the saloon-keepers and restaurateurs in Chestertown were also actively pursuing other business interests. Pere Chambers was a butcher as well as an oyster-seller. In addition to oysters, shad, herring, porter, and beer (as well as his barbering services), Samuel Perkins sold liniment for curing rheumatism. Levi Rogers, the owner of the Cape May Saloon, was also advertising a freight service to and from Baltimore on the schooner *Mary Rebecca*. William Perkins was a butcher as well as a cook, and in the course of his long career in Chestertown he also sold lumber, lime, oyster shells, and ice, which he imported from Maine. Customers interested in purchasing the Maine ice could visit Perkins's ice house, which was open for an hour every morning except Sunday, or arrange to have regular deliveries made to their homes. One indication of Perkins's success as a salesman is that he sold enough oysters to give him a secondary business in shells; the town of Chestertown bought nearly seventy dollars worth of oyster shells from him in 1868 (the town also bought shells from black restaurateur Henry Harris). In the 1880s and 1890s, Perkins was advertising lime made from his shells.

The relatively small number of African Americans in Chestertown with money to spend and the leisure in which to spend it meant that black businesses needed to cater to both white and black customers. Accordingly, the advertisements for black-run businesses appearing in the local newspapers, with their typical address to the "ladies and gentlemen" of the town, cast as wide a net as possible. The reliance of these black establishments on white trade was a necessary and expected part of doing business. In the two or three decades before the Civil War, whites and blacks especially free blacks—in Chestertown regularly availed themselves of each other's goods and services.

One of Chestertown's most prominent and wealthy white citizens was James Alfred Pearce, a lawyer who served in the state legislature and then was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1843. Throughout the 1840s, Pearce maintained a residence in the old Customs House at the corner of Front and High Streets, near the

epicenter of black business activity; within two blocks of his home were the homes and some of the businesses of Thomas Cuff, Maria Bracker, Levi Rogers, Philip Jones, Perry Chambers, and others. The account books that Pearce kept for years reveal both the extent to which he relied on black businesses and the variety of services they were able to provide to him and to other customers. In the fall of 1844, for example, Pearce noted that he paid 25 cents to Samuel Perkins for oysters; fifty cents to Perry Chambers for beef; sixty-two and a half cents to Levi Rogers for manure and oysters; and one dollar to James Jones for meat. Interestingly, Pearce also records receiving a series of payments in 1846 from Thomas Cuff, totaling twenty dollars, to cover a year's wages for someone named Noah. This person may have been indentured, but it seems more likely that he was enslaved to Pearce or to someone for whom Pearce was acting as agent. Either way, the transaction offers evidence that the labor of enslaved or indentured persons was part of the economic exchange between black and white citizens in Chestertown.

The particular relationship between Pearce and the African American business-owners he patronized offers some insight into the general complexities of racial relationships in antebellum Chestertown. Pearce was a slave-owner who advocated the colonization of free blacks. In the 1840 census, he is listed as owning seven slaves, and the 1850 census lists thirteen slaves in his household, with ages ranging from three years to eighty. At the same time, he was living adjacent to Cannon Street and the Scott's Point area, where many free blacks lived and worked, and he was using their services regularly. The account books of Thomas Whaland, a prominent Chestertown physician, reveal a pattern similar to that found in Pearce's ledgers. Whaland owned four slaves in 1850; at the same time, a significant number of free black persons were among his regular patients, including Perry Chambers, Samuel Perkins, William Perkins, Levi Rogers, James Jones, and Thomas Toomey.

Black business people in Chestertown operated in a context in which free blacks, slaves, and those who were profiting directly from slavery lived and worked cheek by jowl. For much of the 1840s, to take one striking example, John Denning, a well-known slave trader who operated out of Centreville and Baltimore, ran advertisements in the local Chestertown papers offering top dollar for saleable slaves. These ads sometimes ran on the same page with, even adjacent to, the ads for the businesses run by Samuel Perkins, William Perkins, Levi Rogers, and others. When emancipation put Denning out of business, he retired to

Chestertown, purchasing a lot on Cannon Street adjacent to the property of James Jones, a prominent black businessman.

While free blacks in Chestertown were able to profit from the demand for goods and services from white residents, they also had to negotiate the obstacles, legal and otherwise, instituted by whites. No black person could vote before the Civil War, and in Chestertown there was a concerted effort to keep them from voting even after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, through the imposition of a property requirement for registration. Free blacks who didn't have sufficient protection were in danger of being kidnapped and sold as slaves. A meeting was held in Chestertown in 1858 by slave owners who were concerned about threats to their human property posed by abolitionists and by the very presence of free blacks in the community. Among the most vocal defenders of slavery at that meeting was James Alfred Pearce.

Some free blacks in Chestertown supported the colonization movement, but for reasons different from those expressed by whites like Pearce or by the House of Delegates' Committee on the Colored Population of Maryland. William Perkins and James Jones attended the 1852 convention of the Free Colored People of the State of Maryland held in Baltimore, where both spoke out in favor of colonization. In his comments, Perkins specifically addressed problems he had witnessed in Kent County:

Wm. Perkins spoke of the law enforced in Kent, by which the children of free colored persons, whom the officers decided the parents were unable to support, were bound out; and also of the law which prohibited a colored person returning to the State if he should happen to leave it. They were oppressed and borne down.¹⁷

These laws would have been all too familiar to Perkins and other free blacks in Chestertown. The local Orphans Court was legally free to declare black parents unfit to care for their children, who could then be indentured to white claimants—and frequently were. In mentioning the second law, Perkins may well have had in mind the case of Maria Bracker, who had been arrested in 1851 because she had moved into Maryland from another state, which was against the law. (Her case was dismissed because of the statute of limitations.)

The complex antebellum laws and practices affecting the lives of free blacks obviously shifted during and after the war and were eventually transmuted into the more clear-cut segregationist laws and practices of the Jim Crow period. The traces of many black businesses and businesspersons become more difficult to follow after the war, and some disappear altogether. We don't know what happened to many of Chestertown's black entrepreneurs. Census figures and other records, however, give us some idea of how well black business owners had done in the decades before the war. In the 1860 census, for example, Pere Chambers's personal wealth was listed at one thousand dollars and his real estate holdings, which included a house in Chestertown and a house on ten acres in Georgetown, were estimated at fifteen hundred dollars. James Jones's two valuations (personal and real estate) were for five thousand dollars and thirty-five hundred dollars. Philip Jones was able to will three houses at Scott's Point to his children. Mary Barrett, who was identified in the 1860 census as an "oyster dealer," owned real estate valued at four hundred dollars. Phenix Reed, a twenty-five-year-old barber, was already worth four hundred dollars in personal wealth and two hundred dollars in real estate in 1860.

The obituary for William Perkins reported that his wealth at one point reached an estimated ten thousand dollars. By the time of his death in 1895, however, Perkins had apparently lost it all; he died, evidently a pauper, in Baltimore's Home for Aged Colored People. Perkins may have been the victim of his own financial overextension, as his newspaper obituary rather snidely suggested in remarking that "because of too many interests his business success commenced to wane, and finally his very snug little fortune was entirely swept away;"¹⁸ but he may also have succumbed to a new racial culture in which the kind of white economic fears expressed by the "Citizen" in 1866 had expanded to include more than concerns about the hotel business. Perkins and others, that is, may ultimately have fallen victim to an economic segregation that was much more pronounced and exclusive after the Civil War than it had been before.

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Notes

¹ These numbers are roughly consistent with the census counts for 1790 (6,748 whites and 655 free blacks) and 1850 (5616 whites and 2,491 free black).

2 Cited in African Repository, vol. 28, 1852, p.326.

3 Mark Kurlansky notes that "In the first half of the notes that "In the first half of the nineteenth century, it was widely accepted in New York that oyster cellars, like dance halls and many taverns, were run by blacks." The Big Oyster, New York, 2006, p. 167.

4 Chestertown Transcript, April 28, 1866.

5 Chestertown Telegraph, December 26, 1828.

6 Kent News, March 28, 1846

7 Kent News, October 12, 1856.

8 Kent News, June 20, 1857.

9 Chestertown Transcript, August 27, 1891.

10 Chestertown Transcript, May 9, 1895.

11 Chestertown Telegraph, May 16, 1828; Chestertown Telegraph, May 15, 1829; Kent News, February 28, 1852.

12 Kent News, April 18, 1857; Kent News, June 20, 1857; November 24, 1860.

13 It is not clear when the Cape May Saloon closed. Albin Kowaleski, in an unpublished thesis, notes that Rogers sold the business to James Jones in 1861 and moved to Delaware. However, Rogers was living in Chestertown when he remarried in 1865; the Kent News also listed him among the leaders of the Chestertown "Negro Party" in 1870.

14 Chestertown Telegraph, January 5, 1827; May 16, 1828.

15 Chestertown Transcript, May 30, 1857.

16 June 12, 1879.

17 Journal of Negro History, I, 1916, p. 337.

18 Chestertown Transcript, May 9, 1895.

This article is indebted to previous work done on free blacks in Chestertown by a number of people, including Kevin Hemstock, Davey McColl, Peter Heck, Craig O'Donnell, and Albin Kowaleski. This article originally appeared in Old Kent, Volume 5, Number 1, 2011.

THE FREEDOM RIDERS COME TO CHESTERTOWN

By Sheila West Austrian

Washington College, like the rest of Maryland's Eastern Shore in 1962, seemed almost untouched by the social forces ripping apart racial segregation in schools, restaurants and hotels across the nation. And before gentrification imposed today's economic segregation, the races lived in close and cordial proximity throughout Chestertown's historic district, especially down Cannon Street. College President Daniel Gibson worked hard to maintain good relations with the community, but Freedom Riders were scheduled to visit Chestertown and he was sure some of his students would join the expected civil rights demonstrations. That could cause problems with the town, but he strongly believed the college should not interfere with the students' right of free speech. Gibson was correct to worry, but Chestertown's social fabric ultimately was strong enough to cope with this new challenge.

Washington College was small, financially strapped with fewer than 500 students, and extremely homogenous. Of 145 new students in 1962, 79 were from Maryland and most of the rest from other Mid-Atlantic states. Gibson had convinced the Board to move toward an enrollment of 750, but the admissions yield rate remained disappointingly low, amid faculty fears that growth would merely buttress the school's reputation as a haven for the academically challenged.

Washington College certainly was a party school in the 1960s; issues of *The Elm* are filled with articles and photos depicting a whirl of dances and parties, many sponsored by the fraternities and sororities. The Kappa Alpha fraternity had hosted a Southern Ball the previous spring, with couples passing through an arch of swords raised by fraternity brothers dressed in pseudo-Confederate uniforms. An African-American band, the Pipe Dreamers, played "rhythmic music" at the Intrafraternity Council Dance in 1962 but no black guests appeared in the photo. Competition for the yearly Best-Dressed Girl contest was fierce. Robert Cleaver, who graduated in 1958, recalls no student discussions of integration issues but does remember an exhilarating Little Richard performance at the Uptown Club. He also remembers President Gibson placed the honky-tonk, a few steps from the campus off limits when he learned students had "integrated" the black club.

Students were concerned about broader issues as well. A test given at the college in March would give local draft boards "evidence of [which young men had] aptitude for continued undergraduate and graduate study." John Glenn had "conquered space on February 20, and a Washington College graduate, Arthur Crisfield '59, was among the first Peace Corps Volunteers sent to Thailand. Students may have been geographically isolated, but they also were part of the new generation inspired by President Kennedy.

Theoretically, the college was not even a segregated institution, for the admissions policy did not explicitly exclude blacks. The Registrar at the time, Erman Foster, later told history professor Nathan Smith that any applications from African-Americans had been rejected. By the late 1950s, however, the administration quietly enrolled a few African-American students. Thomas Morris, an all-round athlete and an academic achiever in the class of 1962, had been the first. Two black women, Pat Godbolt and Dale Patterson, also were on campus that year.

Their presence had generated some of the tension between President Gibson and the Board. When integration first had been discussed, one Board member had fretted about the extra expense to the college. Wouldn't it be very costly, he had pointed out, to build separate dorms, toilets, and dining rooms? He was horrified to learn that the facilities would be shared. Another member of the Board vocally denounced integration as the "ruination" of the college. The college probably had felt daring when it decided to "experiment" with a few black students but newly hired faculty were disappointed by the slow progress. Nathan Smith, recruited to Chestertown from Chicago, had asked for assurance that the college was not segregated before taking the position. He found the on-paper and on-the-ground situations quite different.

Neither Washington College nor Chestertown were comfortable places for black students in 1962. Dale Patterson, who grew up in strictly segregated Baltimore, recalls the 1960s as "the decade from hell." She enjoyed her chemistry classes, served as an RA, and worked in the dining hall to supplement scholarships and loans. Only fifteen years old when she matriculated, Patterson didn't have much of a social life, for the sororities wouldn't pledge blacks and she was too timid to venture into town. "I just decided that I would not ever go to the movie in Chestertown," she recently told a Washington College senior, "because I refused to sit upstairs. I also did not want to be lynched." Although Patterson noted that the college curriculum included no facets of black culture, she did give black music credit for breaking down barriers. "To my ways of

thinking," she said, "Berry Gordy single-handedly overcame the situation with Motown since everyone, black and white, wanted to hear the Supremes, the Temptations, and the Miracles."

Chestertown itself remained deeply divided along racial lines. Most black residents worked as farm laborers or in food processing plants. Aside from the black Garnett School and the black churches, there were few middle-class jobs open to African Americans. At Washington College, blacks were employed only as kitchen or maintenance workers. They appear in yearbooks, but only as nameless faces in group photographs.

Professor Smith and several other faculty members attended meeting of the new NAACP branch. The organization concentrated on improving conditions at the local hospital, which maintained segregated and inferior facilities for the black patients. Concerned white faculty wives, members of the American Association of University Women, had participated in a survey of the segregated slum housing adjacent to the campus. They found that many black homes had no indoor plumbing and that fires from kerosene heaters were common. AAUW activists also interviewed local school board members to determine why Chestertown public schools remained segregated, despite the 1954 Supreme Court decision and the fact that most of the Western Shore had begun full integration in 1955. A senior faculty member bragged to the women about the existing system to prove Chestertown schools were not segregated. Any black student wanting to transfer had to apply to the Board of Education. The principal of Garnett School would convince the student to stay at Garnett, which then contained grades one through twelve. Faculty who shared the local anti-integration ethos, often asked the faculty wives, "why aren't you in your kitchens? Why are you bothering about this stuff?"

For white citizens, Chestertown seemed almost like an idealized Norman Rockwell community. The *Kent County News*, a typical small town weekly, gave fulsome coverage to garden club meetings, golf tournaments, agricultural news, and high school sports. The biggest event of the year was probably the introduction of dial telephones. No need to tell an operator the number, just listen for "a steady humming sound" and make the connection yourself. Kent County still had four high schools (in Galena and Rock Hall, as well as the two in Chestertown), a skating rink in Worton, and even illegal slot machines at the Kitty Knight House.

But until 1962, the town's black citizens were all but invisible in the public record. The paper rarely showed any black faces, and then

almost always in the two columns dedicated to African-American affairs: one for Garnett School and the other the social "News from Butlertown." Where white teens listed a wide range of future aspirations, the Garnett School elite were more likely to cite barber, beautician, or stenographer. And where white newsmakers were normally named in the headline, blacks were not, as in a perfectly race neutral article titled "County Negro Falls Off Boat; Is Drowned."

Most white residents probably considered themselves fair-minded and reasonable, for their lives rarely intersected with the black neighbors on issues of substance. That placid situation changed in February, when Freedom Riders crossed the Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

Freedom Riders, or busloads of white and black civil rights activists, had been taking their non-violent demand for the integrated access to public facilities in other states and cities for months. The Eastern Shore's relative isolation ended on the third of February, a cold and rainy Saturday, when "two big Greyhound buses" and "nine or ten carloads of persons" arrived at the Bethel A.M.E. Church in Chestertown. Several dozen police cars, most from other jurisdictions, were waiting for them. So were hundreds of bystanders and about eighty cars at Bud Hubbard's, a restaurant with a racist reputation and filled with angry white men drinking beer.

A little after three in the afternoon, crowds near Bud's started pummeling the picketers, who eventually fled back to the church. Later "an angry mod of fifty Chestertown Negroes" returned to Bud's, where police managed to avert a real brawl. According to *Elm* reporter Walt Marschner, several Washington College students marched with the picketers or met with the demonstrators at Bethel. He described a rally at the church that night that was "packed with emotion," where tired demonstrators sang civil rights songs and danced in an impromptu conga line. College students, a few professors, and concerned black Chestertown residents, perhaps for the first time together, earnestly discussed efforts to solve the town's racial problems. The reporter learned that the Garnett School principal, previously one of the most respected men in the black community, had left town rather than meet with the Freedom Riders. By standing with the white establishment, he had lost much of his authority.

The *Elm* proved excellent news coverage of the Freedom Ride, with good background information and hour-by-hour commentary. The

article was so good, in fact, that a professor with Supreme Court contacts sent each justice a copy. But the *Elm's* editor in chief, characterized by Marschner as an "Eastern Shore segregationist," put his own stamp on the event with the misleading headline, "Freedom Raids Plague Chestertown."

The *Kent County News* also played the story on its first page, focusing on the few arrests and giving the fracas at Bud's special notice. In an editorial, "The Point Has Been Made," the paper charged that the "so-called" freedom rides were merely a publicity ploy. Local restaurants, it asserted, had the legal right to "cater to any clientele they may choose." A letter to the editor, from a Kennedyville resident, contained unintentional humor with a non-standard version of an old saying. Complaining about Negro demands, he warned, "Give them the finger and they will demand the whole hand."

The *News* also printed letters from local African-Americans who supported integration. One Garnett School graduate told readers about taking her family to the drug store for ice cream. "I don't suppose you can imagine," she wrote, "just how to go about explaining to small children why they can spend their money in such places, but the privilege of sitting down and eating is out of the question." A few months later, the *News* ran a positive article about "Project Eastern Shore," an interracial effort to improve community relations through a series of lectures and discussions. Whereas serious and violent protests continued for several years in near-by Cambridge, Chestertown's leadership seems to have accepted the inevitability of social change.

President Gibson consulted with the Chairman of the Board of Visitors and Governors and then issued a statement four days after the demonstrations. Gibson chose his words carefully, to offend as few as possible. He left Washington College solidly on the fence, advising:

Washington College considers participation in activities supporting integration a matter to be decided by the individual students and their parents. The College neither encourages nor prohibits participation in sit-ins, petitions, etc. The College, however, does not condone violations of the law.

The *Elm's* editor, H. Allen Stafford, continued to ridicule civil rights activism in bold responses to student letters in favor of integration.

He describes the typical freedom rider as "a juvenile delinquent who enters uninvited, inflicts wounds, leaves, and only the wound remains." Pitting community mores against "youthful exhibitionism," Stafford preached that "long-range interests" were harmed by demonstrations. Even the relatively liberal President Gibson, with typical Eastern Shore disregard for haste, thought integration might come to Washington College "in one hundred years. . . In any case, no sooner than fifty years."

During the few weeks demonstrations took place in Chestertown, President Gibson downplayed any college activism to members of the Board. In a March 19 agenda sent in advance of a regular meeting on the 24th, Gibson said "small numbers of students" and to the best of his knowledge "no faculty" had demonstrated. When a student handbill urged participation, the President had convinced the author of the impropriety of invoking the college name or using college mail facilities. He warned the Board that while "some ill will in the local community" resulted from the student action, banning participation would have worse consequences, including a "strong reaction within the faculty itself." And, as he reminded, "the vast majority of our students are not participating or even sympathetic to the methods being used."

After a few weeks, the organized protestors moved on to different locales. Most Washington College students resumed the normal routine of classes, sports, and social events. The guys at Bud's kept drinking beer and talking tough but the town quietly moved to integrate its commercial and public facilities. Stam's and the Chestertown Pharmacy just removed the stools from the soda fountain. By 1963, the movie theater, bowling alley and skating rink had dropped official segregation. The public schools and hospital followed suit. Washington College enrolled more black students during the next three decades but until the school made real efforts to increase diversity in the 1990s, few African Americans even considered applying.

Even today, most black college applicants probably would consider Chestertown an inhospitable community. The local black middle-class remains minuscule and voluntary social and economic segregation usually keeps the races apart. Local African Americans generally do not attend college lectures, worship at the "white" churches, join the country club or eat at table-service restaurants. Urban renewal housing units have replaced the slums around Bethel Church but unemployed young black men still slouch at the corner of High Street and College Avenue. They may have even less

in common with today's Washington College student's than the two groups did in 1962. At least then, the dream was new and more than legal equality seemed possible.

Note: This essay was written in 2003 for a creative non-fiction class taught by Adam Goodheart. Sources included newspaper articles, materials from the College archives and personal interviews. This slightly edited version appeared in *Here on the Chester: Washington College Remembers Old Chestertown*, edited by John Lang and published in 2006 by the Literary House Press of Washington College. It is reprinted here with permission from the Press.

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THE UPTOWN CLUB: IN THE DAYS WHEN RAY CHARLES, OTIS REDDING, B.B. KING, FATS DOMINO, LITTLE RICHARD AND JAMES BROWN HUNG OUT RIGHT HERE IN RIVER CITY

By Leslie Prince Raymond

Note from the editor of Here on the Chester: Pearl Johnson Hackett, her daughter Sylvia Hackett Frazier and their cousin, Rosie Perkins Herbert, grew up just a few steps from the Uptown Club, Charlie Graves' popular venue for black musical artists in the 1950s and '60s. The club on the northwest corner of College Avenue and Calvert Street, though smaller than Harlem's Apollo Theatre and Chicago's Regal Theatre, was a popular stop for black artists performing on the Chitlin' Circuit—a loose network of jook joints, nightclubs, dance halls, bars, theatres and restaurants that flourished throughout the U.S. and especially in the South during the pre-Civil Rights era. Because of recording industry apartheid, which relegated black music to black audiences, black spaces and midnight-to-dawn time slots on radio, the Chitlin' Circuit was critical to the economic survival of back artists who had not crossed over to mainstream audiences.

ROSIE: Charlie's was the entertainment spot of the Eastern Shore... and the Western Shore. I can remember an influx of people coming from Wilmington, and Philadelphia, however the word got out, and this would be a crowded little town.

PEARL: When he had dances the cars were parked everywhere. You had to dress to go out!

ROSIE: I'm going back in the era when the Nike Base was first built, and the soldiers started coming, and you had to dress up. And the ladies really looked good. They had their hairdos; they worked all week to get an outfit for the weekend...

PEARL: ...to go down to Charlie's...Because it was a popular place. You didn't wear your work-clothes to go there.

SYLVIA: Back when I could remember, Mr. Charlie Graves used to wear a suit every day, with a big brimmed hat, and a tie... Because he was the owner of the Uptown Club!

PEARL: We can go back to when Charlie had only the restaurant across the street. That was first. It was across the street, on the right-hand side. And then he went across the street and built a bar and dance hall. It must have been in the early '50s.

SYLVIA: I always thought it was an old saloon...as little kids, we'd walk past and peek in...

ROSIE: I remember first hearing about B.B. King coming to town... and then Fats Domino, and this is in the era of them first starting, getting on the Chitlin' Circuit. When stars came to town, I guess it got too hot in the building, and he would open the back doors and everybody would stand there and SEE the stars. If you weren't old enough to go to the show, you still got to see them.

SYLVIA: Even Etta James was here.

ROSIE: And the Franklin Girls—Aretha, Erma and one named Carolyn I think.

SYLVIA: You could almost say that from the James Brown—B.B. King era all of them have at least dropped in. Even Richard Prior.

ROSIE: Gene Chandler, Sam Cook, Clyde McPhatter, The Platters, Duke of Earl...

LESLIE: Otis Redding?

ROSIE: Yes! Otis Redding! It was just THAT POPULAR. They didn't have a showcase, and they weren't getting paid much on that Chitlin Circuit. But it was a wonderful time. I remember seeing Ray Charles and Charlie always together like bosom buddies, and people saying "there go two Charles." Charlie Graves would be leading him. I was always an up-close person and I stood nearby and watched them. When Ray Charles died I had a great recollection of going back and seeing those times because the man came to Chestertown more than once. He practically lived here.

SYLVIA: There was something about the town that they really liked. Because in my young day when Patti Labelle and the Bluebells came to town, they would walk up the street like they owned it... walking in their curlers and their Capri shorts...standing out there in the road.

ROSIE: I think Patti came here even when there wasn't a show.
(laughter)

ROSIE: Mr. Graves' Uptown Club was the place to go! If a holiday came up and something wasn't happening at Charlie's, well, the town was dead. And the town is still dead today. The entertainment is gone.

SYLVIA: I thought I was everything when I got to go in there without getting permission. They used to have those matinees. I'd make sure I got my house cleaning done so I could be there and get a table. And I'd see all these people. They came from Delaware, and everywhere: good music, good food, and, sometimes, fights.

I can remember when James Brown's bus came up Lynchburg Street, pulled up in front of our house, backed up and parked. Mom and her friends dressed up and went to Charlie's, and the last words out of their mouths were: "Now don't you come around that corner." Well...they just shouldn't have said it, because we needed to get our little peek. So we waited until she got in there good, and we went on in, and crawled in through the crowd on our hands and knees, got our peek and went back home.

ROSIE: The entertainers, before they got really big, were like ordinary people, and they associated with town-people like they always knew you. Remember when Little Richard came to town and needed a hairdo? He refused to go on stage without the hairdo. So Ms. Marion Lindsey did his hair...remember? She was a beautician on Lynchburg Street and he went there and got his hair done. Cause he's cut now, and he was cute back then.

And when James Brown started getting bigger and bigger, and more people were coming to see him from everywhere, so they took it down to the Armory. I asked my mother a month in advance could I go see James Brown. She said no. Well "No" always meant "Yes" to me. I was like that then, and I'm like that now. I started getting my little clothes together. You HAD to have the new outfit. And it has to match. It was me and five more girls; we were all going to dress alike. I think it was black and white saddle shoes, socks that matched, black skirts...

SYLVIA:sharp!

ROSIE: I start buying my little stuff and leaving it at their house. And the night that James Brown comes I see my brothers getting

ready. It was all right for them to go. I said, umm-humm, when they go to bed I'll sneak out and get dressed, so I snuck out, got dressed and went on down to James Brown. I did not care when I got home if I got beat, scorned or whatever. I was going! And my brothers came up to me and said, "What're you doing here? Mom is looking for you!" But I said to myself, I'm not going home 'til the last dance! It was a great time.

SYLVIA: I can remember when I was part of a local band. Charlie'd had his forty-some anniversary. Our band was Black Soul, and the girl singers were called the Blackettes. He had a great big table for his family and his brother came down from Jersey. And it was so special we went out and bought these green gowns with the back cut out. We sang our hearts out because we knew we were part of something special.

ROSIE: I would base this on the Apollo...it was a culture center. It was entertainment: you saw dancing, and every once in a while the locals thought they could sing and they wanted to get up there and show-case themselves. No matter how it looked to some people, that was all we had. You have to sit back and embrace it today, 'cause there was a lot coming out of there in the form of art. I can remember those line dances.

PEARL: The Madison.

ROSIE: Yes, and those dance contests they had. There were guys coming from Annapolis. They were all tall men and they could step! That was the entertainment. They would push the chairs back and they would have a Chestertown group on the side, another group and maybe a Philadelphia group.

SYLVIA: Back then it was hand-dancing time. I remember seeing couples swinging across the floor.

LEALIE: What were some of the other dances?

ROSIE: There was one called Kill that Roach...

PEARL: (laughter) I don't even remember that one.

[On June 1, 1988, in the wake of a concerted police raid and drug bust, a bulldozer demolition wiped out the Uptown Club in a matter of an hour.]

SYLVIA: It was heartbreaking, when it started going way down. And then they had that great big drug bust. They had all these people laying out on the floor. I was getting ready to go, because I wanted to get my last good-bye. But people were running up and saying don't go down there. And there were helicopters flying around, and I stood there and watched them knock the place down. It hurt me to my heart, it really did.

ROSIE: It took something out of our town, an era that was gone. The drug epidemic came in, and the place really went down.

PEARL: And Charlie was older then, too. And if he didn't let them in, that would be a problem.

ROSIE: They should have named something like a road after him. Charlie Graves' Way, or something.

LESLIE: What were some of the segregation issues at the time?

ROSIE: To know the closeness of the community that you live in is a beautiful thing. Compared to big-city living this is paradise. The only thing though, looking back, about Chestertown, that was sad to me, is I did not have...not one...white friend. To look back and understand the era that I lived in, that was devastating. To never know or never have any connection with someone my own age of another race. I didn't get that feeling until I moved to the city at the age of twenty-three and met white friends. And I thought Oh my! What a waste.

It really was a Jim Crow town...I won't say there was a lot of hatred then, but it was the way. By going away and coming back, I've picked up on some of still here. And I can tell the ones who have been transplanted here. And as life goes on, layers go down, and soon it will stop. And with everyone commuting now, it's changing...That can be good and it can be bad...When you have families moving in from the cities, and different parts of the world, you bring in new changes. When I hear older folks talking and saying "I wish it was like it was" I know they were regular home people.

We were blessed to have Mr. Charlie Graves' Uptown Club in our time. The performers who are still on the circuit that we go see today, we say Oh My! And I can go anywhere and meet someone today who remembers Chestertown, someone who came to see a B.B. King concert or one of the performances.

Recently I met a man who couldn't believe that we had seen all these artists. Not in little Chestertown...you didn't expect that...But it was the truth! This was the Apollo of the '50s. It was a time of change, and time of Black culture, and we saw all these artists. It's the truth! The local white people didn't come, but white people from the cities would drop down...They were the die-hards, and they enjoyed it.

And it was a beautiful time.

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