

SLAVERY IN EARLY  
GLENVILLE, N.Y.  
BY  
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BEING THE SIXTH REPORT  
OF THE  
TOWN HISTORIAN

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"He brought them out of darkness  
and the shadow of death, and brake  
their bands in sunder."  
---Psalm 107:14.

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JEREMIAH AND MARY WILSON  
"JERRY AND POLLY"

## SLAVERY IN EARLY

## GLENVILLE, NY.

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AS WITH the Dutch burghers who founded Albany and Schenectady, so also, certain of the early settlers of the Mohawk Turnpike and the Sacandaga Road and of other parts of the territory now comprising the town of Glenville, owned Negro slaves.

Concerning the institution of African slavery as it existed in Glenville, it is purposed to assemble and record in this paper such accounts and authentic incidents as can be gleaned from the meager records yet preserved.

Prefacing the story of slavery in Glenville, a few remarks on the introduction of slave-holding in the colonies and in the early days of the American Union will be given.

The first Negro slaves of which record exists, in the colony of New York, were brought to the island of Manhattan in 1626 by the West India Company. Of these Negroes, at least eleven men and probably some women, the Rev. Jonas Michaelius, under date of August 11th, 1628, wrote: "The Angola slaves are thievish, lazy and useless trash."

The next considerable number recorded came in 1664, when the ship, "Gideon", landed "between 3 and 400 half-starved Negroes and Negresses", brought from Loanga on the coast of Africa. This landing occurred but a few days before the arrival of a fleet of English frigates before New Amsterdam, besieging and straightway capturing the town. Petrus Stuyvesant, director of New Netherlands, severely criticized by the West India Company for his weak defense and early surrender to the British, wrote to the States-General in the home country in extenuation of his course, that the limited food supply in the little town and the necessity of feeding these three or four hundred "half-starved Negroes and Negresses who alone, exclusive of the garrison, required one hundred skepels" (75 bushels) "of wheat per week," was one if not the chief cause of the hasty surrender. Thus we see that the fateful arrival of this cargo of slaves from Africa was an important factor in the occupation of New York by the British.

By 1698 the number of slaves in the colony of New York had increased to 2150. Three-quarters of a century later, in 1776, their number is given as 21,993, but in 1790, according to the first general census of the United States, their number

had decreased to 21,324.

NUMBER OF SLAVES IN GLENVILLE

Schenectady, yet a part of Albany County, not being set apart as a separate county until 1809, was listed by the Federal Census of 1790, quoted above, as having 225 slaves and five free colored persons. That part of "Schenectady Township, now North of the Mohawk," -- the present town of Glenville -- had 65 slaves, held by 26 proprietors, as shown by the following list:

<u>Proprietors</u>	<u>Number of slaves</u>
Betts; Robert	2
De Graaff; Abraham	3
De Graaf; Claus	3
De Graaf; Jesse	1
De Graaff; Will'm	4
Fonda; Jellis T.	3
Mabe; Aaron	1
Mabe; John	7
Sanders; John	4
Schermerhorn; Jacob	1
Schermerhorn; Ryer	1
Stevens; Will'm	1
Swart; Nicholas	1
Toll; Charles	3
Toll; Daniel	2
Truwilligar, Solomon	1
Van Eps; John Baptiste	3
Van Patten; Adams	6
Van Patten; Philip	2
Van Patten; Simon ("Cider Simon")	1
Vedder; Albert A.	3
Vedder; Harma	2
V.Voorst; John Baptist	3
V.Voorst; John S.	1
Wendel; John Baptist	3
Yates; Yellis	3

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Despite the heading of the foregoing list, some of these slaveholders it appears had their actual residence in the village of Schenectady. They may, however, have been land-owners in that part of the township lying north of the river, Following the above quoted list, as printed in "Heads of Families, First Census of the United States, 1790", Washington, 1909, is a longer list showing the number of slaves owned in

that part of Schenectady Township, "south of the Mohawk River."

As shown above, it will be seen that in 1790 the total number of slaves held by the burghers of early Glenville was small, but 65 in all. Few of the proprietors owned more than two or three. Jan Mabe (Mable) is credited with seven, the greatest number owned by one family. At a little later date, however, Judge John Sanders of Scotia is said to have owned nearly a score of Negroes. The massive timber-work in the Sanders Mansion, as reconstructed in 1713, was prepared and hewn by slaves. The big beams of yellow, or "pitch-pine," supporting the ceilings, after being hewn from the logs were finished to a nicety with the plane.

While not actually legalized by any special statute of the colonial laws, yet slave-holding in the Dutch colony was generally recognized as an established right. Indeed, could not authorization for its being and continuance be drawn from the Scriptures? "They sought their code of morality in the Bible, and imagine that they there found this hapless race condemned to perpetual slavery." Introduced by custom, with few or none to protest against this glaring travesty of the common rights of the brotherhood of man, it was for nearly two hundred years accepted as an existing fact, assumed and believed right by the Dutch burghers -- Dutch, as classed by the most of writers, yet many of these hardy pioneers in the New World were scions of Walloon or Huguenot families. Others were "Noormen," natives of the northland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, while a very few were from the Germanic states.

#### TREATMENT OF SLAVES

African slavery as it existed in the valleys of the upper Hudson and of the Mohawk, was mild in form and patriarchal in character. This is well-attested by all the writers, early and late, who have touched the subject. Mrs. Grant of Langan, Scotland, who spent several years of her girlhood in Albany, at the home of her uncle, Colonel Schuyler, in her entertaining narrative, "Memoirs of an American Lady," first published in London, in 1808, devotes an entire chapter to the home life and gentle treatment of the slaves among the Albanians. "Each family," writes Mrs. Grant, "had a few of these. They would remind one of Abraham's servants who were all born in the house; that was exactly the case. They were baptized too, and shared the same religious instruction with the children of the family; and for the first few years, there was little or no difference with regard to food or clothing between their children and those of their masters."

Another charming picture of Negro servitude as it existed in Albany in revolutionary days is given by Mary Gay Humphreys in her "Life of Catherine Schuyler." This is taken in part, however, from the work of Mrs. Grant, quoted above, and inasmuch as many if not all of the features of slavery depicted therein would hold good for the township of Schenectady, the story in part will be given here in Mrs. Humphrey's words:-

"There was a retinue of servants attached to each of the prominent houses. In the Schuyler household the slaves all descended from two old women brought from Africa when they were young. Mrs. Grant gives an amusing account of the rivalries in excellence between these two tribes. 'Diana was determined that in no respect of excellence Maria's children should surpass hers; and Maria was equally determined that Diana's brood should not surpass hers. If Maria's son Prince cut down wood with more dexterity and dispatch than any one in the province, the mighty Caesar, son of Diana, cut down wheat and threshed it better than he. For every department of the household there was a slave allotted. They hoed, drilled, shod horses, made cider, raised hemp and tobacco, looked after the horses and the garden, made and mended the shoes, spun, wove, made canoes, attended to the fishing, carpentering, each household sufficient unto itself. Slavery probably never took a more unobjectionable form. The negroes were treated with even familiarity; each was allowed his own garden, and was encouraged to raise pets. Here they lived, and multiplied to old age, no slave being sold unless he proved unmanageable or to be a corrupt influence; in this case, the threat to send the refractory one to Jamaica or the Barbadoes was usually sufficient. Pinxter, one of the three Dutch fetes of the year, belonged to the negroes. It was observed the Monday following Whitsunday, and generally continued through the week. There was a colored harlequin. For many years this was personated by a well known guinea negro known as King Charley. Dressed in a cast-off coat of the military, decked out with colored ribbons, his legs bare and a little black hat with a pompon at one side, he was seated on a hollow log, which had each end covered with skins, and served as a drum for dancing. Other negroes had eelpots covered with skin which they beat with their hands while they sang a song that had a refrain 'Hi-a bomba bomba,' which it was supposed was brought over from Africa. To this music the negroes danced."

In the fondness shown by the blacks of old Albany for the barbaric refrain, "Hi-a bomba, bomba" and rhythmic drum-beat we can plainly see a harking-back to the boom of the hollow log or that of the great skin-topped wooden drum which explorers in Equatorial Africa have told of hearing; uncanny, rhythmic pulsations throbbing through the jungles and well-nigh impenetrable forests. Sometimes beaten for a barbaric dance held

in some secluded forest glade, or perchance for the observance of a bloody magical rite; then, again, conveying a message, perhaps a warning to far-off villages, their drums in turn relaying the word to still more distant peoples.

"GENERAL PEET", AND "YAT",  
FIDDLERS OF OLD GLENVILLE

Schenectady Township, like Albany, also had its Negro fiddlers and buffoons, and, too, much the same observance of holidays, including, of course, the Pinkster Days, on which the slaves were granted much license and special favors. Dr. Daniel Toll, in a sketchy narrative written in 1847, of events and customs in early Glenville, -- a work that is now seldom found -- gives an interesting account of a winter-evening party given at the home of Judge John Sanders in Scotia, at which the Negro fiddler known as "General Peet", furnished the music for dancing. The guests on this occasion were of the Dutch families of the neighborhood. Following general conversation on the topics of the day, a bountiful supper was set before the guests, the main dish being a huge platter of "souse", either headcheese or pullatyes, with bread and butter, pickles and onions, concluding with hot chocolate and a huge triangular slice of pie. On the making, structure and final carving of this famous pie, Doctor Toll, whose story of life in early Glenville is so rich in detail, gives an amusing dissertation: "By-the-by", writes the Doctor, "this pie requires a little passing notice; it was baked on a large pewter platter, measuring in circumference as large as an ordinary grindstone; the pastry was made with sweetening" (molasses) "in the room of having sugar grated in it: these pies were served out to the guests in triangular pieces, in form similar to the geometrical figure called a sector; it at the same time required a dexterous hand to form them regularly, which was done in the following manner: the center of the dish being correctly ascertained, the apex of the triangle would rest on this center, from which the legs of the triangle would diverge at an angle of thirty or forty degrees to the margin of the periphery of the platter, and this would constitute the portion of each guest."

As the worthy doctor, born in 1776, an adept in mathematics as well as in the art of mixing pills, evidently was a guest at one of the festive occasions of which he writes so enter- tainingly, we will let him finish the account in his own words:-

"After the supper had got through with, and things, such as table, &c., had been moved out of the way, and the family and guest deeply engaged in conversation, black General Peet would make his appearance with his fiddle under his arm, and with a becoming bow he would take his stand in one corner of the room, where he would soon send forth a few spirit-stirring

strains, such as the Hunting Squirrel, The Girl I left behind me, Old Sushyea, rounds, &c., which was soon followed up with the sprinkling of some white sand on the floor, for there were no carpets in those days; soon after this a voice was heard, not exactly 'Come, let us pray', but 'come, let us dance.' This was no sooner proclaimed but a group of old and young, from grandmother to grand-daughter, would be on the floor, marshaling themselves in a form for a dance. Dancing would then continue through all its forms, including jigs and hornpipes, until the old folks became tired, then after this, for the younger portion of the company to continue the dance, it became necessary to make a requisition on the kitchen for relief, where there were a score of darkeys of all ages and genders and descriptions, which soon furnished the requisite relief, and accordingly a dance filled up with Sambo and Dina -- Sambo having his young Missa for a partner, and as likely Diana her young Massa. Sambo would, however, show evident marks of uneasiness, as if he was conscious of being out of his proper place; he, however, soon recovered himself and obtained his ordinary composure, which was soon followed with the dancing and rolling of his luminaries, and the showing of his ivory, accompanied with a significant shake or nod of his head and a very shrewd look, as if he would say, 'I can go it, Massa.' Dina, on the opposite side, would respond, 'and I, too.' No sooner did the scraping or sound of the violin fall upon Sambo's ear, but what his whole person became electrified, and away he would start, moving through the dance with all the science, agility and nimbleness of a professed dancing-master. After dancing had got through with, Sambo would receive a hint, and would leave the room with a profound bow, saying, 'Thank you, Massa', extremely well pleased and tickled. When he arrived in the kitchen he would sing out, 'Well dar, Joe, I beat Massa and tudder white-a-man too, by jingo!' Now, after a few of General Peet's buffooneries and monkey capers, the party would break up, and thus would constitute one of the winter evening visits to Judge Sanders', and would be a subject for conversation for a month thereafter."

And now we come to the story of another Negro Fiddler of old Glenville, a slave named "Yat", belonging to the Glen family, who, as we shall see had certain drastic restrictions placed on his fiddling, being permitted to fiddle only on certain specified days, namely; at the Christmas time, three days; for New Years, two days; Easter, two days, and for Pinkster, the great holiday occasion, made much of by the negroes, three days. Except on these particular occasions poor Yat's fiddle was to remain in the keeping of his master and mistress; not even an opportunity was given him to scrape out a tune or two in the way of keeping in practice, unless as we can well surmise, he did this stealthily at the cabin of some more favored black, whose fiddle was not locked up during the greater part of the year.



## A REMARKABLE AGREEMENT

Despite the clause of the State law rendering null and void any agreement made between master and slave, yet on the second day of September, 1805, an agreement was written, duly signed and witnessed between John S. and Sarah Glen of Scotia, and their Negro Slave, "Yat". This remarkable document, perhaps unique of its kind, is now in possession of the writer of this paper, and on account of the oddity of its provisions and the glimpses it gives us of the ideas and customs of the times and the relations between slaves and their masters, coupled with its historical value as a rare document, it will be given here in its entirety:-

ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT made and concluded this second day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand Eight hundred and Five by an between John S. Glen & Sarah Glen his daughter of the first part of the City of Schenectady and County of Albany and Yat a Negroe Man Slave of the second part of the same City and County aforesaid.

- 1st The parties to these presents agree each with the other in manner herein after Mentioned- - - - -
- 2d The said John S. Glen and Sarah Glen Agree to give the above named Negroe Man Yat his Freedom in Six Years time from the above date provided he fulfills this agreement in every respect - - - - -
- 3d The said Negroe Man Yat Agrees on his part to serve his Master & Mistress John & Sarah Glen or their heirs or assigns during the term of Six years from the above date and shall serve them Faithfulley when in health during that time shall not Absent himself day or Night from their service without his Master or Mistress Consent all hollidays excepted that is to Say said Yat Agrees not to keep any more days than is herein after mentioned For Christmas Three days New Years two days Easter Two days and for Pinkster Three days and no more hollidays said Yat Agrees to keep - - - - -
- 4th The said Master & Mistress agrees to Allow said Negroe Man Yat to go and see his wife once every three weeks on Saturday to go from Schenectady two hours before Sun Sett and to return on Monday next in the forenoon at Ten o.Clock or before - - - - -
- 5th The said Yat Agrees not to keep any wives more than the one he is Married to, and not to Commit Adultery and to keep his own lawful wife, and said Yat Agrees not to go a Fidling unless he gits the Consent of his Master or Mistress, hollidies excepted, and said Yat doth covenant and Agree Niver to run away from his Master or Mistress Service during Six Years, and should that be the Case he is to be Slave for ever, and shall be lawfull for his Master to Sell him for

ever and it is further Agreed that Yat shall leave his Fiddle in his Master or Mistress Care, and his Master or Mistress shall deliver Yat said Fiddle when thay give Consent he shall Fiddle, but at hollidies his Master and Mistress give hereby Consent for him to Fiddle without Yat asking them, and it is Agreed by Yat when in Town not to Sleep Abroad but shall sleep in his own bed in his Masters house, if it is ever so late when he comes home, and it is further agreed that Yat shall go to Church at least once every Four Weeks - - - -

6th It is hereby Agreed by Yat that should he breake a Hogshead of Spirrits or do any other damage by Running of horses or by his Neglect he shall remain a slave for ever and subject to be sold - - - -

7th It is further Agreed that should Yat perform all the Articles Covenants and Agreements herein Contained that then the said Negroe Man Yat shall have his Freedom and be a Free Man at the expiration of Six Years and Injoy it the same as any Free white Man, and should said Yat not perform all the Covenants and Agreements herein Contained or lack in one of them then this Agreement to be Nul and Void on the part of the parties of the First part and the said Yat to Continue in such case the Slave of the said parties of the first part their executors Administrators or Assignes in the same manner as if the present Agreement had never been made - - - -

Lastly it is agreed that the said Yat shall After the expiration of the said Six years give his Note for the sum of Ninety dollars payable the Second September one thousand eight hundred and Twelve without Interest, payable to the said parties of the first part their executors Administrators or Assignes In witness whereof the said parties to them have hereunto enterchangeably set thair hands and Seals the day and year first above written.

Sealed and delivered  
in presence of us ---

Jno I DGruff  
John B Clute

John S: Glen  
Sarah Glen

his  
Yat X----  
mark

For the discovery and rescue from Time's dust-bin of this interesting agreement between Yat the slave, and the Glens, father and daughter, the sole credit belongs to the late Cornelius F. Van Horne whose tireless energy in historical research brought to light and recorded so much of the forgotten history of our Mohawk Valley.

In a letter, dated January 8th, 1913, referring to the document in question, Mr. Van Horne writes:- "I have rescued it from utter oblivion", and with his characteristic humor, he continues: "In my mind I have pictured Yat as a jolly, good-natured darkey. I do not think he has been greatly alarmed over the different clauses mentioned, and I think that when their backs were turned, that he has made faces at them, and rolled his eyes, and his ivory teeth has shown, and with a sly grin and a chuckle he has made his mark. I shouldn't wonder if he has managed to steal out of his attic room and somehow find that dear old fiddle, and pay a visit to the slaves of some of the old Dutch burghers, or perhaps he has made a cut down through the garden and orchard to the river bank, got his master's boat, and over the river for a frolic."

Johannes Sanderse Glen, born 1733, the owner of Yat, was the fourth in direct descent from Alexander Lindsey, of the Glen, Scotland. Lindsey, known to the Dutch as Sander Leendertse, was the first settler north of the Mohawk at this point, obtaining a patent in 1665 from Governor Nicolls for "50 morgans of land", about 100 acres, directly opposite the village of Schenectady. Lindsey, in honor of his native land named this tract Scotia. As time went on, in some manner the name Glen became affixed to his name, and this addition continued to be used by all his descendants. The Sarah Glen who jointly signed the agreement with Yat was a daughter of Johannes, born 1765. Her mother was Sarah Sanders of Albany, who died in 1788. Their home was in the old Dutch house, built by John's father, Abraham, now the Public Library of Scotia. Under its quaint, pointed roof Yat, and possibly other slaves of the Glens, slept.

Some have though that the hand of the daughter, rather than that of her father, may be seen in the framing of the stringent provisions of the agreement in question. Be that as it may, nothing yet has been found in the way of a record showing that poor Yat attained his freedom after the stipulated six years had gone by. Possibly the agitation against the continuance of African slavery, which then was beginning to grow and crystallize may have brought about his freedom even sooner. Other than the agreement shown, the only reference we can find to our Yat is contained in the quaint old record book of "The Church at the Woestina", the Dutch Reformed Church at Vedders Ferry, as Hoffmans was formerly called, built during the closing years of the 18th century, though afterwards dismantled and re-erected on the south side of the river, in Rotterdam. In this church record, under date, January, 1804, is recorded in the handwriting of good old Domine Romeyn, the baptism of two children of "Yate, a blackman", and "Mary, a blackwoman." These were respectively, "Tom, born Oct. 24, 1801", and "Yate, born August, 1803." A note added to this entry states: "Baptized after an examination into their views of desiring baptism and with a written solicitation from their masters, John S. Glen & Philip Vedder." The name of the owner

being given makes it certain that this "Yate, a blackman" was the very Yat of the famous document quoted, despite the final e added to the name. It is simply the old Dutch family name Yate or Yates, always by the Dutch pronounced "Yot". Glen's slave, Yat, at one time may have belonged to the Yates family of old Schenectady. Slaves in some instances were known by the family name of their owners. We learn, too, from the explanatory note quoted, that Yat's wife, Mary, was a slave of Philip Vedder.

#### HOUSING THE SLAVES

The Dutch burghers of old Glenville seem to have had no uniform method of housing the few slaves owned by them. In one or two instances, like those of Albany, they occupied small cabin-like structures built in sheltered nooks in the rear of the big family house. The few slaves owned by Johannes Baptist Van Eps, who lived on the Mohawk Turnpike, just east of Hoffmans, lived in cabins built in the valley of the little stream flowing into the Mohawk at that point. Some families seem to have made room for their slaves in a part of their big Dutch houses, for instance, the slaves owned by the Vedder family, two miles below Hoffmans, lived in basement rooms having a sunny, southern exposure. These rooms, one with its fireplace and hearth, are today much as they were when occupied by the Negroes. The slaves owned by the Glen-Sanders family of Scotia, lived in an addition, built for that purpose, on the north side of the big stone house of 1713. This addition was afterwards pulled down. The outlines of its form, however, can still be seen on the massive stone walls.

In Cuyler Reynolds' "Hudson and Mohawk Valleys", there is a lengthy account of the "Douw" house, built in 1724, at Wolven Hoeck, just below Albany--the home of Captain Petrus Douw. In this charming story of a characteristic Dutch house of the Colonial times, it is stated that well-up, under its high, pointed roof, there was a second attic floor called the "cock-loft." Here the slaves of the family slept. It is known that slaves slept in the attic of the John S. Glen house, now the public library of Scotia.

#### BURIAL OF SLAVES

The first public cemeteries established in the town, followed the building of the Dutch Reformed Church in the village of Glenville in 1812-1813. Before that time burials of the early settlers were made in the numerous private cemeteries scattered all over the town. A few of the early Dutch settlers, however, were buried in the old Green Street cemetery in Schenectady, these burials afterwards being removed to a special plot in Vale Cemetery. There may have been cases in Glenville, where slaves were buried in the family graveyard with their masters, but generally they were buried in a separate plot, such graves in all cases seen being marked merely with an uncut, unlettered slab of slate or perhaps a common field-stone.

The location of several of these separate burial places of slaves is known, but others certainly have been obliterated by the plow and harrow.

Following the establishment of the church cemeteries, Negroes, both slaves and freemen, their graves still but rudely marked, were buried in certain areas of these cemeteries, set apart for that purpose. In the records of the Consistory of the First Dutch Reformed Church of Glenville for the year 1826, under date of March 26th is this entry:-

"Resolved -- that such persons of colour as may hereafter be members in full communion with this church shall be allowed sepulture in the burying ground of this church in such part or corner as the Consistory shall designate and that no person of color who is not a member in full communion shall be admitted the rite of burial in this ground."

Kind as they were to their slaves yet the foregoing resolution shows that in some respects at least, the residents of early Glenville drew the color line very sharp. In the sanctuary as well as in the cemetery a designated place was set apart for the Negroes. In the Dutch church mentioned above, the Negroes were assigned to certain seats in the gallery and the efforts to persuade one rebellious colored mammy, "Polly", to mount the gallery stairs each Sunday, instead of seating herself in the body of the church caused much trouble to the Consistory, as can be seen by the Clerk's entry of various resolutions passed and the appointment of committees to expostulate with Polly. Indeed, one wonders if the fathers of the Church, at that period, expected that their colored members, on reaching the pearly gates, would be ushered into a separate compartment.

In later years the resolution of 1826 restricting the burial of Negroes to certain plots in the church cemetery at Glenville, though never rescinded, was forgotten or not observed and such burials were made in whatever part of the cemetery colored persons, whether church members or not, chose to acquire lots. In most cases their graves being marked with headstones of marble or granite.

In a church cemetery in an adjoining county, according to the records of Melvin W. Lethbridge, that zealous chronicler of the gravestone lore of our Mohawk valley, there stands at the grave of an ex-slave, a marble headstone bearing the following noteworthy inscription and epitaph:-

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M A R G A R E T  
 wife of  
 JOSEPH HOUCK  
 died Sept. 20, 1872.  
 Aged about 106 Years.

She was a slave at the Battle of Monmouth, N.J. June 28, 1778.  
 made free in Christ in 1813, now free indeed.

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The inscription shown above speaks of the battle of Monmouth. Margaret was owned by the family on whose farm the major part of this battle of 1778 was fought, and as a girl she helped prepare, and carried bandages for the wounded American soldiers.

#### PUNISHMENT OF SLAVES

As stated before, the treatment accorded the few slaves held in the region was mild, and offences calling for serious punishment were infrequent. Minor offences by the younger children were promptly and efficiently taken care of by the colored Mammy of the household who, if the occasion called for it, without advice or delay soundly chastised not only her own children but also those of her master and mistress as well.

The penalty provided by the early laws for several specified offences committed by slaves, was whipping; a certain number of lashes applied by a person appointed for that purpose thus in an act, passed Dec. 10, 1712, for "Preventing, Suppressing and Punishing the Conspiracy and Insurrection of Negroes and other slaves," we find it specified that masters may punish their slaves for crimes and offences at discretion, not extending to life or member. Also, this act forbade more than three slaves to meet together, except in the employment, or with the consent of their masters, on penalty of being whipped on the naked back, at the discretion of any justice of the peace, not exceeding forty lashes. And any city, town or manor may appoint a common whipper for its slaves, his salary to be paid by the master at so much per head, not exceeding three shillings for each slave whipped. Further, if a slave assault any free man or woman, professing Christianity, such corporal punishment may be inflicted on him, not extending to life or limb, as to the justice shall seem meet or reasonable.

One of the "Common Whippers", for Schenectady Township evidently was a slave of Aaron Bradt, as the following receipt shows:-

Schonegtendie, April 5, 1735.

Then received from Symon Veder, towns treasurer, the yust and full sume of the Shilling Gorant money, itt beeing for my negroo worcks that he has Done for whippen the negro need in this town.

j said Received by Mee, Arent Brat.

The title of the act quoted above, mentions "Negroes and other slaves." This clause was thus framed to include Indians held as slaves. Indian slavery was legalized by most of the colonies, including New York. Judge Matthews of Louisiana in a case in which an Indian sought to recover his liberty, said:-

"It is an admitted principle, that slavery has been permitted and tolerated in all the colonies established in America by the mother country. Not only of Africans, but also of Indians."

And in New Jersey a decision of the courts, made in 1797, referring to Indian slaves, says:-

"They have been so long recognized as slaves in our law, that it would be as great a violation of the rights of property to establish a contrary decision at the present day, as it would in the case of the Africans, and as useless to investigate the manner in which they originally lost their freedom."

Very few Indians, however, were held as slaves in New York, and these mainly in New Amsterdam and its near vicinity. There is no record of any such held in either Albany or Schenectady.

The severity of the provisions of the Act of 1712 was due, some writers have explained, to popular clamor and groundless fear following an outbreak and revolt of the Negro slaves in New Amsterdam, in the summer of that year. A disturbance too insignificant, however, to be called an insurrection.

But, as previously stated, the punishment most dreaded by the slaves of Albany and of Schenectady was that of being sold to Jamaica or the Barbadoes. This threatened penalty undoubtedly was a great deterrent of serious crimes. Nevertheless, as we naturally would expect, there now and then appears record of slaves bearing pronounced vicious tendencies, like Dinah, one of the many slaves owned by Judge Douw of Wolven Hocck, who set fire to the barn of Leonard Gansevoort in Albany, causing the great conflagration of 1793, which destroyed more than a block of the principal houses in the city. For this crime she was tried and hanged in the presence of a multitude gathered around a gallows erected on Pinxter Hill.

One, and only one attested case is recorded of a lapse into medieval barbarism in the punishment of crime, by the Dutch of old Schenectady. This occurred in the early days of Glenville when a slave of the Toll family, living near the western limits of Scotia, after an altercation with his master, smarting under reproof, and perhaps chastisement, set fire to his master's cow-shed, which burned to the ground with all the cattle it sheltered. As a punishment for his crime the unfortunate wretch was chained to a stake, somewhere near the foot of the present Crescent Park in Schenectady, and burned to death. A threat made to his master, by this Negro, before setting fire to the building, was noted and well-remembered by the Toll family: he would give him the "roode-horn", he said.

This odd word, "roodehorn", used by the revengeful slave, has aroused some little speculation. Some have thought it to be a word of African origin, learned by the slave from his ancestors, not long from the jungles of the Dark Continent. Perhaps he, himself, may have been brought from the Slave Coast. Others see in it the Dutch word roode (red), meaning he would cause the horns of the cattle stabled in the shed to glow red with fire.

The Dutch of Albany also were guilty of one of these outbursts of savagery in punishment, when in 1715 a Negro and his wife were publically burned at the stake, following their trial and conviction for a murder committed at "Vroomansland" in the Schoharie Valley. Some little time after this barbarous punishment, it was conclusively shown that the woman was entirely innocent of complicity in the crime charged.

Like volcanoes bursting through Earth's fair surface, spewing death and destruction, so, among many peoples and even to this day the spirit of primal savagery here and there breaks through our veneer of civilization -- perilously thin in places -- menacing the very foundation of our social system, with its diabolism. The excuse has been offered for the Dutch of Schenectady and Albany in the cases cited, that at best they were but a generation or two remote from the terrible scenes of fire and blood that followed the appearance at the water-gates of the Netherlands of the infamous Duke of Alva, his galleons crowded with Spanish cut-throats, bringing the blood-stained machinery of the Inquisition, which was to be established in the Lowlands. In the dreadful years that followed, countless thousands of the Dutch were killed in defense of their faith and their country, many being tortured and burned at the stake. And, of course, with this barbarism brought to their very doors, reprisals in kind followed. Thus in the household life of the Dutch of both Albany and Schenectady, stories of terrible punishment meted to the invaders of their fatherland were common.



## SALE AND GIFT OF SLAVES

In Schenectady Township the sale of slaves rarely occurred, but in the Colonial newspapers slaves were often offered for sale. Happily the day for such advertisements is a thing of the past. One such notice in an issue of the Boston Evening Gazette, in 1741, reads:- "To be sold, by the printers of this paper, the very best negro woman in this town, who has had the small pox and measles; is as healthy as a horse, as brisk as a bird, and will work like a beaver."

In the Gazette of May 12th, 1760, was offered for sale "a negro woman about twenty-eight years of age, she is offered for sale for no other reason than her being of a furious temper, somewhat lazy. Smart discipline would make her a very good servant."

Negro children were sometimes given away, as we learn from an announcement in the "Postboy" of February 28th, 1763:- "To be given away, a male negro child of good breed, and in good health. Inquire of Green and Russell."

Alida Conde, born in Schenectady, June 16th, 1763, eldest child of Jesse and Parthenia (Ogden) Conde, and granddaughter of Adam Conde, High Constable of Albany, on her marriage to James Boyd, January 16th, 1783, received from her parents as a marriage portion a whole family of slaves. James Boyd was a prominent citizen of early Schenectady. He was several times elected Supervisor of the Fourth Ward of that city, now the town of Glenville, and in 1811 and 1812 was a Member of Assembly for Schenectady County. He owned a farm on the Mohawk Turnpike, just west of Scotia, which later became the property of the Cramer family. It is now known as the McMichael farm. The large brick house standing thereon was built by Boyd.

### JERRY AND POLLY

As Schenectady, in the years following the Emancipation Act of 1817, which became effective July 4th, 1827, had its Moses Viney who drove the famous three-wheeled carriage of Dr. Nott around the country-side and through the streets of old "Dorp", and many other odd characters among it ex-slaves, so also Glenville had as permanent residents a few families of the freed slaves. Among these was Jeremiah Wilson and his wife, "Polly", who came to Glenville, from the vicinity of Minaville, Montgomery County, some time between 1830 and 1840.

On their arrival in Glenville Jerry and Polly lived as tenants in a small house standing on the west side of the road known as Lovers Lane, where that road crosses the Crabb Kill.

Today no trace remains of this house. Next, they lived in a tenant house one mile east of the village of Glenville, on the farm now occupied by Omie DeGraff. Time has also effaced all trace of this home. The little barn standing near the house was destroyed by fire before their removal. Later, Jerry and his wife bought a house and a small plot of ground about one mile south of the village, on the northern slope of the Glenville hills. Here, with their children, they lived for many years. Jerry, being unusually skillful in the care and management of horses, found employment as a teamster, also at times working as a day-laborer. Finally he became sexton and grave-digger for the Reformed Church at Glenville, which position he held for a long time.

For his odd sayings and fondness for the use of long words, nearly always misapplied, Jerry became widely known throughout the town and the adjacent region for miles around, and the stories told of his droll expressions would fill a small volume. Lest they disappear, a few of these will be here chronicled:

For his skill in the care of horses, as mentioned above, Jerry's services were often sought at weddings and parties given at the farmhouses of the neighborhood. Here he would await the coming of the guests, taking full charge of their rigs, driving to the barn or carriage-house, with many loud-voiced commands to the horses. At events of this kind, Polly also attended, helping out or taking full charge of the kitchen work, at which she was proficient. On one memorable occasion, a social function held at a farmhouse some little distance from Jerry's home, it was well along in the small hours before the last guest had departed, and for some little time thereafter, the clatter of dishes could still be heard in the kitchen. Finally, on account of the lateness of the hour and the distance from Jerry's home he and Polly were asked;-- an especial favor -- to stay until morning. Needless to say, they readily consented. The affairs in the kitchen well-straightened out, Polly, as was her wont, proceeded to "visit" with her weary hosts. Jerry, with more wisdom, listened to her chatter but a short time and then impatiently exclaimed: "Come, Polly, you're keeping the folks up; it's high time we expired!"

#### SPECULATORS

On another occasion, a party or social at a farmhouse in the neighborhood, Jerry and Polly, as a mark of esteem, were invited as guests, not being asked to assist either in the care of the guest's horses nor in the work of the kitchen. Of course they were present. A few days after, a neighbor of Jerry's,

though well aware of the recent honor bestowed but wishing to hear what Jerry would say, asked: "I hear, Jerry, that you and Polly were at the big gathering, over at the Deacon's, the other night. I suppose you took good care of the horses, and Polly, of course, took charge of the work in the kitchen?" "Yes, suh," replied Jerry, "we was there--got specially invited; but we didn't do nuthin'; Polly and me, we was just speculators!"

#### TOLLING THE CHURCH BELL

Numbers beyond the sum total of his fingers and thumbs meant little or nothing to Jerry, being unable to read or write. As sexton of the Glenville Reformed Church it was part of his duties to toll the bell whenever a death occurred in the neighborhood; an old-time custom not now observed in this region, but whose disuse is regretted by many. Slow, measured strokes, of the bell were given, one for each year of the life of the deceased. On Jerry assuming this duty, the problem arose how to arrange that he, ignorant of numbers, should give the proper number of strokes to the bell. The problem was happily solved by giving him a small board whereon chalk marks were made, each mark representing a year. Striking the bell, he would wipe off one mark, repeating this process until the board was clean.

To give due solemnity to this old-time custom, the strokes of the bell were given very slowly, and perhaps it was the same genius who contrived the scheme of the chalk-marks, who suggested that the chalk-marked board should be placed in a window, several feet distant from the bell-rope. Thus the time spent by Jerry in limping across to the board--for he was lame-- and back to the bell-rope for each stroke, made about the proper interval between the strokes.

#### JERRY BUYS A COW

It was a notable event in the lives of Jerry and Polly when first they were able to number a cow among their possessions; a horse, they had kept for years. In the course of time this cow sickened and died, thereupon a kind-hearted neighbor circulated a subscription, collecting twenty-five dollars thereon, to purchase another cow for Jerry. This sum was the approximate price of cows in those days.

With the twenty-five dollars in his pocket, Jerry sallied forth, going to a man who had cows for sale. Yes, the farmer had several cows for sale; would Jerry look them over? Making a choice, Jerry inquired the price. The owner, aware of the sum possessed by Jerry, to which, no doubt, he was a contributor, said, wishing to favor Jerry: "You can have that cow for twenty-four dollars, though she's worth more money". Jerry

looked the cow over, critically, and said: "A purty-good lookin' critter, but twenty-four dollars seems a big price for her; I'll give you twenty-five, not a penny more." Needless to say, Jerry, with a dollar-bill handed back to him, duly tucked in his pocket, led the cow home.

#### AFRICAN MAGIC

Jerry will be especially remembered by some of the older residents of Glenville, from whose hands he removed warts; stubborn warts that had defied all attempts at removal by the usual remedies for those excrescences. This he accomplished by suddenly grasping the wart-studded hand of this patient at an unexpected moment -- this last was essential, he affirmed--, then, bringing the afflicted member near his lips, tightly clasped in his two hands, he breathed or blowed on it, meanwhile mumbling some unintelligent jargon.

But a few generations remote from his ancestors of the Dark Continent, this performance seems to have been an innate survival of African Voodoo magic. Perhaps, however, handed down to him directly from his fathers. Nevertheless, unbelievable as it may seem, Jerry's magic art never failed to bring the promised result. The troublesome wart, under his treatment, disappearing exactly in such a time and manner as he had foretold. This fact could be attested to by several persons yet living in the neighborhood, who thus benefited by his uncanny powers.

Blowing or breathing on the patient seems to have been an essential feature in the treatment given by the sorcerers, conjurers, and medicine-men of many primitive races. De la Vega, Bishop of Chiapas, Mexico, in a stately folio, now of extreme rarity, published in Rome, in 1702, writing of the Black-Art among the Mayas, says: "They apply their medicines by blowing on the patient, and by the use of infernal words, learned by heart by those who can not read or write." And John Eliot, famed "Apostle to the Indians", questioning the Indians of Massachusetts Bay, was told that their Powows, or medicine-men, "pull out the sickness by applying their hands to the sick person, and so blow it away." At this, Eliot records his inference, "that their powows are great witches, having fellowship with the old Serpent, to whom they pray."

#### POLLY, ONCE A SLAVE OF THE SHULERS

Polly, born a slave, in 1803, was sold when twelve years old to the Shuler family, near Minaville, N.Y., for \$150.00. After her marriage to Jerry, and establishment of their home in Glenville, where their six children were born, she and Jerry would make occasional visits to the Shuler homestead, where they were always kindly received and treated as honored guests. On their arrival, generally about the middle of the

forenoon, Jerry would each time say, with slight variation:  
 "Now, Mrs. Shuler, Polly and me have come to take dinner with you, but we don't want you to make any fuss or go to any trouble on our account. Polly and I, we can eat anything -- chicken or anything; we're jest plain farmers, like you folks."

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Polly died at her home on the Glenville hillside, in 1886, and three years later Jerry died at the home of a married daughter, in Ballston Spa, N.Y., with whom he had made his home after Polly's death. They are buried in the cemetery at Glenville, that he had so faithfully and efficiently cared for so many years. Their shapely tombstones bear the following inscriptions: Jeremiah Wilson, Born April 20, 1810. Died Dec. 13, 1889." and "Mary Wilson. Born Feb. 20, 1803. Died May 3, 1886."

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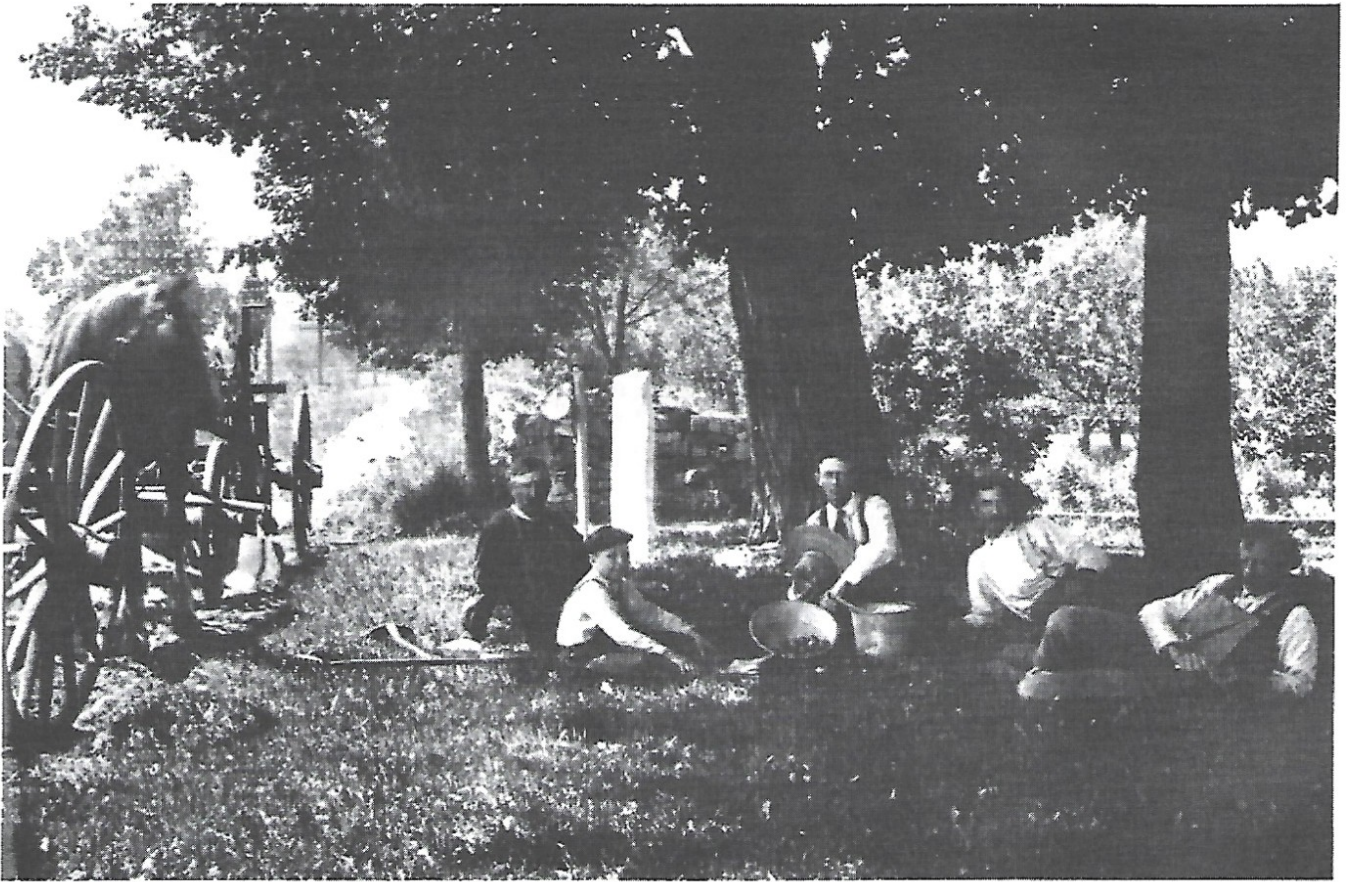
It may be of interest to add to these random sketches, that a great-granddaughter of the Wilsons, found to possess unusual talent as a vocalist, is now (1932) taking a course of instruction in that art, in the city of Washington, D.C.

#### SWAGO ENCOUNTERS A TOAD

In bringing this paper to a close, the story of "Swago and the Toad" will be given. Though it may seem to have somewhat of an apocryphal flavor, like that of the Don's famous battle with the windmills, nevertheless this tale of poor Swago's encounter with a toad passed current and was often related by the early Dutch of the valley. It appears that a certain Dutch farmer, living on the Mohawk Turnpike, had a male slave called "Swago", evidently not endowed with the normal supply of wit. Incidentally, his name, "Swago", may have been derived in some way from the place-name Oswego, pronounced "Osway-go", by the Dutch. He may have been a straggler or possibly sold from that region.

As the story ran: Swago, with his master, was hoeing corn on the Mohawk flats. Barefooted, of course, for that was a common custom with the slaves, when working on the soft, stoneless soil of the river flats; not only the slaves but often the master as well, thus worked barefoot. Suddenly in the black earth at his feet, Swago caught sight of a toad, whereat he exclaimed, "Toad! Massa; toad!" Doubtless obsessed with the prejudice so common in old times against that harmless little creature, and fear of its supposed venom, his master said, "Hock him, Swage; hock him!" Thus admonished, poor Swago, with all his strength, brought down the sharp blade of his big Dutch hoe on the supposed toad, only to find that he had completely severed one of his great toes, his foot being partially covered, or hidden in the loose black soil.

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THE VAN DER VEER FARM: Fifty-five years elapsed between these pictures.