

GERMANTOWN *CRIER*



*Bell Tower of the Shrine of the Miraculous Medal,
Chelton & Musgrave Streets, Germantown; formerly
St. Mary's Shrine, Vincentian Fathers*

SLAVE-CATCHER THWARTED:

An 1837 Incident of the African-American Experience

An excerpt from the Germantown Telegraph for December 20, 1837, briefly noting the capture and subsequent release of a fugitive slave named Margaret Brooke or Brooks, has previously been noted in these pages (40, no.2:41, Spring, 1988). Recently we have come upon an eyewitness account of this event, by Charles Jones Wister, Jr., in his memoir of his father, entitled The Labour of a Long Life, published in Germantown in 1886. This appears in Volume II, pp.12-13.

November, 1891.

An incident which rudely and violently shocked the even tenor of the ways of the peaceful village of Germantown, occurred rather more than half a century ago, the present month. On Wednesday, the 29th of November, 1837, when at noonday the writer was, with some of his schoolmates, quietly wending his way up Shoemaker's Lane, on his return from Dannerhower's [i.e., Danenhower's] dam, where he had been skating, his attention was attracted by a two-horse carriage drawn up at the foot of the hill just northeast of Germantown railroad bridge, from which alighted three burly-looking savages, some armed with clubs, and others, as it afterwards proved, with pistols. They approached, at a rapid gait, the house adjoining the Rock-house [one of the very early houses of Germantown, standing on what is now Belfield Avenue, near Penn Street, -Ed.], which they entered. Immediately they reappeared, holding by the wrists and dragging after them a struggling, agonized negro woman, whose heart-rending cries can never be obliterated from ears that they have once penetrated, whom they finally forced into the carriage and drove off, bearing their captive back to slavery. Such an outrage upon humanity, it may well be supposed, could not be committed in any civilized community without producing a profound impression, and sympathy for the victim. Nor did it fail to do so in Germantown, but the constable (for there was one in the party) flaunted his warrant, and rescue was not attempted. In fact, so secretly and expeditiously was the arrest made, and so secluded was the neighborhood, that few were cognizant of it. Of the few, however, was John Knight, himself a fugitive slave, who had tasted the bitterness of bondage, and was consequently a zealous sympathizer. John had for many years been employed by the writer's Father as coachman, and a good and faithful servant he proved. At the time of the above occurrence, having left his former position, he was a tenant of the old Shoemaker farm situated on the lane of that name (afterwards the property of Mr. G. H. Thompson). Hearing of the arrest he was in a state of violent indignation, his former state of servitude being vividly brought to mind with all its hardships and inhumanities. He immediately mounted one of his farm horses and followed the miscreants, riding close behind the carriage, one of whose occupants presented a pistol threatening to shoot; but the whilom slave was no coward and heroically rode on, exclaiming, "Shoot away, gentlemen, you can't frighten me," and continued the

unwelcome escort all the way to the city, determined that the victim should not meet her fate without a defender. The husband, named Lemon, was absent, at work, and the children were thus left uncared for in the deserted house. Upon reaching the city the woman was taken before a magistrate and committed for a further hearing, John Knight being present. The case was afterwards investigated before Judge Rowland, and she was proved to be the property of John O. Price, of Baltimore County, Maryland.

"The traitor's heel is on thy shore, Maryland, my Maryland," had not yet been sung, and the time for it, which ended forever all traffic in human flesh and all possibility of the recurrence of such scenes as that above described had not yet come by about twenty-five years. And to John O. Price this heart-broken, brutally-abducted woman and mother would have undoubtedly have been remanded had not the indignation of the community rescued her, by the payment of four hundred dollars for her ransom; a great portion of which was subscribed by citizens of Germantown. Her name in slavery was Margaret Brooks.

Notes. In the 1840 Federal Census for Germantown appears *Moses Lemon*. His entry shows a total of 5 persons, one being engaged in "Navigation of Oceans." But these 5 are not identified further in any way, not as to sex, age, nor in the spaces provided on the page under "Free Colored Persons." Could the census-taker have attempted to shield this family from public attention? In the 1850 Census, the first to name and provide some information on each member of the household, *Moses Lemon* is not mentioned, and the head of household is *Margaret Lemon*, black, female, born Maryland, aged 45, who does "_ocking Work" -- possibly "Glocking" or "Hocking"; *Caroline Lemon*, mulatto, female, aged 19, "wash-woman"; *Edward Lemon*, 12, mulatto, male; *Sarah Lemon*, 6, mulatto, female, all born Pennsylvania. Also in the household are *Sarah Con[way?]*, black, female, aged 17, born Delaware, and *Mary Peterson*, black, female, aged 21, born Pennsylvania, "washwomen."

John Knight of Bristol Township, in 1840 appears as free, colored, aged 30-65, with two males under 10, two males 10-24, one female under 10, and two females 10-24. In 1850, he appears as black, farmer with real estate valued at \$3,000, born Delaware, aged 56, married within the year; *Mary Knight*, black, aged 53, and *John Knight*, 14, attended school within the year, both born Pennsylvania. Also present *Lydia Mills*, black, female, 23, born Pennsylvania, cannot read or write.

Further information on these families would be appreciated.