

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

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Society researches black history
by Jay Graybeal

Each year the Historical Society of Carroll County celebrates February as Black History Month by presenting research about the unique contributions of African-American citizens to the history of our county. Exciting findings about 19th century relationships between whites and blacks were made during the research for the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House restoration project.

Now that we have compiled the history of the slave and free African-Americans who lived and worked at the house, we can present a significant black history interpretation program at the site.

Jacob Sherman owned eight slaves when he died in 1822. He freed six of them through his will, a fairly common practice by Pennsylvania Germans in this period. Three men, Joshua Juniper (born c. 1794), Basil Gibson (born c. 1796) and Amos (born c. 1797), were to be free one year after Sherman's death. Each also received a generous legacy of \$150 "as compensation for their services rendered."

Freedom certificates recorded at the Frederick County Courthouse provide a physical description, age and other information about these men. Joshua was five feet, six and three-quarters inches high and had a scar on "his little finger of the left hand occasioned by the cut of a sickle and the nail cut off the third finger on the farm hand and has lost his fore teeth." Basil was five feet four and one-quarter inches high was scarred on his face, breast, arms, hands and left leg. The clerk also noted that Basil had "very rough hands." Amos was five feet six inches high and had several scars on his fingers. All three men had been raised in the vicinity of Westminster and each probably worked primarily as farm laborers, as evidenced by their many scars.

The will also stated that Mary Key (1812-1892) was to be free on her twenty-first birthday August 12, 1833. Elizabeth Sherman apparently did not require Mary's services and sold her in 1823 to Jacob Reese (1798-1872), a Westminster merchant. Mary's sister Eliza (b. 1815) was also to be free on her twenty-first birthday March 12, 1836. Sally Key (c. 1771-1855) and Lucy Behoe (1802-1851) were to serve until the death of Elizabeth Sherman. Jacob Sherman purchased Sally from William Pepple on December 8, 1784 for "the Sum of fifty eight pounds 10 shillings." Pepple had purchased her from Thomas Willson of Little Pipe Creek. Sally and Lucy each received legacies of \$150.

Two other slaves, Matilda and Patience, apparently were not considered close to family members and were not devised to the widow. Matilda was sold at public auction to Jacob Hull; it is not clear what became of Patience.

Sally Key, Lucy Behoe, Eliza Key and their families lived with Elizabeth Sherman until her death in 1842. The Federal Census of 1830 shows seven persons living in the house: Mrs.

Sherman, an unidentified free white male between twenty and thirty years of age, and five black slaves. The slaves would have been Lucky Behoe, her son William Henry Behoe (b. 1828), Sally Key, Eliza Key, and her daughter Sarah Brown (b. 1829). Presumably Sally and Eliza served as house servants; Lucy Behoe was probably a weaver.

The Federal Census of 1840 shows some changes since 1830. The household included Mrs. Sherman, who was blind, an unidentified white male between thirty and forty years of age, three slaves and seven free blacks. Eliza Key had been manumitted in 1836 and her daughter Sarah Brown, although still a slave, was counted as free. Lucy Behoe and her children Frances Anna (born c. 1837) and William Henry appear to have been joined by the children’s father Samuel Behoe. Samuel had been living in Baltimore in January 1838 when Mrs. Shellman sold the two children to their father for a fee of six dollars. Six years earlier, Mrs. Sherman had manumitted William Henry and Marry Ann Behoe (b. 1831). Two free boys under age ten were probably sons of Eliza Key. The three male slaves, a boy and two men, probably belonged to the unidentified white man.

Elizabeth Sherman manumitted at least one other slave before her death. On April 23, 1842 she recorded a document stating that twelve-year old Sarah Brown would be free at age 16 on October 1845. On the same day she sold Sarah for a token fee to Beale Behoe (born c. 1799) who likely was Lucy’s brother-in-law. Sarah probably continued to live with her mother in the Sherman house.

Elizabeth Sherman died at her residence on June 28, 1842. Although she died intestate, her administrator Isaac Shriver (1777-1856) fulfilled wishes she “expressed in her life time” for bequests of personal property to Lucy Behoe, Eliza Key and Sarah Brown. Lucy received a large bequest including livestock, household furnishings and a “Weaver’s Loom” all appraised at \$241.55. The latter item suggests that Lucy had been trained as a weaver. Eliza and Sarah received household goods appraised at \$50.10 and \$30.00 respectively. Lucy and Eliza, and probably Sarah, were living in the house at the time of Mrs. Sherman’s death and the bequests are most likely the objects in their rooms.

The study of the Sherman family slaves provides insights into the lives of a group of Carroll countians who have been largely ignored in the past. Our new interpretation program for the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House will explore these hitherto forgotten residents.

Photo credit: Uncredited

Photo caption: The property inventory compiled for the estate of Jacob Sherman lists the slaves who lived at the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House.