

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

The ethnicity, race, and religion of our ancestors sometimes determines the extent of the historic paper trail we can find for them. My own personal genealogical research falls along a bifurcated path. My mother's side of the family, mostly English, from migrations to North America from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, yields an exponential number of forebears. A unique thrill occurs when we see our ancestors' names on primary source documents.

My father's side of the family, by contrast, has a short family tree. My paternal grandparents, first-generation Americans, descended from landless Irish tenants who only began to merge from obscurity with the onset of Catholic parish registers beginning around 1825. Ireland's complex history as a conquered British colony made most of its peasants virtually invisible until Catholic Emancipation. Folklore has provided me with some clues, and shared DNA continues to link long-scattered families. I empathize with other groups for whom history did not record their ancestors' first and last names. Descendants of slaves from Africa immediately come to mind.

*Vermont Genealogy* has expanded its inclusion of families who do not fit into the White Anglo-Saxon families long associated with the early days of Vermont statehood. Our research in this journal, however, had not yet grappled with the unique research challenges of tracking early Vermont families of color. As Vermont's demographic slowly changes, more studies have been published that seek to rediscover early communities of Blacks living in Vermont. Beginning in 1820, the United States Census made categories for "free colored males and females" who were heads of household. Of course, some families, Black and white, slipped through the cracks. An enormously helpful source that beckons more systematic research throughout Vermont cities and towns is Carter G. Woodson's *Free Negro Heads of Families in the United States in 1830*.<sup>1</sup> The author, a historian and founder of the Association for the Study of African American History, extracted and organized details from the original census returns. A summary below of total household numbers by county and town in Vermont may challenge some of our conceptions of where Black families lived in Vermont prior to the Civil War:

Panton, Newhaven, Bristol, Middlebury, Ferrisburg, Weybridge, and Vergennes, in Addison County: 82 individuals.

Pownal, Shaftsbury, Manchester, Sunderland, Rupert, and unspecified towns, in Bennington County: 75 individuals.

Danville, Cabot, and Walden, in Caledonia County: 28 individuals.

Burlington, Essex, Huntington, Hinesburg, and Charlotte, in Chittenden County: 105 individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *Free Negro Heads of Families in the United States in 1830* (Washington, D.C.), 1925. Available online through archive.org.

Brunswick and Lemington, in Essex County: 16 individuals.

Fairfax, St. Albans, Swanton, Craftsbury, Derby, Holland, and Westfield, in Franklin County: 85 individuals.

Fairlee, Braintree, and Brookfield, in Orange County: 20 individuals.

Benson, Pittsford, Fair Haven, Orwell, and Rutland, in Rutland County: 84 individuals.

Montpelier Village, in Washington County: 9 individuals.

Brattleboro, Rockingham, Townshend, Putney, and Westminster, in Windham County: 22 individuals.

Pomfret, Hartland, Wethersfield, Reading, Woodstock, Windsor, Chester, Springfield, Cavendish, Royalton, Plymouth, and unspecified towns, in Windsor County: 111 individuals.

Windsor County, in particular, is well-represented in the first article of this issue, **Meros of Woodstock and Derby, Vermont: A Network of Free Black Families**. It gives context to not only the extended Mero family, one branch in Derby and the other in Woodstock, but also two other heads of household in the 1830 census, Caesar Lewis and Peter Nassau. At the heart of this story is the Civil War service of four Mero men in the famous Massachusetts 54th Regiment comprised of volunteer Black soldiers.

Diantha Howard chronicles **More Early Members of the Congregational Church of South Hero (and Grand Isle), Vermont**. Her contribution underscores the value of church records at a time of great fluidity of migrations to and from Vermont.

George W. Varney's extensive study, **Silas, Hazen, and Denison Danforth, Brothers of the Northeast Kingdom, Vermont, and the Eastern Townships, Québec**, connects Silas Danforth to his brothers and delineates the migration path of the Burbank and Danforth family from New Hampshire to northern Vermont and Québec. Part 2 will conclude in the fall issue.

Lastly, John Leppman reviews Scott Andrew Bartley's **Early Vermont Settlers to 1771: Volume 2: Northern Windsor County (Hartford, Hartland, Norwich, Pomfret, Sharon, and Woodstock)**.

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