

**Dee E. Andrews**

**Length of residency = 3 weeks (15 days) : Wed. Dec. 12-Sat. Dec. 15 and Mon. Dec. 17-Sat. Dec. 22, 2007; Wed. Mar. 19-Sat. Mar. 22; Mon. Mar. 24, 2008**

As a Scholar in Residence at the Pennsylvania State Archives, I read and surveyed records for my book project, "The Boundaries of Freedom: Early American Antislavery, 1760-1830," which focuses especially on the area north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line, from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. Because I received competing awards in the Summer of 2007 (as part of my 06-07 sabbatical leave), I was able to accept only three weeks of support from the PHMC, half of my original plan. But I was able to accomplish a great deal, not in small part because of the extraordinary support from the PSA staff. I plan to return to the Archives to complete work in the next several years.

I was eager to be a Scholar in Residence in order to explore the host of government records and the variety of manuscript collections featured in Ruth E. Hodge's *Guide to African American Resources at the Pennsylvania State Archives* (2000). Apart from research at the Maryland State Archives for my dissertation, this was my first serious foray into government and legal documents, and my work at the Archives persuades me these are critical for understanding the changing status of black people, and black-white interactions, in the era of the "long Revolution." While a number of the sources I used are on microfilm, especially the county records, most were not, so being able to work directly with the original records was especially valuable to me.

To turn to various record groups:

In each case, I looked at or surveyed the contents of at least one example of the record that I cited on my original proposal. Overall, these were: RG 4 (the Office of the Comptroller General), RG 26 (the Department of State), RG 33 (the Supreme Court), and RG 47 (the County Governments); and eight different Manuscript Groups: MG 8 (the Pennsylvania Collection); MG 53 (the Reah Frazer Papers); MG 90 (the John R. Miller Collection); RG 93 (the Moore Family Papers); MG 185 (the Harmony Society Papers); MG 203 (the Cornwall Furnace Collection); MG 294 (the French Azilum Collection); and MG 352 (the Maclay Family Papers).

These turned out to be of varying utility for my project. To elaborate:

*RG 4, The Office of the Comptroller General*, includes the Philadelphia Port Records for the slave trade, but this topic is well beyond the scope of my project, which is not about the trade but about what happened to black people once they were in North America.

But the extradition files and pardon books in *RG 26, The Department of State*, provide good background for cases of black fugitives from justice. Among other things, the Extradition Records include an 1822 petition by the State of Maryland complaining of the numbers of slaves escaping to the neighboring state and asking that Pennsylvania to return these individuals. The Pardon Books contain numerous references to black people,

chiefly in Philadelphia. A number of conclusions may be drawn by comparing material on whites and blacks in these records: for example, while the numbers of black defendants pardoned was relatively low, the condition for the pardons for three-fifths of this group required leaving the state, as compared to one-third of white women defendants and one-fifth of white men defendants. RG 26 also includes important correspondence between Attorney General William B. Reed and Secretary of State Thomas H. Barrows *et al.* on the burning of Pennsylvania Hall in 1838.

RG 33, *The Supreme Court Records*, include several important collections of records relating to free people. The records of Habeas Corpus for Negro Slaves provide detail on several cases relating to black people accused of kidnapping when seeking freedom for their children and/or spouses: one consequence of the Pennsylvania Gradual Emancipation Laws of 1780, since only those born after the law's passage were freed (into a form of indentured servitude). The records of the Courts of Oyer and Terminer, also provide information on both black defendants and victims of crime, and detail on black-white interactions from depositions in many cases. The Supreme Court's Affidavits, Depositions, and Appeal Papers also contain information on cases involving black servants.

Probably the richest of government records will turn out to be RG 47, *County Governments*, but this will require some serious future digging. The County records include registers of slaves, required by the emancipation laws, best for Adams, Bedford, Cumberland, Lancaster, and Westmoreland Counties: and continuing well into the 1820s. Lancaster County in particular includes a lengthy "Index to Slaves" -- actually an index of slaveholders --1780-1834: the dates indicating once again how long slavery remained a legal and social factor in Pennsylvania. In some cases, the records show ways in which Pennsylvania the experience of free black people did *not* reflect trends within the greater society: the Bucks County List of Paupers in Almshouse and Chester County Poor House Records, for example, illustrate that poverty in this county was a largely white problem, although some blacks appear on the lists. The Berks County Revolutionary War Pension Applications identify many Germans, but not black veterans, reflecting the geographical distribution of slavery in the state, since many blacks were recruited to fight in the war. The PHMC Library, furthermore, contains the very good study, *Shadow of Freedom: Slavery in Post-Revolutionary Cumberland County, 1780-1810*, by John Alosi, published by Shippensburg State University Press in 2001: an important study of slavery and freedom in this County, based on censuses and the county records. The other important source for Cumberland County records is MG 90, *The John R. Miller Collection*.

The manuscript collections were also of varying utility, but contain important if scattered evidence pertaining to free black life and the ending of Pennsylvania slavery over this time period.

Several have useful if brief references to slaves and free people. MG 8, *The Pennsylvania Collection*, includes materials relating to the Cook and Guffey family, including a list of

Edward Cook's slaves in Westmoreland County in 1780. *MG 90, The John R. Miller Collection*, again, is an important collection for Cumberland County slave registers. *MG 93, The Moore Family Papers* include slave registers from this Carlisle family. *MG 185, Harmony Society Records, 1786-1951*, contains a revealing 1817 Indenture for a black woman at the Indiana settlement; and indentures for numerous white servants, mostly immigrants, useful for comparison. *MG 294, The French Azilum Collection*, revealed no significant sources for a settlement in the northwestern part of the state. A general survey of *MG 352, The Maclay Family Collection* turned up almost no references to slavery or free black people, including in David Maclay's Daybook, probably again reflecting the regional concentrations of slavery and the black population in the state. One solitary reference – "Our [negro?] boy, began to plant corn in the orchard field" – in the Daybooks suggests the possible remnants of slavery lying behind absence of explicit evidence.

By far the most important of the manuscript groups for this subject and this time period are *MG 53, The Reah Frazer Papers*, and *MG 203, The Cornwall Furnace Collection*. The Frazer Collection is comprised mainly of the legal papers of the legislator's father, William Frazer, a Delaware attorney. William Frazer's papers contain numerous fragments of records relating to court proceedings, repeated references to black workers, slaves, and servants, and a reference to at least one black client, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. But the Reah Frazer segment includes original material on the important runaway case, Thomas Jeffrey v Samuel and Daniel Gibbons, 1828-30. The Cornwall Furnace collection also contains important material on black forge workers at a very early point in the new republic.

I also spent one afternoon in the PHMC Library, working on the excellent collection of reprints on African American history, including the 1808 edition of Absalom Jones's *A Thanksgiving Sermon, Preached January 1, 1808, in St. Thomas's, or the African Episcopal Church, Philadelphia*. And I spent another afternoon exploring the resources of the Pennsylvania State Library.

## **Preliminary Conclusions**

My work at the PSA has persuaded me that over the "long" Revolutionary era, the ambiguous status of slaves and former slaves continued to cloud black life in the North as well as the South, conflicts over the length and nature of service were fairly common, and that blacks and whites lived and worked in close proximity. For these reasons, African Americans appear in government records with some frequency in this era, as black people adjusted to or rebelled from their assigned status in white society. In 1780, when the first Gradual Emancipation Law was passed in Pennsylvania (indeed, the first such law in the United States as a whole), 6,855 slaves lived and worked in Pennsylvania. By 1790, this number had dropped substantially to 3,760, even though only the children of slaves born after 1780 were freed by the 1780s law; twenty years later in 1810 the number had dropped again to 795: so in those twenty years nearly close to 3,000 slaves had either died, been manumitted, or left the state (Table 1-1, in Gary B. Nash and Jean R.

Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* [1991]).

Among a number of goals, part of the purpose of my project will be to refine our understanding of what happened to those 3,000 people: especially whether or not most were sold – illegally – out of state, or managed to become part of the free people of Pennsylvania. At this time, I'm persuaded that most of these missing people in fact succeeded in negotiating their way out of slavery, with the support of white activists and, to a lesser extent, northern courts: and that their actions are a little known part of the history of American race relations.

I am especially grateful to Linda Reis, Jonathan Stayer, Karen James, and Paula Heimann for their generous assistance during my stay. The PSA staff was incredibly responsive, especially to my numerous photocopying requests.

If I were to make one request for the Program for the future, it would be to provide the Scholars in Residence with a desk and Internet access. I had these in my first two weeks because of Linda Schopes's retirement, but I had to move from machine to machine in the last week. For just one example of the way in which on-line access would help: Jonathan Stayer showed me how to access the Pennsylvania Archives at [www.footnote.com](http://www.footnote.com) to see what I might find there rather than spending valuable time on the printed volumes: but I wasn't able to have consistent access to that website after that. While of course some of these tasks can be prepared by a scholar before he or she is in residence, part of the advantage of on-site research is for researchers to be able to move easily among different kinds of records and media.

But that was the only drawback. My time at the PSA was a true pleasure.