

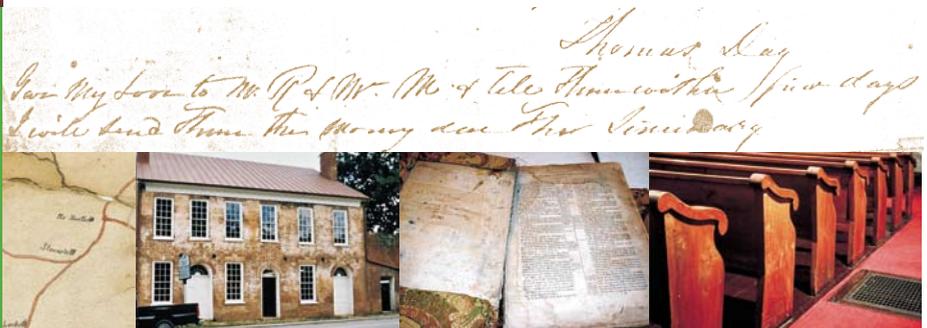
The Hidden History of THOMAS DAY

by Laurel C. Sneed and Patricia D. Rogers

Like detectives
confronted with
conflicting accounts,
we were challenged
to figure out where
the truth [about
Thomas Day]
actually lay.



The Apprend Foundation
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The Hidden History of
THOMAS DAY

*Uncovering the Remarkable Story of
North Carolina's Free (Black) Cabinetmaker*

June 2009

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Laurel Crone Sneed is the Director of the Thomas Day Education Project (TDEP), an initiative of the Apprend Foundation, Inc. She is producing a Web site on ten nineteenth-century African American entrepreneurs, artists, and artisans in addition to a documentary film titled *Thomas Day, American*.

Patricia Dane Rogers is a former reporter for the *Washington Post* and an independent writer. She published the first major national newspaper article about Thomas Day in 1997 and has been researching his life ever since.

Peter H. Wood is Professor Emeritus of History at Duke University and a scholar of American race relations. He is the author, with Elizabeth Fenn, of *Natives and Newcomers*, a survey of the early history of North Carolina.



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The Apprend Foundation was established in 2005 as the sponsoring organization for TDEP, which was formed in 1992. After several years of affiliation with the North Carolina Central University Foundation and then the North Carolina Museum of History, the Apprend Foundation became a stand-alone educational foundation committed to researching and disseminating knowledge about African American history and culture, especially at the K-12 levels.

Apprend achieves its purposes through public and K-12 educational programs; through partnerships with schools, museums, universities, and historical associations; and by producing and disseminating traditional and "new media" such as Web sites and digital material for schools and the general public. TDEP has brought over 600 teachers from around the nation to North Carolina to study Thomas Day and to collaborate with scholars and master teachers.

The Apprend logo is in the shape of the newel post at the William Long House in Caswell County. Many think the shape reflects Thomas Day's initials, "TD."

The wooden face on the front of this publication is one of a pair carved in the main parlor mantel at the Long House, crafted by Day in 1858. We are grateful to descendants of William Long for allowing us to photograph these two works.



Courtesy of Chris Hilbreth, Duke University Photography.

Eminent historian of the African American experience and early Thomas Day researcher, **Dr. John Hope Franklin**, died at 94 as this was going to press. Franklin was a long-time friend of the Thomas Day Education Project, having served as a scholar advisor on our 1995 research project that identified Day's parents, forbears, and brother. Dr. Franklin was an inspiration to everyone he met.

This publication is lovingly dedicated to Dr. Franklin's memory.

I am fascinated by a person who rises above his station in life—that someone else has defined for him. He rises above it and defines his station for himself. ... He says, "I'm going to be Thomas Day, the cabinetmaker, the citizen of this town, and I expect you to respect me for it." And they do. Now that's remarkable in the 1840s and 1850s; it's just remarkable.

Dr. John Hope Franklin



**NORTH CAROLINA
HUMANITIES
COUNCIL**
MANY STORIES, ONE PEOPLE

This project is made possible by a grant from the North Carolina Humanities Council, a statewide nonprofit and affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Getting Back in Touch With Thomas Day

Peter H. Wood, Professor Emeritus of History, Duke University

Dr. John Hope Franklin passed away during the week I was writing this Foreword. In fact, I had just finalized it and attached it to an e-mail and sent it off when I learned on the afternoon of March 25 that my distinguished Duke colleague had died that morning, at the age of 94.

Without Dr. Franklin's seminal research and his on-going support of all efforts to uncover the history of Thomas Day, this current round of research and its publication would not have been possible. It seems only fitting to all of us working on this effort to dedicate this publication to his memory.

We realize, from sitting at the dining room table, that the same story can take on a very different flavor and meaning, depending on who is telling the tale. We also know, from annual events like Thanksgiving Dinner, that recollections about relatives change over time, as memories fade and new facts emerge.

Just as our family history is a work in progress, North Carolina's past (and America's too) is an evolving story, not a fixed and finished tale. Generally, we look to trained historians to be the keepers of this history, devoting time to searching new evidence and weighing competing interpretations. But more often than we realize, history is expanded by interested citizens, eager to answer a question on their own. And sometimes the impact is impressive. Think of Alex Haley, the black journalist who delved into his family history and produced *Roots*. Haley's best-seller appeared in the bicentennial year of 1976, and he dedicated it "as a birthday offering to my country, within which most of *Roots* happened."

Most history books—scholarly or popular, traditional or revisionist—come from the desk of a single individual. So it is important to be reminded that history is a collective enterprise, a constant conversation between people interested in the same subject. History lovers have occasional disagreements, of course, just as guests do at the dinner table. But there's a common interest in finding shared historical ground and in unearthing new facts. Occasionally, fresh interests are aroused and new friendships are formed, prompting further collaboration. This, in turn, can lead to surprising breakthroughs. After all, "Two heads are better than one."

I have relearned the truth of this old saying by being part of the widening conversation about Thomas Day. It continues to shed new light on his life and work. Hats off to the North Carolina Humanities Council for inviting Laurel Sneed and Patricia Rogers to talk to a broad audience throughout the state via this publication. Their article on the nature and results of their fruitful collaboration will draw more people into the discussion.

The discussion is already a wide one, and it has been growing slowly over several generations. The seeds were planted nearly seventy years ago, when a young black historian at Harvard named John Hope Franklin mentioned Day in his 1941 doctoral dissertation. Two years later, while teaching at St. Augustine's College in Raleigh, Franklin published his work as *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860*, a pioneering study that offered clear glimpses of Day and pieced together the world he inhabited.

In the time since Dr. Franklin put Thomas Day on a broader national stage, the circle of interest in the man and his world has continued to widen. Many people from diverse backgrounds have helped to uncover the history of Thomas Day: educators, genealogists, furniture experts, journalists, homemakers, media producers, museum curators, and community historians, as well as academic researchers. They have taken part in teacher workshops and school presentations, in re-enactments and furniture exhibits. They have shared their knowledge of Day in magazines and newspapers, in children's books and professional journals, on Web sites and in antique shops, and, as you might imagine, around the dining room table. And every time a new group is exposed to Thomas Day, there always seems to be at least one person who wants to learn more. That prompts additional questions and sets off fresh research. Before long, a new contributor joins the ranks of those adding to our understanding of Thomas Day.

So the seeds that Dr. Franklin planted continue to grow, and as this publication suggests, much remains to be discovered and explored. A careful compilation of Day documents and historical references, either in a book or on a Web site, would be a valuable asset for the future. But already it is possible to look back and marvel at how much has been learned and shared. Thousands of people, young and old, now know something about Day, his work, and the precarious situation of free blacks in a slavery-based society.

Most importantly, fascination with this representative individual is leading another generation to re-examine the history of nineteenth-century North Carolina. It was a far more troubled, complex, and interesting domain than the mythical realm that was so often presented to the public in our earlier "moonlight and magnolias" version of antebellum southern history. Thomas Day once said, "The mind is very much like any kind of building or workmanship," yet he might be very surprised at all of the "workmanship" that has gone into rebuilding his life and world. Nearly 150 years after his death, Day is still patiently teaching all of us. How lucky we are in getting to know more fully this creative Carolinian and the time in which he lived.

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF THOMAS DAY

Uncovering the Remarkable Story of North Carolina's Free Black Cabinetmaker

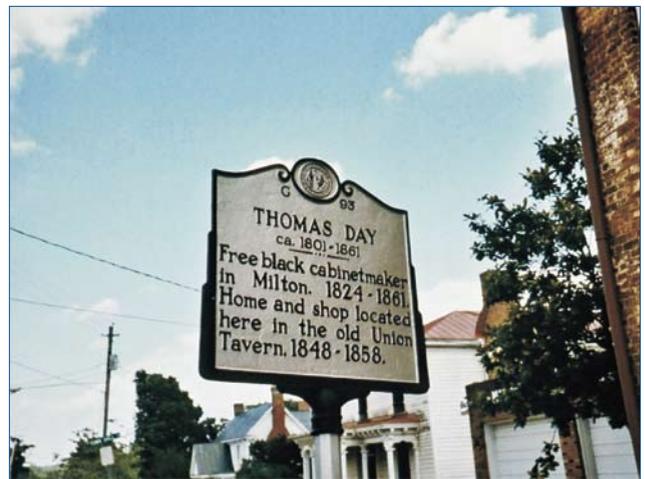
This is not a typical history article. It's part personal journey, about two researchers who stumbled upon one man's story in a chapter of American history they knew nothing about and got hooked; it's also part model for how to do research; and it's part explanation of what persistent "detective" work over many years has uncovered.

In early June of 1835, Thomas Day, a 34-year-old free black cabinetmaker from Milton, North Carolina, traveled to Philadelphia. While he could have been in the North on business, he seems to have been there for a different purpose: to attend the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of Free People of Colour in the United States. This event attracted the nation's most prominent free African Americans, many of whom would go on to become major anti-slavery activists. Participants called for a boycott of goods produced by slave labor and boldly proclaimed their belief in universal liberty and racial equality:

We claim to be American citizens and we will not waste our time by holding converse with those who deny us this privilege unless they first prove that a man is not a citizen of that country in which he was born and reared.¹

If Day's white neighbors and patrons back in Caswell County, North Carolina had learned that he was among this black abolitionist conclave, he and his family would have been in grave danger. In North Carolina, anyone merely in possession of abolitionist literature risked being accused of disseminating it, a crime punishable by imprisonment, whipping, and even death.² Day's participation in the Philadelphia convention is even more remarkable because only five years earlier, North Carolina's Attorney General, Romulus Saunders, informed members of the state legislature that they could trust Thomas Day. "In the event of any disturbance amongst the Blacks," Saunders noted, "I should rely with confidence upon a disclosure from him as he is the owner of

slaves himself as well as real estate."³ Saunders, a Milton resident, could not have imagined his mild-mannered and accommodating free black neighbor in the midst of a throng of enthusiastic African American activists in a major northern city. Until recently, many scholars of antebellum North Carolina history might also have found this hard to believe. But our understanding of Thomas Day and his family continues to grow and change.



Courtesy of the Thomas Day Education Project.

Today, visitors to the village of Milton (population 132) cannot avoid either hearing about Thomas Day or bumping into one of the many sites associated with him. The starting point is usually the red brick Presbyterian Church on Broad Street where he was a member and made the beautiful walnut pews that are still in use today. Church records document his membership and the restoration of his former workshop a few doors down unearthed the original template he used to fashion the distinctive s-shaped arms of the pews. But this is where facts about Day and the pews end, and two conflicting tales begin.

According to one traditional story that has been passed down in Milton, Day agreed to make the pews on condition that he would be allowed to sit in the main sanctuary so his slaves could look down from the balcony and see him and his family among the white parishioners. In another version—told mainly by Day’s descendents—he made the pews with the stipulation that his slaves would be allowed to join him and his family downstairs in the sanctuary.⁴ For cultural historian Juanita Holland, these tales reflect two very different views of the man. In the first case, a Thomas Day who desires to segregate himself from his slaves and to “distance himself from being black” and in the second, a Day who was “insinuating himself and those he cared about into the [white-dominated] system as much as he could.”⁵



Courtesy of the Thomas Day Education Project.

The walnut pews that Thomas Day made over 170 years ago are still in use at the Milton Presbyterian Church.

Thomas Day’s life history is full of many such contradictions, and, like detectives confronted with conflicting accounts, we were challenged to figure out where the truth actually lay. After twelve years of digging and uncovering a variety of revealing manuscripts and documents, this is a brief overview of what we found.

Accidental Researchers

If someone had told either of us that we would spend so much of our time—over a decade—trying to piece together the puzzle that Thomas Day’s life represents, we would both have said “no way.” We are, respectively, an educator/film-maker

and a journalist. We are not genealogists and, initially, we were not even history enthusiasts. However, by now we feel that we have more than earned the label “independent researchers.” By profession, we are communicators who have been plunged into a wide range of fascinating subjects during our careers. Predictably, in a world of deadlines, we typically dipped in and out of diverse topics rather quickly. But something happened for each of us with exposure to the Thomas Day material. We got hooked. Some might say “stuck.” The chapter in American history that he opened up to us was a world we had never encountered before: the experience of free African Americans in the generations between the American Revolution and the Civil War. Free blacks, also called “free people of color,” constituted a class that was neither white and free, nor technically enslaved. Their ambiguous status kept them on the alert at all times. In an interview, eminent historian John Hope Franklin described their experience in antebellum North Carolina:

Free blacks in North Carolina, as Thomas Day came into manhood, could not move freely from one community to the other. If you wanted to go from Milton or Yanceyville to Raleigh, you needed permission to do that. And it was dangerous for you to do that, because . . . if you turned up where nobody knew you, it would be assumed that you were a runaway slave, and you had no defense against an accusation that you were a runaway. Now he could be seized, and he could be jailed, and the jailer could advertise that he had taken up a runaway slave. . . . Now if that free black, let’s say it was Thomas Day, said, “I am not a slave, I am free,” they’d say, “Yeah, how’re you going to prove it?” “I can prove it in court.” They’d say, “You have no standing in court. You cannot take an oath. You cannot swear on the Bible because you are not a person.” You see?⁶

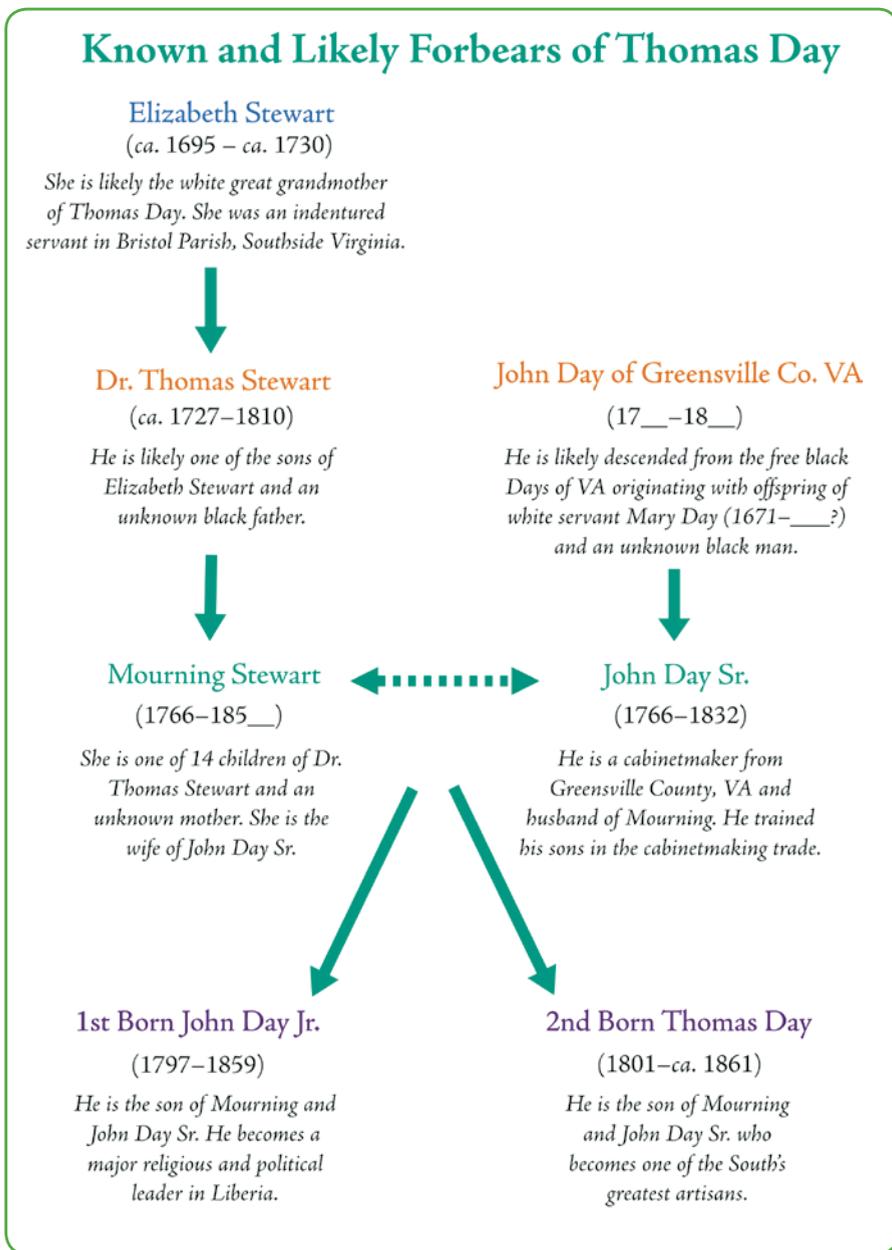
We began our research more than fifteen years ago, when I, Laurel Sneed, began working on a script for a documentary film about Thomas Day. I quickly reached a major impasse: the first 25 years of Day’s life were a virtual blank. Almost nothing was known beyond the fact that two censuses

specified Virginia as his birthplace. So, with the aid of a research grant from the North Carolina Humanities Council, I began my search, with the assistance of Christine Westfall, a recent history graduate from Northwestern University. I wanted to learn the identity of Thomas Day's parents and whatever I could about his formative years.

After weeks of scouring records in Southside Virginia courthouses and running down leads that led nowhere, I found the proverbial needle in the haystack. It was hidden in an 1832 record from the Chancery Court of Dinwiddie County, Virginia. A faint passage on a handwritten page cited "John Day and Mourning, his wife, formerly Mourning Stewart, one of the heirs . . . of Thomas Stewart the elder."⁷ This document contained details of a suit regarding the estate of one Thomas A. Stewart and it listed the spouses of his many heirs. It was significant because I already knew that there was an 84-year-old woman named "Mourning S. Day" listed in Thomas Day's household in the 1850 Caswell County census.⁸ Could Mourning Stewart Day be the elderly woman, presumably his mother, living with Thomas Day in 1850? It seemed like a match, but I wanted to be certain.

In Thomas Stewart's 1808 will, he left a slave to his grandson, "John Day," which made it clear that Stewart's daughter, Mourning, and her husband, John Day, had at least one son named John by 1808.⁹ In his study of free blacks born in Virginia and North Carolina, noted genealogist Paul Heinegg listed

a John Day, born in 1797, who had migrated to Liberia and become a well-known missionary and statesman. This John Day's occupation was also listed as "cabinetmaker" and because of this, Heinegg hypothesized that John Day was the brother of the famed North Carolina cabinetmaker with the same surname.¹⁰



Heinegg had no proof of a fraternal relationship between John Day and Thomas Day, but he cited, as a major source, a eulogy and obituary for John Day prepared at the time of his death. It appeared in the *African Repository*, the publication of the American

Colonization Society, which was the organization that spearheaded the colonization of Liberia. The eulogy stated that from 1846 to 1859, John Day Jr. had been a superintendent for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and that he had overseen its missionary work in Liberia and Sierra Leone “up to the hour of his death.”¹¹

Intrigued, I made several calls to the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee. I discovered that the archives possessed a collection of correspondence containing more than one hundred letters from Reverend John Day to the corresponding secretary of the Foreign Mission Board. Luckily, John Day turned out to be one of the most prolific letter writers among nineteenth-century Baptist missionaries. One letter in particular was a treasure trove of relevant events, dates, places, and a cast of characters that could never have been obtained from courthouse records alone. Written in 1847, this crucial letter was an autobiographical account of John Day’s early years. In it, he confirmed what courthouse records had implied:

My mother was the daughter of a coloured man of Dinwiddie County, Virginia, whose name was Thomas Stewart, a medical doctor, but when or how he obtained his education in that profession, I know not.¹²

John and Thomas Day’s mother, Mourning Stewart Day, was the second daughter of at least 14 children born to Thomas Stewart.¹³ She was the first child born after the death of his first wife and was apparently named in commemoration of the mourning period.¹⁴ In his autobiographical letter, John Day also identified his father as a cabinetmaker named John Day (Sr.).¹⁵ Another letter, found in the Nashville archives, written by John Day’s widow in 1860, identified John and Thomas Day as brothers.¹⁶ John Day’s autobiographical letter in concert with the courthouse documents provided crucial elements for a portrait of John Day’s childhood and adolescence. From this account, the outline of Thomas Day’s early years could be traced.

Thomas Day’s Parents Identified by Brother

Thomas Day was born into a respectable, free black family in 1801 in rural Dinwiddie County, Virginia, about 25 miles southwest of Petersburg. When Thomas was six years old, his father, John Day Sr. moved the family to neighboring Sussex County where John Jr., age ten, was boarding with a white Quaker friend of the Day family and being educated by Quaker tutors. Young Thomas was apparently sent to the same school as his brother. John Day Sr. trained both boys in his trade, cabinetmaking. They made this move in the year that Congress finally outlawed further importation of slaves from Africa, but conditions for free black families in Virginia were precarious at best, and the Days were well aware that local Quakers could be important allies.

During the late eighteenth century, Quakers had become increasingly opposed to slavery, even in Virginia, which had more free and enslaved people of African descent than any other state. A new study shows that as early as 1767, Virginia Quakers were “training enslaved people to be laborers in a free market. Monthly meetings [Quaker congregations] loaned money to African American tradesmen and established apprenticeships for their children.”¹⁷ After successfully pushing for a state manumission act in 1782, Quakers in the Old Dominion intensified their activities; “from 1783 to 1795 Virginia Quakers continued to petition their state assembly for laws easing enslavement, including one that declared free African Americans were citizens and made it a crime to enslave their children. One of these petitions influenced the passage of a law in 1795 that allowed African Americans claiming to be free to be heard in court.”¹⁸

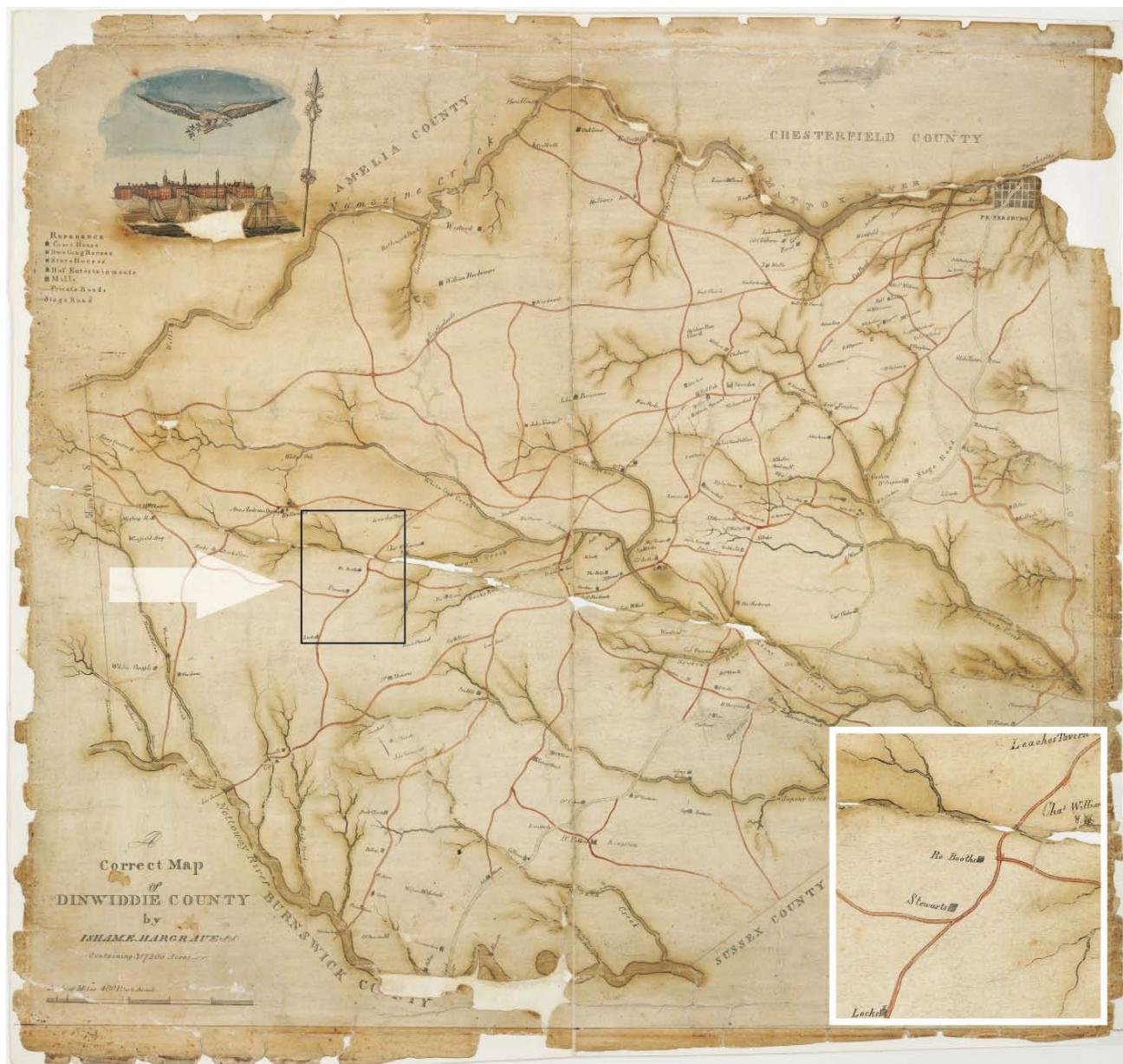
After establishing that Mourning Stewart Day was indeed Thomas Day’s mother, I soon discovered more about Dr. Thomas Stewart, Thomas Day’s grandfather and namesake. Stewart was the son of an unknown black man and a white indentured servant, a woman likely named Elizabeth Stewart from whom, by law, he inherited his free legal

status.¹⁹ Before the American Revolution, most southern free blacks were the mixed-race progeny of black enslaved or indentured men and white female indentured servants. Invariably identified as “Dr.” Stewart in tax rolls as well as in Chancery Court, Stewart likely apprenticed with a medical doctor and became a well-known and respected local medical practitioner.

While John Day does not mention Thomas in his autobiographical letter, he does refer to his brother in two subsequent ones. The two

came of age during tumultuous times. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, gradual improvements in roads and transportation increased the flow of manufactured products as large urban shops sold domestic goods and furniture through wider networks. This, in turn, affected many local artisans who could not compete with cheaper, and often more fashionable, factory-made products, including furniture.

John Day Sr. was one of the artisans who had a hard time staying ahead financially. He also



Courtesy of J. Barrett Chappell, Jr., Clerk of Circuit Court, Dinwiddie County, VA.

An early 19th-century Dinwiddie County, VA map by surveyor, Isham Hargrave, pinpoints the location of Dr. Thomas Stewart's house and tavern which stood on present-day Old White Oak Road. Thomas Day was born in this part of the county in 1801, where his family was likely living.

developed a drinking problem. John Jr. later recalled his own youthful efforts to keep his head above water after his father became “intemperate”:

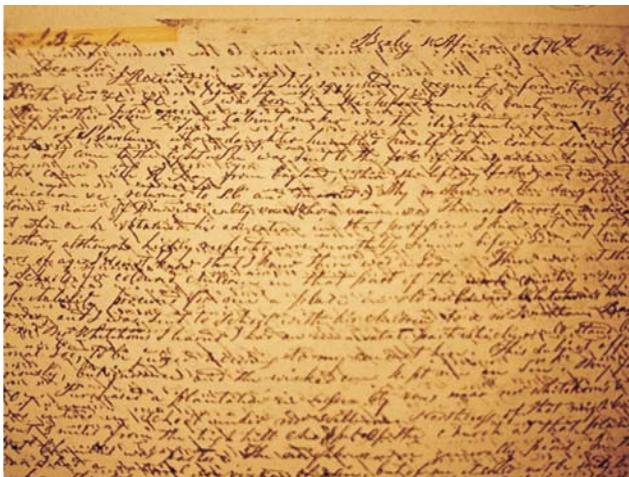
In 1817 my father went over to North Carolina and left me in Dinwiddie to pay a debt he owed to Mr. John Bolling. I carried on a little cabinetmaking business in a village in that part of the county . . . paid my father’s debt, and was likely to do well in the world’s estimation, but associating myself with—young white men, who were fond of playing cards, contracted that habit. J. L. Scott a merchant and friend of mine came into my shop to see me and I frankly told him that if I continued in that place that I should ruin myself. He procured a shop for me about 7 miles off of Mrs. Ann Pryor’s. I commenced well there but a drunken journeyman set fire to my shop and consumed all I had. The neighbors spoke of reinstating me, but I would not accept any thing but a coat and hat of my friend, J. L. Scott. I went on my feet to Warren County, North Carolina and got in possession of my father’s tools, borrowed money off a gentleman, and commenced work there.²⁰

My discovery, in 1995, that John Day and Mourning Stewart Day were the parents of John Day Jr. and his younger brother, Thomas, became major news throughout the Dan River region of North Carolina and Virginia. The headlines on the front page of the *Caswell Messenger* on October 25, 1995 had an eerily contemporary ring: “Thomas Day’s Parents Identified by Brother.” The research report of the findings was distributed throughout Caswell County, where the Day name was already especially familiar and respected. A copy also ended up in the hands of Janie Leigh Carter, a former history teacher, independent scholar, and lifelong friend of Patricia Dane Rogers, then a staff writer for the *Washington Post*.

On a visit to the Carters that fall, I, Patricia Rogers, read the report with surprise. In the first of several curious coincidences, it was clear to me that Thomas Day, the subject of the report, was the same cabinetmaker I had just heard about for the first time. A few hours earlier, I had picked up a voice mail from my office and learned that a North Carolina furniture company was about to launch a line of Day furniture reproductions. And here I was, seven miles from Milton, practically in his back yard. For a reporter with a national design, architecture, and decorative arts beat, the new furniture was the perfect “news peg” for what promised to be a remarkable tale.

In February 1997, the Home section of the *Post* published my subsequent article about Thomas Day as a cover story. I described as much as I could about his distinctive furniture and Laurel Sneed’s ongoing research. One year later, in preparing her Wake Forest University master’s thesis Carter transcribed all of John Day’s letters to the corresponding secretary of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Along the way, I made a few discoveries of my own including a critical 1835 newspaper item that placed Thomas Day in Philadelphia among delegates to the black convention.

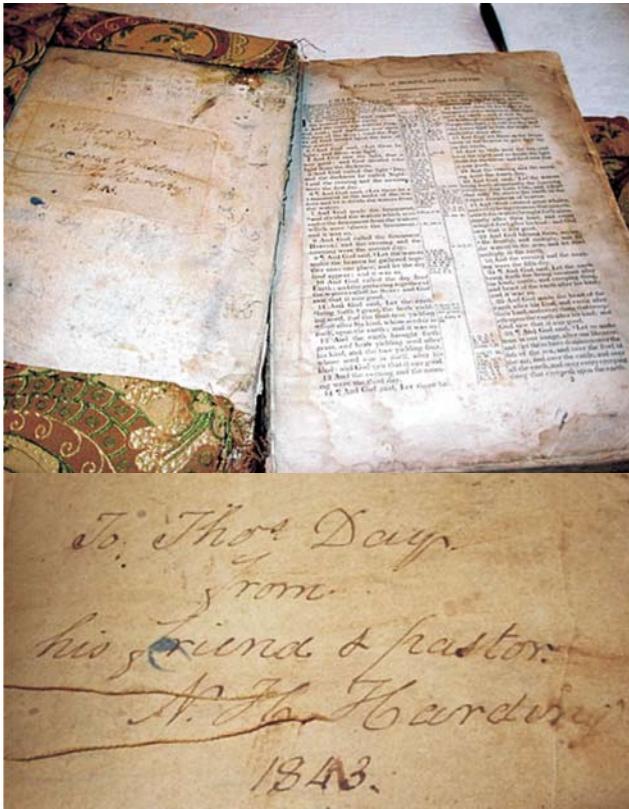
My initial research, however, was focused on Thomas Day’s descendants and forebears. The inquiry spanned three centuries of family history, and it eventually led me, using my reporter’s



Courtesy of the Thomas Day Education Project.

John Day Jr. wrote his 1847 autobiographical letter to the Rev. James B. Taylor, corresponding secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Richmond, VA. It identified his and Thomas Day’s parents and provided vital background information.

It is not clear from this letter or other records where Thomas and his mother were during the time that John Jr. was working off the family debt. Quite possibly, Thomas spent at least some of the time with his older brother meeting the family obligation and honing his cabinetmaking skills.



Courtesy of Dr. Thomas Day V.

Thomas Day's Bible was discovered at the home of a direct descendant in Maryland. Names and dates in the Bible provided clues to Day's network of contacts and prompted interest in his pastor, Rev. N. H. Harding. See page 11 sidebar, "Who was Nehemiah Henry Harding?"

instincts, to the home of Dr. Thomas Day V in suburban Baltimore. This dermatologist whose son is also named Thomas Day, had inherited his great-great-grandfather's Bible. The well-used book, more than 150 years old, was in tattered condition, but it was still possible to read the initial inscription by the minister of the Milton Presbyterian Church: "To Thomas Day from his friend and pastor, N. H. Harding 1843."²¹ Like many family Bibles, this one was full of important names and dates. Some of these leads would later help to reinforce our understanding of Day's abolitionist connections.

Another significant find was a c. 1822 map, virtually unknown beyond Dinwiddie County. It identified the homestead of Day's maternal grandfather, Thomas Stewart, and pinpointed its location about five miles west of the present-day town of McKenney. Thanks to this original map, which to this day hangs unheralded above a copy machine in the county courthouse, I was able to locate the neighborhood where Thomas Day

was most likely born. Early on, I also unearthed information about the professions and activities of the Stewart family including an advertisement in the November 13, 1778 edition of the *Virginia Gazette*, which provided the first contemporaneous verification of Thomas Stewart's medical practice:

I Nathaniel Hobbs of Dinwiddie County do hereby certify, that in the month of May last my negro boy Tom received a kick from a stallion in the forehead, which deprived him of his senses from Sunday until Tuesday evening in which time he lost a quantity of blood, and many ounces of matter, supposed to be part of his brain, but the assistance of Dr. Thomas Stewart, of Dinwiddie, and his specifick balsam,²² he is now perfectly well and as sound and sensible as ever.²³

With the doctor now clearly in my sights, I could begin to learn more about this intriguing individual. In addition to manufacturing and administering patent medicines, Stewart was a successful entrepreneur and farmer. Records revealed that he owned large tracts of land, a mill, and a popular tavern located in his "mansion house." He ran these diverse operations with the help of his family and numerous enslaved workers. In 1810, the year he died, he owned more than 900 acres in Dinwiddie County and also possessed slaves.

The more I learned about Stewart, the more it seemed likely that this energetic and entrepreneurial man was a role model for his grandson and namesake, Thomas Day. Stewart's upward mobility must have been achieved through some combination of talent, drive, and good fortune. However, the ownership of enslaved men, women, and children was another central factor in his climb, and this raised obvious questions about the mixed-race doctor's relationship with his slaves.

Evidence suggests that Thomas Stewart's connection to his enslaved workers was not as exploitative as one might expect, given what must have been his driving ambition. In a will he wrote in 1804, he listed 27 slaves by name and requested that 16 of them be freed upon his death. He also asked that some unnamed boys "whom I have

WHO WAS NEHEMIAH HENRY HARDING?

A Minister Wrestles with His Conscience by Peter H. Wood

If Thomas Day offers one window into the complex world of antebellum race relations, his Presbyterian minister in Milton, the Rev. Nehemiah Henry Harding, provides another. Slavery was the most controversial issue of the day and everyone had strong opinions. Advocates could be found for armed revolt, peaceful petitioning, immediate freedom, gradual emancipation, African colonization, or continued enslavement. As controversy swirled, individuals shifted their stance on the matter. This is particularly clear in the zigzags of Milton's Harding, a strong-willed cleric who arrived in town in 1835, the same year Thomas Day attended the black convention in Philadelphia.

Born in Brunswick, Maine, in 1794, Harding went to sea at an early age and became captain of a vessel plying the waters off the coast of North Carolina. Early in the 1820s, a time of widespread religious awakening, he experienced a shipboard conversion during a storm and changed careers. He worked briefly in Raleigh and attended the University of North Carolina for two years, intent on entering the ministry. Admitted to Princeton Theological Seminary in 1826, he was ordained and became pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Oxford, North Carolina, in 1830. Harding served there five years before moving to Milton where he became the pastor of the Milton Presbyterian Church and also founded the Yanceyville Presbyterian Church. He lived in Milton until his death in 1849.

Harding never lost touch with his friends and family in Maine. During trips back to Brunswick, the minister addressed topics including slavery. Long before Harriet Beecher Stowe moved to Brunswick in 1850 and penned her highly influential best-seller, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the town was engaged in discussing slavery. Local Bowdoin College spawned vigorous debate on abolition. When Harding returned in 1833 after living in a slave state for more than a decade, "he delivered a [pro] colonization lecture to the students." As a local anti-slavery advocate recounted five years later, the minister seemed "dark in mind . . . and hard in heart." But in Maine he "came in contact with abolitionists, and . . . returned to the South with arrows of truth rankling in his bosom."

The commentator, who published his musings in the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* in 1838, reported that Harding had undergone a swift change of heart in North Carolina. Although "surrounded with adverse influences" and at odds with the "the prevailing current of popular feeling," he nevertheless announced his . . .

opposition to slavery." The commentator knew this because in July of 1834, Harding had sent a letter to the Rev. George Adams at Brunswick's First Parish Congrega-



The Milton Presbyterian Church

tional Church, "stating the change that had taken place in his mind on the subject of slavery." The commentator shared an excerpt from this letter with readers of *The Liberator*:

You remember that while I was with you last summer, I was much opposed to the anti-slavery society, and contended that the colonization scheme was . . . the only remedy for the evils of slavery, and that I made a . . . talk before the students; it was [a] poor talk, for it was a miserable theme . . . I feel it a duty I owe to myself and the friends I have with you, to say that my views and feelings which were then wavering, have, after mature deliberation and much prayer, been entirely changed: and that I am now a strong anti-slavery man. Yes, after mature reflection, I am the sworn enemy of slavery in all its forms and with all its evils. Henceforth it is a part of my religion to oppose slavery. I am greatly surprised that I should in any form have been the apologist of a system so full of deadly poison to all holiness and benevolence, as slavery—the concocted essence of fraud, selfishness and cold hearted tyranny, and the fruitful parent of unnumbered evils to the oppressor and the oppressed, the one thousandth part of which has never been brought to the light.

But the story didn't end there. The last sentence of this quote beginning with "I am greatly surprised . . ." was extracted from *The Liberator* and republished later by Theodore Dwight Weld in the American Anti-Slavery Society publication, *American Slavery As It Is: The Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*. The book's influence on anti-slavery sentiment in the country was only surpassed by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

continued on next page

On a return visit to Brunswick in 1838, Harding shifted his stance on the issue yet again. The local observer was astonished to hear him make “gratuitous and invidious remarks” about the increasing militancy of abolitionists. (“Mr. Harding was asked while here this time, what he thought of the abolition efforts now, and he replied it was a ‘nefarious business. That we had better take care of our own poor.’”) From the pulpit, the visitor from Milton bemoaned the fact that “now the church itself has become the great agitator.”

Asked to read an announcement for a meeting addressing “the duty of Christians . . . towards the colored people,” he refused and preached a sermon warning Brunswick’s citizens to beware of excessive zeal regarding their “duty to the colored people.” Harding’s “palpable inconsistency” stung the irate commentator who informed his readers: “We see the withering, mildew influence of slavery on the southern ministry and church. It has been doubtless thro’ the influence of the clergy and the church that Mr. H. has been tempted to close his ear and steel his heart against the cry of the bleeding captive, and again to become the ‘apologist of a system full of deadly poison to all holiness and benevolence.”

The Liberator, “A Recreant Minister,” June 29, 1838. Accessible Archives, Inc. is available at www.accessible.com.

What are we to make of this scathing commentary? Does it reflect the view of a sheltered New Englander with little appreciation of the complexities Harding faced in keeping his North Carolina congregation together? And, what are we to make of the ship captain-turned-preacher? A slaveholder himself, Harding appears to be actively wrestling with this thorny issue, shifting his position as his circumstances and perceptions change. But his return to an apologist stance also suggests that he was trying to distance himself from his earlier passionate anti-slavery statements that were, apparently without his consent, appropriated and widely published by radical abolitionists.

We may never know how Harding truly felt, but perhaps his views changed again during the last decade of his life through interaction with his most prominent free black parishioner. After all, he and Thomas Day were each learning from experience that racial enslavement in the United States might outlast them both, and that they needed to be guarded in their stated public opinions if they were to endure and prosper in North Carolina.

emancipated” each be sent to school and then trained in a “good trade.”²⁴ The will was contested by “divers witnesses,” most likely family members to whom the slaves were more valuable as property that could be sold. Based on the testimony, the court refused to admit the will to the record.²⁵ After Stewart’s death, the slaves he had promised freedom in the 1804 will sued the heirs but were unsuccessful.²⁶

By 1820, John and Thomas Day both were living with their parents in an area called Nutbush, near present day Bullocksville, North Carolina. This rural area lies in what is now Vance County, but was then part of Warren County. During this period, as in earlier generations, many free blacks crossed the Virginia border, heading south to escape escalating racist laws in the Old Dominion and to find cheap, fertile land. Soil depletion, the result of decades of tobacco cultivation, was another factor that compelled movement out of Southside Virginia.

In 1821, the Day brothers left their parents’ home in Nutbush. Thomas, then 20, went to

Hillsborough, North Carolina’s former capital, where he had a “stand” or shop and advertised his walnut and mahogany furniture. John Jr., then 24, moved to Milton, 40 miles north of Hillsborough where, he tells us in his autobiographical letter, he studied to be a Baptist preacher. But after he completed his studies, church authorities rejected John’s application to become a minister. It was a particularly disillusioning setback, for he believed his application was rejected on spurious grounds by his white examiners. With a wife and young family to support, he needed to find a different way to uphold his beliefs and find his way in the world.

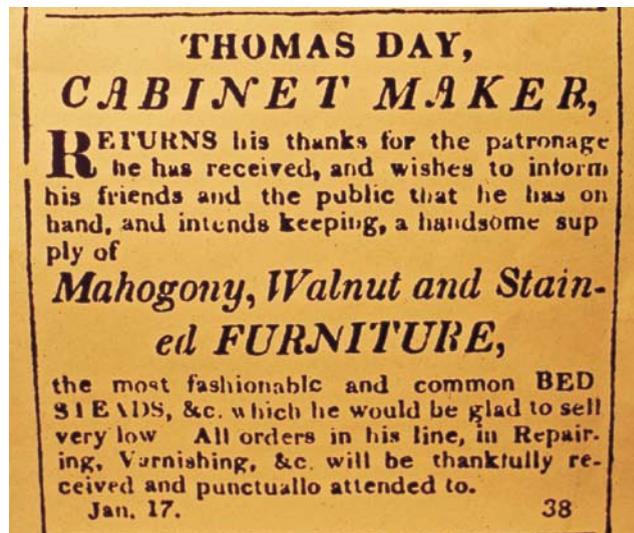
“We love this country and its liberties, if we could share an equal right in them,”²⁷ wrote one free black man who could have been speaking for John Day and many others. Seeing no hope for fair treatment, these disillusioned free blacks were drawn to the idea of migrating to Africa after the formation of the American Colonization Society in 1816. Many white politicians who feared slave unrest, especially in the South, endorsed the idea.

In the dozen years after the American Colonization Society acquired control of Liberia in West Africa, more than 250 local colonization societies sprang up across the South. Numerous religious sects supported the idea, and southern Quakers like those the Days had befriended in Virginia became particularly active.²⁸ Like hundreds of other free black Virginians and Carolinians, John Day Jr. pulled up stakes and took his family to Africa. In the years that followed, he became a towering political and religious leader, a proponent of Liberian colonization, and a critic of the institution of slavery.

The Politics of Survival

Thomas Day chose to follow a very different path from his brother. Thomas remained in North Carolina and opened a cabinetmaking business of his own in Milton during the 1820s. Perhaps recalling the ways that his grandfather had successfully navigated a slave-based society, Thomas invested in the American free enterprise system despite its glaring inequalities. However, he must have realized that in order to thrive in the South as a free person of color, he had to possess and utilize the skills of a master politician.

One of those necessary skills was an ability to convince white people that he was a free black they could trust. In 1827, he bought property in Milton and paid for an ingratiating advertisement in the local newspaper, the *Milton Gazette & Roanoke Advertiser*, in which he thanked his patrons for their furniture orders and assured them of punctual service.²⁹ At the end of the previous year, 1826, North Carolina's legislature enacted a law barring additional free blacks from migrating into the state.³⁰ Soon Thomas Day, a reputable North Carolinian, was personally affected by this racist statute. Before the decade ended, he became engaged to a free black Virginian, Aquilla Wilson, who was five years his junior. They married on January 6, 1830 in Halifax County, Virginia. Thomas Day now needed to get around the recent law that prohibited him from bringing his new wife back to North Carolina to live with him in Milton.



Day publicized his goods and services in the March 1, 1827 edition of the local newspaper, the *Milton Gazette & Roanoke Advertiser*.

In a decisive demonstration of how quickly he had established himself among the white elite, sixty-one of his neighbors signed a petition to the North Carolina legislature requesting that they exempt Aquilla from the law. The most prominent name on the petition was Romulus Saunders, the Attorney General. In an affidavit attached to the petition, he stated that Day was “of very fair character—an excellent mechanic, industrious honest and sober in his habits,” and noted that “in the event of any disturbance amongst the Blacks, I should rely with confidence upon a disclosure from him as he is the owner of slaves himself as well as real estate.”³¹ This imprimatur from the state’s highest legal authority not only expedited the bill, but it also legitimated Day and made him a known quantity to the most powerful members of the state’s gentry.

This petition offers a clear example of the way in which Day was obliged to operate to assure the success of his business and the acceptance of his free black family. Free African Americans and former slaves living in the North could take strong public stands against slavery, as did Frederick Douglass after escaping from enslavement in Maryland in 1838. But Thomas Day’s situation, hundreds of miles below the Mason-Dixon Line, was far more precarious and required a more subtle form of resistance. According to historian Ira Berlin:

He accepts the law but requests exceptional treatment. This makes him different from someone like Frederick Douglass who challenges the legal system and demands the abolition of slavery and the discriminatory racist laws that support it. . . . We see a “personal” approach—enlisting one’s customers and neighbors rather than using a “political approach” of directly challenging the . . . system.³²

Political scientist, James C. Scott, in his 1990 book, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, has studied the ways that different subordinate groups, such as free and enslaved African Americans during the antebellum period, resisted domination. The petition on behalf of Aquilla Day, according to Scott’s perspective, is a political act, albeit one crafted by a subordinated person who is not able to directly challenge the system, as could Douglass after he fled to the North. In antebellum North Carolina, a frontal attack on racist laws would have provoked retaliation. To “accept” the laws of the state, yet personally petition for an individual exemption from a law, did not openly threaten the racist status quo. If anything, from the legislature’s standpoint, granting the exception seemed to affirm the rule itself. The petition demonstrated that Day was willing to work within the established system. Moreover, leading white citizens publicly attested their certainty, based upon first-hand encounters, that Day seemed cautious and accommodating on racial matters, unwilling to organize with others to overtly fight longstanding discrimination. It is this political “middle ground” between complete acquiescence and outright defiance that Thomas Day and many other free blacks in the South cultivated.

The petition of the citizens of Milton on behalf of Thomas Day’s wife also demonstrates

his awareness that it was critical for a man in his marginalized position to be held in high regard by white elites. He once advised his daughter, always “regard your character more than your life.”³³ An unassailable reputation among the powers that be was the best protection. Day’s slave ownership was also an integral part of his public image—a badge of “whiteness” so to speak. It helped whites to view him as an exception to their standard perception of white superiority and black inferiority. However, Day’s ownership of slaves was more than a protective cover, although it served that purpose well.

While slavery was entrenched in the South and free blacks of means often participated in it as owners, southern whites were three times more likely to own slaves than southern free blacks. Although slave holding was “fairly widespread among the free black population,” free blacks were a very small percentage of the total population.³⁴ According to historian Juliet E. K. Walker, a leading scholar of the African American business tradition, “Facing competition from slave-owning white craftsmen, free black craftsmen needed slave ownership to have any chance of success. In a slaveholding society, was there an alternative to unpaid labor?”³⁵

Day employed free blacks, whites, as well as slaves throughout his career. He owned slaves for three decades, increasing his holdings from two in 1830 to 14 in 1850 at the peak of his career. Of these 14, six were male and between ages 15 and 30 years when their physical capacity for labor was optimal. By 1860, Day was one of only eight free black slaveholders remaining in North Carolina.³⁶ Many free blacks left North Carolina in the decades before the Civil War as a result of increasingly constricting economic and social conditions.

He [Thomas Day] accepts the law but requests exceptional treatment. This makes him different from someone like Frederick Douglass who challenges the legal system and demands the abolition of slavery and the discriminatory racist laws that support it. . . .

Dr. Ira Berlin,
Southern Historian

Converting a Landmark into a Home and Business

By 1850 Day's Milton operation produced one sixth of all furniture made in the state. A pillar of the community, he owned three in-town properties, a 270-acre farm, and shares in the local bank. In 1848, he purchased the most significant piece of real estate in Caswell County, Milton's Union Tavern. A fine example of Federal architecture, the tavern, built in 1818, had been a popular public hostel and stage stop. It was—and still is—an important regional landmark.

Free blacks could legally own property in antebellum North Carolina, but Day's conspicuous purchase and conversion of Milton's most prominent building into his home and business was at odds with the behavior expected of free blacks. The acceptable comportment was described in the slave narrative of Lunsford Lane of Raleigh, who purchased his own freedom with funds earned while still an enslaved entrepreneur:

I had endeavored so to conduct myself as not to become obnoxious to the white inhabitants, knowing as I did, their power and their hostility to the colored people. . . . First, I had made no display of the little property or money I possessed, but in every way I wore as much as possible the aspect of poverty. Second, I had never appeared to be even so intelligent as I really was. This all colored people at the south, free and slaves, find it peculiarly necessary to their own comfort and safety to observe.³⁷

Day was able to transgress these social norms because his business served the self-interest of Milton's white citizens. The fact that the tavern was on the market may suggest that it needed to be restored to productive use, which would serve the whole community. He provided products that people needed, and black business activity—even illegal slave operated businesses—often flourished wherever whites were able to get quality goods



Courtesy of the Caswell County Historical Association.

In 1848, Thomas Day bought the Union Tavern on Milton's main street and turned it into his home and workshop. One of Caswell County's finest examples of Federal-style architecture, it has been restored as a "hands-on" museum featuring exceptional examples of Day's furniture.

and services at competitive prices. Moreover, as stated earlier, Day's political instincts and "street smarts" were exceptional. He is described in public records as a mulatto and his light skin tone surely contributed to the level of acceptance he had among whites. Because no portrait or daguerreotype of him has yet been found, it is impossible to know how Caucasian he looked; however, there is no evidence that Thomas Day ever passed.

Proud Parent of Children at an Abolitionist School

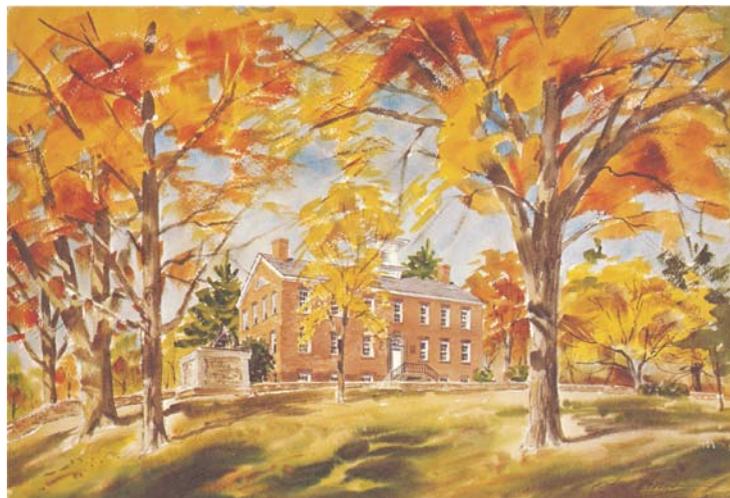
Though educational opportunities for free blacks were few in the late 1840's, Day's wealth enabled him to send his three children, Mary Ann, Thomas Jr., and Devereux, to a co-educational boarding school in Wilbraham, Massachusetts. Some contemporaries viewed the principal of Wesleyan Academy, Miner Raymond, as a "flaming abolitionist" and the same description applied to most of the school's faculty.³⁸ We first learned about the political leanings of Wesleyan's leaders years before we discovered Day's presence at the Philadelphia convention. We felt that we had entered a historical twilight zone. It was not easy to reconcile Thomas Day, slave owner, with Thomas Day, proud parent of students enrolled at an institution dedicated to ending slavery!

Intrigued, we pored over every shred of evidence we had about Wesleyan, including letters Day wrote to his daughter, Mary Ann, when she was a student there. He ended one letter with a postscript that read, “Give my love to Mr. R. and Mr. M. and tell them within five days I will send them the money due the Seminary.”³⁹ Since Day had mentioned both men by their full names in the body of the letter, it was clear that “Mr. R.” was Miner Raymond and “Mr. M.” was John Merrick, the treasurer of the school’s board. For Day to use such a familiar expression as “give my love” indicates that he was close to these anti-slavery educators, but with no knowledge of his activist ties at the time, we were momentarily stumped.

How could Day be on such intimate terms with abolitionist educators in western Massachusetts, more than 1,000 miles from North Carolina? How could he be sympathetic to abolitionist teachings when he himself held slaves? Why would radical abolitionists allow the children of a slave owner to attend their institution? And, why would he risk sending his children to Wesleyan after other southerners had long ago withdrawn their children from the school because of its radical anti-slavery views?⁴⁰ We did not have the answers but we knew that the seemingly innocuous postscript provided a glimpse of Thomas Day that we had not seen before.

Between Quiescence and Revolt

James Scott’s admonishment became our mantra: So long as we confine our conception of the *political* to activity that is openly declared we are driven to conclude that subordinate groups essentially lack a political life or that what political



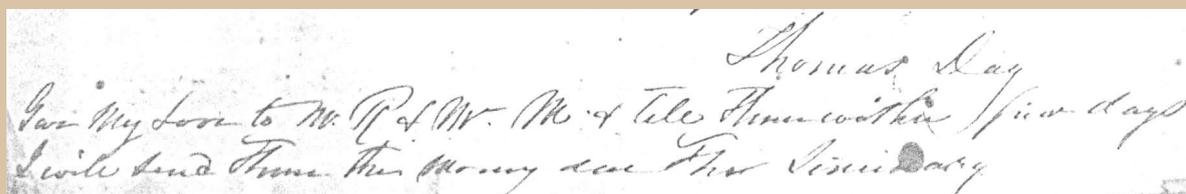
Courtesy of the Wilbraham & Monson Academy.

Thomas Day’s three children were educated at Wesleyan Academy, a Methodist boarding school in Wilbraham, MA that was a hotbed of abolitionist activity.

life they do have is restricted. . . . To do so is to miss the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt. . . . It is to focus on the visible coastline of politics and to miss the continent that lies beyond.⁴¹

An exploration of the “continent” meant a visit to Wilbraham where Wesleyan is still operating today as the Wilbraham & Monson Academy. This trip, in 1997, confirmed that Wesleyan, founded by Methodists in 1817, was a bastion of abolitionist sentiment. Indeed, the entire town of Wilbraham had clear anti-slavery leanings when the Day children were attending the academy. The school’s chapel was an active Underground Railroad station and there were other safe houses in the area. But we could not yet connect the dots to explain how Day had come to know about Wesleyan Academy or to be on such close terms with its leaders.

It took more than a decade after the trip, but we finally found a key piece of the puzzle. It revealed that Thomas Day was among the delegates attending the Fifth Annual Convention for the



This seemingly innocuous post script provided evidence that Thomas Day had radical abolitionist friends, the leaders of Wesleyan Academy.

Improvement of Free People of Colour. The evidence came in the form of a type of classified advertisement, called a “card,” for a boarding house in Philadelphia. Serena Gardiner, a member of the large free black activist community in the city, owned the boarding house and provided room and board for 21 men, including Thomas Day, during the convention. These boarders, in turn, signed the “card” at the end of their stay, recommending her establishment to others as well as citing their reason for being in the city:

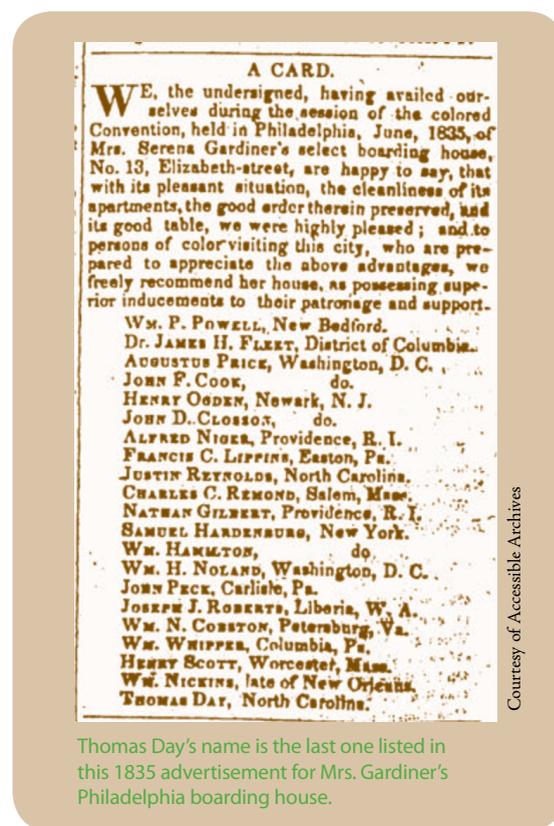
We, the undersigned, having availed ourselves during the session of the colored Convention held in Philadelphia, June 1835, of Mrs. Serena Gardiner’s select boarding house, No. 13, Elizabeth-street, are happy to say, that with its pleasant situation, the cleanliness of its apartments, the good order therein preserved, and its good table, we were highly pleased; and to persons of color visiting this city, who are prepared to appreciate the above advantages, we freely recommend her house, as possessing superior inducements to their patronage and support.⁴²

Eager for additional business, Gardiner published the card in *The Liberator*, the abolitionist publication of William Lloyd Garrison.⁴³ It included the names and home states of all the men. Three, including Day were from southern states. Gardiner was apparently unaware that identifying the handful of southern black delegates in a national anti-slavery publication could endanger them when they returned home.

In addition to “Thomas Day, North Carolina,” the illustrious gentlemen Gardiner listed included Charles Lenox Remond, a fiery orator from Massachusetts who later became a regular on the international anti-slavery lecture circuit, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, the future first president of Liberia and a close friend of Reverend John Day, and William Whipper, a Pennsylvania lumber merchant and one of the wealthiest free blacks in America. Whipper operated a major Underground Railroad station in Columbia, Pennsylvania for more than 20 years, often concealing fugitive slaves in his company’s shipping cars. Later, Whipper described

his home, a safe harbor at the end of a bridge across the Susquehanna River as a main “point of entry for fugitives fleeing from Maryland.”⁴⁴

Those who signed Mrs. Gardiner’s card also included two Washington, DC delegates, the Reverend John F. Cook and Augustus Price. Cook was a former slave who rose to become a famed abolitionist educator and pastor. He was a founder of the esteemed Washington, DC institution now known as the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church and devoted his life to educating black children. At the time of the convention, Price, who co-authored Whipper’s keynote speech for the meeting, was an aide to the sitting President of the United States, Andrew Jackson. Described as “the president’s trusted servant and private secretary,” Price was “present at private White House meetings and cabinet discussions” and also “apparently helped the president draft important documents.”⁴⁵ Two months after the Philadelphia meeting, Washington, DC experienced the Snow Riot, the city’s first major episode of white mob violence against African Americans. Nearly 50 armed white men attacked black people and their property. Cook



Thomas Day’s name is the last one listed in this 1835 advertisement for Mrs. Gardiner’s Philadelphia boarding house.

THOMAS DAY'S PUBLIC VS. HIDDEN TRANSCRIPTS

by Laurel Sneed

Yale political scientist James Scott writes in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* that “Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a ‘hidden transcript’ that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant.” You might speak with disrespect and even with hostility about a highway patrol officer after he has given you a ticket and driven away. But when the officer is standing outside your car window asking you questions, most drivers are exceedingly polite using language such as “Yes, officer/ No, officer” that shows deference and acquiescence.

Scott has given us a useful way to think about this sort of familiar and universally-practiced behavior, as well as helpful vocabulary with which to discuss it. He describes the accommodating tone we use when interacting with someone who has power over us as a “public transcript” designed to “provide convincing evidence for the hegemony of dominant values.” What we say and do behind their back, the “critique of power” is the “hidden transcript.” To understand the behaviors and especially the political life of oppressed people, we need to pay due attention to both the public and hidden transcripts, although the hidden transcript often, for understandable reasons, can be very difficult to excavate intact.

Thomas Day and other southern free blacks in North Carolina carefully crafted a “public transcript” which, according to Scott’s definition provided “the self-portrait of the dominant elites as they would have themselves seen . . . it is designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule.” Day’s ownership of slaves and real property was part of his “public transcript” which telegraphed the message that he accepted white power and its major institution, slavery. However, his close

personal ties to abolitionists, his attendance at anti-slavery meetings, his children’s attendance at an abolitionist school, and their subsequent social activism in racial uplift causes, all indicate that Day’s apparent acceptance of the racial status quo in North Carolina was a public transcript—a political strategy that he used to survive.

According to Scott, the hidden transcript often seeps into the public transcript, but one must know how to detect it. One of the ways he suggests is to observe how members of a subordinate group act when the powers that dominate them are threatened or fragile. An example of this is the behavior of free blacks in Wilmington, North Carolina at the end of the Civil War. Even before the fall of the Confederacy, the free black citizens were supporting the Union cause and were working actively toward racial equality and uplift by establishing schools for recently freed black children. The hidden transcript—the behaviors, feelings, and actions that had long been “underground”—were coming out “in the open” as soon as the fear of a crackdown by the Confederate Government was removed.

Because the process of historical interpretation and analysis too often relies heavily on evidence found in public records, it has taken many years of research to ferret out that there was another, far more political side to Thomas Day than public records convey. It was only because we had access to some personal records—the letters he sent to his daughter—and because his name was carelessly mentioned in an advertisement for a boarding house where delegates to a black convention were staying, that Day’s “hidden transcript” was detected.

See *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* by James C. Scott, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

and Price were both targeted. Cook escaped the city on horseback as the mob destroyed furniture and books at his church-based school and seriously damaged the building.⁴⁶ The mob pursued Price in vain, threatening to “enter and search the White House.”⁴⁷ The violence was intensified because of a rumor that Price had distributed incendiary anti-slavery literature to the African American community.⁴⁸ Historian Peter H. Wood had this to say about Day’s housemates in Philadelphia:

I am struck that we have a veritable who’s who of the black elite staying together at “Mrs. Serena Gardiner’s select boarding house” in early June of 1835. Almost all of them seem to have achieved remarkable economic success. All have confronted the issues of social and civic leadership (integration vs. separation, Africa vs. America, open abolitionism vs. accommodationist gradualism, acceptance vs. confrontation) that are uppermost in the country in that turbulent year.⁴⁹

It is unlikely that Day would have risked his life and livelihood by meeting with high-profile black activists and abolitionists in Philadelphia unless he supported their policies and beliefs. It was simply too dangerous to be associated with them. After Nat Turner's bloody insurrection of 1831, white-on-black violence, targeting free blacks and anti-slavery activity, had increased and spread. It was a great risk for Day to even be in the so-called City of Brotherly Love, where white mobs had attacked and demolished African American homes, businesses, and gathering places during the year of the convention, as well as in 1832 and 1834.⁵⁰

A Look at Thomas Day's Peers in North Carolina: John Carruthers Stanly & Louis Sheridan

At the same time Thomas Day was at the convention in Philadelphia in early June of 1835, white North Carolinians convened a state Constitutional Convention in Raleigh. On the one hand, delegates proceeded to expand the right to vote to include white men who did not own property. On the other hand, they deprived free black men of their voting rights, even when they were property holders. On July 4, *The Liberator* published a letter that had appeared earlier in the *Fayetteville Observer*, noting that Louis Sheridan and John Carruthers Stanly, two of the state's wealthiest free black slave owners, were in a unique and powerful position to protest the loss of their right to vote. The letter stated, "free Negroes such as . . . Sheridan . . . and . . . Stanly . . . should have plead trumpet-tongued in behalf of the more respectable portion of this degraded class."⁵¹ But there is no evidence that either of them—or Thomas Day—uttered a word of protest. Taking an overt political stand would have been useless and even self-destructive. As successful North Carolina businessmen and slave owners, Sheridan and Stanly

shared many similarities with Day, especially the survival strategies they used to deflect criticism and to circumnavigate the shoals of racism in antebellum North Carolina.

Of the three, Stanly was the wealthiest and owned more slaves than any other free black man in the South.⁵² Born into slavery in New Bern in 1774, he was of Thomas Day's parents' generation. His father was a prosperous white merchant with extensive shipping interests, his mother an enslaved Ebo woman. Stanly was privately tutored, highly literate, and apprenticed in the barber trade. Like Day, Stanly was extremely concerned with his public image. Freed at the age of 21, he was not satisfied with his "free papers" as sufficient certification of his legal status. Stanly successfully petitioned the General Assembly in 1798 to "confirm, establish, and Secure [your] petitioner his Freedom with the rights and privileges attendant thereon."⁵³ Just as Day would later do with the

petition on behalf of his wife, Stanly used this request both as a means to reinforce his legitimacy and as a tool to publicize his reputation statewide.

Stanly was also a member of the New

Bern Presbyterian Church where he sat in the sanctuary with the white congregation. Like Day, he had numerous business dealings with leading whites. The most important person in his network was his white half-brother, a congressman and banker. Even though this prominent kinsman was known to be a high-flyer and speculator, Stanly co-signed a bank note for him, and became saddled with the debt when the loan came due. Stanly had to mortgage many of his properties to satisfy the loan, beginning a downward financial spiral from which he never recovered. However, at the height of his success, Stanly owned four plantations—a total of 2,600 acres—exclusive of his city holdings. According to historian Loren Schwenger, Stanly also owned more than 150 slaves.⁵⁴

No citizen of Newbern would hesitate to walk the streets with [John C. Stanly]. He was uniformly courteous and unobtrusive.

Stephen F. Miller, a former New Bern resident who knew John C. Stanly

Stanly, who died around 1846, is often considered a banner example of exploitative free black slave ownership. In fact, his views meshed so thoroughly with those of white New Bern that at the time of his death “few of his white neighbors considered him much different from themselves in the feeling that the South’s ‘peculiar institution’ was the capstone of a unique and advanced civilization.”⁵⁵ This description by one of those neighbors underscores the degree of acceptance Stanly and his family achieved:

J. C. Stanly was a man of dignified presence, and lived in fashionable style, his sons and daughters being well educated and always making a good appearance as bright mulattoes. No citizen of Newbern [present day New Bern] would hesitate to walk the streets with him. He was uniformly courteous and unobtrusive.⁵⁶

This assessment of Stanly was based on his wealth, class, reputation, and “dignified” public image. Had his white associates looked beyond appearances, however, they might have detected ways that Stanly and his family were, in fact, different from them. While he has been described as a “hard task-master . . . who fed and clothed [his slaves] indifferently,”⁵⁷ he was also directly involved in obtaining the freedom of nearly 30 enslaved individuals. John Hope Franklin described him as the “most influential free Negro in the manumission movement.”⁵⁸ Slave owners sought him out for his expertise in gaining the legal freedom of slaves.

Rather than working one-on-one to free individuals, at least one member of Stanly’s family advocated taking organized political action to combat the institution of slavery itself: his Oberlin-educated granddaughter, Sara, became a well-known anti-slavery activist, lecturer, and teacher. The following is an excerpt from an address she wrote to the Convention of the Disfranchised Citizens of Ohio in 1856, when she was only 20 years old:

On our native soil, consecrated to freedom, civil liberties are denied us . . . let us reject the absurd phantasy of non-intervention . . . and substitute a radical, utilitarian spirit.

Sara G. Stanley,* granddaughter of John C. Stanly
*Sara added an “e” to her surname

On our native soil, consecrated to freedom, civil liberties are denied us . . . we search for the panacea for the manifold ills which we suffer. One, and only one, exists; . . . it is embodied in one potent word—ACTION. Let unanimity of action characterize us; let us reject the absurd phantasy of non-intervention; let us leave conservatism behind, and substitute a radical, utilitarian spirit. . . . It was a Spartan mother’s farewell to her son, “Bring home your shield or be brought upon it.”⁵⁹

One wonders if her radical orientation was in part a reaction to the lack of direct political action she witnessed among members of her grandfather’s generation of free blacks in North Carolina.

Louis Sheridan, who was born around 1788, was the other notable free black North Carolina slave and business owner chastised in the editorial for failing to use his position to publicly protest the end of free black male suffrage in North Carolina in 1835.⁶⁰ Sheridan was from Elizabethtown on the Cape Fear River upstream from Wilmington. Like Stanly, he was the

offspring of a white man and an enslaved woman. After gaining his freedom, he prospered as the owner of a dry goods store and became a substantial real estate investor, owning numerous properties in town and in surrounding Bladen County.

Sheridan, like Day and Stanly, built a broad network of social and business relationships with whites in high places. Sheridan’s immediate circle included a former North Carolina governor, John Owen, an Elizabethtown native who openly opposed the free black loss of suffrage. Sheridan developed an excellent reputation as a businessman. Like Day and Stanly, he publicly appeared to accept the norms of white supremacy, and his ownership of slaves bolstered the perception that he accepted the status quo.

There were, however, a few cracks in Sheridan’s mask of accommodation, and in time they

deepened. In 1828, for example, his name appears as an authorized agent for the nation's first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*.

Sheridan also appears to have served, although he later denied it, as an agent for that paper's more radical successor, *Rights of All*.⁶¹ Sheridan disassociated himself from *Rights of All* after the *Cape Fear Recorder* denounced him for supporting the abolitionist publication. In a letter to the editor of the *Cape Fear Recorder* dated September 30, 1830, he disclaimed "all connection" with northern political elements and exploited his impeccable reputation to ingratiate and distance himself:

I will appeal to my general conduct in society and to all who know me of every class in the community and challenge one and all to produce any evidence of a solitary instance in which I have by word or deed hinted at or countenance such mischievous effects as are attributed to the "Rights of All" and to other papers or pamphlets published in the Northern States.⁶²

The letter appeased Sheridan's critics, but many of his words and actions in the next few years indicate that he actually did share sentiments frequently articulated in northern anti-slavery publications, including *Rights of All*. In August 1838, eight months after Sheridan left for Liberia, the *Colored American* quoted from a letter he had written to noted New York abolitionist Lewis Tappan, citing his growing desperation at the overt racism he was experiencing in North Carolina:

Our cast being that in which the smallest degree of interest is conceived, nothing possible to be done is left unattempted to degrade and bring us down below the standing of their very slaves and the consequence is that under the now existing state of things, we the free people of color are denuded of all privileges marking the attributes of a man.⁶³

... we the free people of color are now denuded of all privileges making the attributes of a man.

Louis Sheridan, North Carolina businessman who expatriated to Liberia

Sheridan at first considered Liberian colonization the greatest "humbug ever palmed off on the American people."⁶⁴ But after losing the right to vote in North

Carolina in 1835, he thought it was only a matter of time before blacks would be banished from the United States. Caught between a rock and a hard place, Sheridan immigrated with his immediate family and more than 50 of his freed slaves on December 30, 1837. The expatriation proved disastrous. He lost family members to disease and by the time of his own death in 1844, he had become *persona non-grata* in Liberia because of his public condemnation of the government corruption there.

Tying Up Loose Ends Only to Find New Leads

Ira Berlin asserts that Thomas Day's participation at even one convention suggests his "connections to the North" as well as "ties with important elements of the activist black community engaged in self-help, racial uplift and anti-slavery projects."⁶⁵ This led us to wonder if we might find him in the attendance rosters of other similar gatherings. After much searching, we got a hit. Five years after Thomas Day showed up in Philadelphia, a man identified as "Thomas Day Jr." appears on the roll of attendees at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York City.⁶⁶ This individual is listed with the New York delegation, but no Thomas Day Jr. is listed in the 1840 U. S. Federal Census from that city, and we have not yet found another Thomas Day associated with the anti-slavery movement.

Thomas Day had business contacts as well as personal friends in New York City, so the suffix "Jr." and his placement with the New York delegation could well have been attempts to camouflage his identity. Also, a disclaimer on the roster admits that there were errors "in the orthography of names and towns" due to the "hurry and confusion of such a large assembly."⁶⁷ So it is possible that the

ANNIE DAY SHEPARD AND ANNIE WASHINGTON DAY

A Family Legacy of Racial Uplift through Education by Laurel Sneed

Thomas Day's commitment to racial uplift through education was a family legacy realized by many descendants, primarily by his daughter, Mary Ann Day (see page 15), his daughter-in-law, Annie Washington Day, and his grand-daughter, Annie Day Shepard. Annie Washington Day was the founder and leader of several schools for black children in Washington, DC and her namesake, Annie Day Shepard was the wife of Dr. James E. Shepard, who in 1910 founded the National Religious Training School and Chautauqua in Durham, which became North Carolina Central University.

Born in 1863, Annie Day Shepard was the daughter of Thomas Day Jr. and his first wife, Mary Virginia Washington, who died four years later. The child and her nine-year old sister, Minnie, were both sent to the District of Columbia to live with Annie Washington, their mother's younger sister. At this time, Annie Washington had just begun to teach in the public school system. By 1870, she was principal of the Stevens School, the premier public school for black students in the District. The building she knew closed in 2008, but the school continues as Francis-Stevens Education Campus just a few blocks away from its old location.

Annie Washington's career in education began in 1857 when she opened a private primary school for black children in her widowed mother's house on K Street between 17th and 18th Streets NW. Her mother ran a laundry business and through her earnings was able to send her two daughters to excellent schools. Annie Washington was educated by Rev. John F. Cook (see discussion of Cook on page 17) and Myrtilla Miner, a white abolitionist educator. A report to Congress on the status of schools in the city in 1868 described Annie Washington as one of the three educators "not surpassed by ANY in the district." The other two teachers were white.

In 1871, Thomas Day Jr. wed Annie Washington, but the marriage was short-lived because she died just six years afterwards. Although Annie Day was only 14 when her step-mother died, she knew her better than her natural mother and followed in her footsteps by pursuing a



Thomas Day's granddaughter, Annie Day Shepard in her early twenties.

Courtesy of the North Carolina Central University Archives.

career in education. She enrolled at Scotia Seminary in Concord, NC, the first historically black female institution of higher education established after the Civil War, where she studied to become a teacher.

Like many African Americans in the late 19th century, Annie Day was drawn to the central Piedmont of North Carolina where the town of Durham was booming and had a thriving business-oriented black community. She married Dr. David Robinson, a medical doctor and they had one son. Robinson died within a few years leaving Annie a young widow. In 1895 her father, Thomas Jr. died in Washington State, where

he had relocated and established a reputation as a furniture maker. That same year, Annie married James E. Shepard, a graduate of Shaw University.

Annie Day's marriage to Shepard marked a turning point in her life. Having suffered the losses of her natural mother, her stepmother, her first husband, and her father, she enjoyed 52 years of marriage and a highly productive partnership with Shepard, whom she preceded in death by six months. With Shepard, she had three daughters, two of whom survived into old age.

Within a decade of their marriage, Dr. Shepard was able to provide a comfortable standard of living for his wife and their children. He worked as a pharmacist, civil servant, and religious educator. In 1910 she worked alongside her husband to establish the educational institution which would become North Carolina Central University. Over the course of thirty-seven years, Annie Day Shepard was able to see the vision of racial uplift through education, which was so important to her grandfather Thomas Day, her aunts, and other forbears become a reality for thousands of African American youth.

In February of 1947, Annie Day Shepard died and was memorialized at the White Rock Baptist Church in Durham. She was described in the program as "A Loving Mother—A Devoted Wife—A True Friend." Community leader, social activist, and visionary educator are also terms that aptly describe this extraordinary woman.

“Jr.” is a mistake or that the name “Thomas Day” is partially or wholly in error. But if the name is correct, this could very likely be the North Carolina cabinetmaker.

If Thomas Day of Milton took part in this American Anti-Slavery Society meeting, he could have met the delegation from Wilbraham, Massachusetts, which included trustees and a future principal of Wesleyan Academy. At this time, the racially integrated American Anti-Slavery Society claimed 250,000 members and hundreds of auxiliaries. In addition to abolition, it promoted racial uplift by disseminating names of schools that welcomed black students. In its report on this convention, the *Colored American* (a “weekly” then edited and published by Wesleyan Academy’s first black graduate and radical abolitionist, Charles Bennett Ray) noted that “thousands” had attended.⁶⁸ If this meeting were the occasion for Day’s introduction to the Wesleyan contingent, it would explain a long-time association and his comfort level with the abolitionists to whom he entrusted his children a decade later.

Thomas Day had entered the 1850s at the top of his game, but business practices such as buying and selling on credit and investing in expensive shop machinery left him in arrears. His health deteriorated and a national financial panic that wiped out one out of three businesses in 1857 ended his storied success.⁶⁹ In the summer of 1858, the credit agent for R. G. Dun & Co. of Boston made the following note in his ledger about Day’s furniture business: “[Mr. Day is] [b]roke all to pieces—prop’y under a deed of trust. When he gets through his present debts, he won’t have much of anything left.”⁷⁰ A few months earlier, Day had declared insolvency, and a year and a half later most of his personal property was sold at public auction. Although six of his slaves were eligible for sale, their names do not appear on the deed recording the event.⁷¹ After the 1860 U. S. Federal Census, Day’s name disappears from the public record. It is believed that he died in 1861, but the exact date of his death is not known, as neither an authenticated gravesite nor an obituary has yet to be found.

Free blacks were both conservative, protecting what little they had, and radical, eager to build a new social order. They held tight to the status quo and at the first opportunity challenged it. This unresolved tension defined the free black identity.

Dr. Ira Berlin,
Southern Historian

In the spring of 2007, we made one last ditch search for an obituary in black newspapers at The New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. We did not find one, but we did discover valuable references to two of his children, Thomas Day Jr. and his older sister, Mary Ann. The source was a revealing article in the *Christian Recorder*, published by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. An article for the edition of April 15, 1865, marking the dramatic final week of the war, noted that Thomas Day Jr. was in Wilmington, North Carolina.⁷² A sentence about a “Miss Day” also provoked our interest, and a bit of digging soon proved that she was none other than Mary Ann Day, the young man’s sister.⁷³

Thomas Jr., who was also a cabinetmaker, had borrowed money from some of his father’s white business contacts and occupied his father’s old workshop until January 11, 1864, when he paid off his debt. We had already discovered that his aging mother had asked to transfer her Milton church membership to Wilmington,⁷⁴ but we could not imagine why until we found evidence that two of her children had relocated there. The *Christian Recorder* described the politics of the vibrant free black community that embraced the Days as kindred spirits in this thriving port city:

The people [in Wilmington] are generally refined and well informed . . . Union to the bone, liberal and modest. Almost or I may say all of the colored people have been engaged in the business of hiding Yankee prisoners. Almost every house in the city occupied by colored people has done this favor for our prisoners.⁷⁵

As the Confederacy was disintegrating, Thomas Day's long hidden political sympathies were emerging from the shadows, albeit in the values and example he passed down to his children.

Mary Ann, a teacher, was already actively involved in racial uplift in Wilmington before Union forces occupied the city on February 22, 1865. She had helped establish an "underground" school for recently emancipated black children at a time when teaching them was still forbidden. The newspaper set the scene on March 11, 1865, when Mary Ann, three other teachers, and nearly 700 black children assembled in the basement of the city's largest Methodist Church on Front Street. There, they met Union leaders as well as representatives from the Freedmen's Bureau and the American Missionary Association.⁷⁶ The American Missionary Association was one of several benevolent societies that funded schools throughout the South.

Wilmington's leading black citizens, including Thomas Jr., were characterized as individuals "who have friends and relatives in the North."⁷⁷ They were also a close knit, politically active group. Two underground teachers who assisted Mary Ann with the school in Wilmington were daughters of James D. Sampson, a wealthy Wilmington free black carpenter and builder, who, like Thomas Day, owned slaves and had his children educated in the North. George W. Sampson, one of James Sampson's sons, became a friend of Thomas Jr. and served a few years later as witness at his second wedding. Another Sampson son, John Patterson Sampson was educated in Boston. He founded an anti-slavery newspaper in Cincinnati, the *Colored Citizen*. It was circulated to thousands of black soldiers during the Civil War and because of this, John P. Sampson achieved national fame as a journalist and abolitionist.⁷⁸

A subsequent letter from Mary Ann to the American Missionary Association described the black children she was teaching. They were so poor, she reported, that they could not afford books. Mary Ann elected to pay for the necessary texts herself and requested that the cost be "deducted from [her] salary."⁷⁹

Her involvement in establishing one of the first Wilmington schools for formerly enslaved children further suggests that her father selected Wesleyan because he wanted his children to be empowered by this training ground for abolitionists. Numerous graduates of Wesleyan, white as well as black, became activists. Many served as educators; some graduates and their offspring took part in founding other schools and colleges.

Thomas Day's granddaughter, Annie Day (Thomas Jr.'s youngest child), continued the tradition. Annie married James E. Shepard, a prominent black resident of Durham, North Carolina. There, in 1910, she assisted and encouraged her husband in establishing the National Religious Training School and Chautauqua, an institution which later grew to become North Carolina Central University.

Annie Day Shepard's stepmother, Annie Washington Day, was Thomas Jr.'s second wife, and she too fits the family profile of involvement in black education. Annie Washington Day was a noted Washington, DC educator who was mentored by the Reverend John F. Cook (see discussion of Cook on page 17), the clergyman and educator who was a delegate to the convention in Philadelphia in 1835. Before her marriage, Annie Washington became a founding member of the Contraband Relief Organization, which was established in 1862 at the home of Cook's widow, to assist needy freedmen and black soldiers who served in the Civil War.⁸⁰ The leading organizer was Elizabeth Keckly, Mary Todd Lincoln's dress designer and confidant.⁸¹ (Keckly had been enslaved in Hillsborough, North Carolina as a young woman.) Annie Washington was described, in an 1868 report to Congress on the status of area schools, as one of three teachers "not surpassed by any in the district."⁸² The other two teachers were white.

There will always be unanswered questions about Thomas Day, although he is much less paradoxical to us now than he was over a decade ago, and much more political. Day was not an outspoken abolitionist, like David Walker, the egalitarian black agitator who moved from Wilmington, to



MARKET STREET, WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA.

Wilmington, North Carolina in the mid 19th-century, a few years before Thomas Day's widow and two children became residents.

Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

New England in the early 1820's and pressed for immediate change. Nor did he become a violent insurrectionist, like Nat Turner, who was also born in Southside Virginia near where the Day brothers grew up. However, we now know that Thomas Day had ties to some of the most powerful abolitionists in the country, and these came with enormous risk to his and his family's safety.

Because Day's political contacts and activities were so well hidden, we do not know the full extent of his activism. However, he was risking his life by being in Philadelphia at the black convention and by likely also attending the New York meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The risks he took by attending such gatherings only make sense if he were strongly committed to the racial uplift and strong anti-slavery agendas of those convocations. But it is Day's choice of Wesleyan as a school for his children and his close personal relationship with the school's headmaster and treasurer that are most revealing. These radical abolitionists would not have been on close personal terms with a slave owner had he not assured them, by actions as well as words, that he was sympathetic to the cause. By sending his children to Wesleyan, Day was preparing them to

be social activists, especially in the mission of racial uplift through education. His daughter's devotion to teaching recently emancipated children and the involvement of many Day descendants in African American education testify to Thomas Day's legacy.

Thomas Day's pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness—like that of John Carruthers Stanly, Louis Sheridan, James D. Sampson, and other slave owning Tar Heel free blacks—was fettered by contradictions, moral dilemmas, and the constant fear of violent retaliation. In the words of historian Ira Berlin,

... free blacks were at various times abolitionists and slaveholders—and sometimes both. Staring down into the depths of deprivation where most men and women of color were confined as slaves while looking up toward the great promise of equality white people—particularly white Southerners—celebrated, they both feared change and craved it. Free blacks were both conservative, protecting what little they had, and radical, eager to build a new social order. They held tight to the status quo and, at the first opportunity, challenged it. This unresolved tension defined free-black identity.⁸³

Afterword

Research is a never-ending process. When finalizing sources for this article, we took a last look at the *Black Abolitionist Papers*, a four-year effort to identify the documentary record of the most significant black abolitionists in America. The editors set out to find primary sources and to compile a comprehensive name list. Ultimately, their search netted 14,000 documents and a list of nearly 300 black men and women who were identified as abolitionists. In “Notes to Researchers” for the *Index to the Black Abolitionist Papers*—the microfilm

collection of virtually all primary source material gathered—the editors describe the stringent culling process which kept the list manageable and useful for research. Thomas Day made the cut based solely on the evidence that he was at Mrs. Gardiner’s Philadelphia boarding house with men attending the black convention who were or would become leading black abolitionists. This has been part of the public record since 1981 but until now, no one has identified this Thomas Day, black abolitionist, as the cabinetmaker from Milton.⁸⁴

THE WISDOM OF THOMAS DAY

I have long since learned to enjoy my life in a higher circle than depending on human society for my comfort or happiness. My pleasures are placed in hope beyond this world. My highest pleasure is in discharging my every day duty as nearly as possible.

Ever regard your character more than your life. ... The higher the character the greater the responsibility [and] the more is expected of the character or person & consequently the more you have to learn & to know.

The mind is very much like any piece of building or workmanship.

The fool squanders away his money for things he does not need and fails to pay for such necessaries as sustains his worthless life.

Note: spellings and punctuation have been standardized for readability.

ENDNOTES

1. C. Peter Ripley, Roy E. Finkenbine, Michael F. Hembree, and Donald Yacovone, eds., *The Black Abolitionist Papers: The United States, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 3:146-151. The quotation appears in a convention address written by delegates William Whipper, Alfred Niger, and Augustus Price.
2. *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at the Session of 1830-31* (Raleigh: Printed by Lawrence & Lemay, Printers to the State, 1861), Chapter V, 10-11.
3. *Journal of the House of Commons of North Carolina, 1830-1831*, 238, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC.
4. Patricia Phillips Marshall, "The Legendary Thomas Day: Debunking the Popular Mythology of an African American Craftsman," in *Thomas Day, African American Furniture Maker* (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 2005), 50. There are variations among the descendants' versions of the pew stories, but most of them portray Day as benevolent toward his slaves, and even egalitarian. According to Marshall, myths about Thomas Day have evolved over time to account for the seeming incongruities in his life story, such as the fact that he was black yet attended a predominantly white church and owned slaves. There is no documentary evidence that Day agreed to make the pews on the condition that he and/or his slaves receive special seating. As the major cabinetmaker in Milton and a member of the church (1841-1861), Day was a natural choice for this job.
5. Juanita Holland, filmed interview by Laurel C. Sneed, 1998, Thomas Day Education Project Archives, Durham, NC.
6. John Hope Franklin, filmed interview by Laurel C. Sneed for *Thomas Day, American*, October 1995, Thomas Day Education Project Archives, Durham, NC.
7. *Dinwiddie County Chancery Order Book 1, 1832-1852*, Microfilm Reel 18, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. The document is dated April 4, 1832, and refers to an earlier court order.
8. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Caswell County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, DC. Day's household is listed under "Free Inhabitants" and there is a woman listed as "Mourning S. Day, 84."
9. Thomas A. Stewart, will dated May 18, 1808, Dinwiddie County, Virginia Wills 1801-1869, Microfilm Reel 57, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.
10. Paul Heinegg to Laurel C. Sneed, November 2000, in a conversation at a symposium sponsored by the Thomas Day Education Project titled: "Navigating the Labyrinth of Race," Yanceyville, North Carolina.
11. *African Repository*, "Eulogy of Rev. Edward W. Blyden, on the Rev. John Day, Monrovia, 1859," vol. 37, no. 5, (Washington: American Colonization Society, 1861): 154-8.
12. John Day to James B. Taylor, October 16, 1847, John Day Missionary Correspondence to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN. Janie Leigh Carter transcribed the letters from the John Day Missionary Correspondence to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board for her master's thesis, "John Day: A Founder of the Republic of Liberia and the Southern Baptist Liberian Missionary Movement in the Nineteenth Century" (Wake Forest University, 1998).
13. Paul Heinegg, *Free African Americans of North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina from the Colonial Period to About 1820*, 5th ed. (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2005), 2:1091-2. Heinegg lists 14 children in order of birth date, with Mourning (born c. 1766) as Stewart's fourth child and second daughter. Stewart's granddaughter, Hannah, however, states in court testimony that Stewart's first wife had one daughter (Hannah's mother, Nancy, born c. 1755) and three sons, making Mourning the 5th child and 2nd daughter. Hannah also stated that Thomas Stewart married twice. See Mecklenburg County (VA) Chancery Causes, 1872-007, Hannah Stewart v. Elizabeth Chavis etc., Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. Stewart married Winnifred Atkins on February 5, 1795, 29 years after Mourning's birth so Atkins could not have been Mourning's natural mother. See Catherine Lindsay Knorr, *Marriage Bonds and Ministers' Returns of Sussex County, Virginia 1754-1810* (Pine Bluff, Arkansas: Purdue Co., 1952), 77.
14. Thomas A. Stewart, will dated September 22, 1804, Dinwiddie County, Virginia Wills 1801-1869, Microfilm Reel 57, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. In this will, Stewart left his daughter, Mourning, and her heirs, twenty-five pounds.
15. John Day to James B. Taylor, October 16, 1847, John Day Missionary Correspondence to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.
16. Catharine Day to James B. Taylor, May 23, 1860, John Day Missionary Correspondence to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.
17. Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice* (Philadelphia: Quaker Press, 2009), 112.
18. *Ibid.*, 50.
19. *The Vestry Book and Register of Bristol Parish, Virginia 1720-1789*, transcribed and published by Churchill Gibson Chamberlayne (Richmond: Privately Printed, 1898), 24, 58, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. These transcribed parish papers detail baptisms, deaths, and births including several mulatto children of "Eliz. Stuard." A 1731 vestry order notes that two "Melettos" named Tom and Will would be bound to Peter Wynn who owned property near Stewart's future holdings.
20. John Day to James B. Taylor, October 16, 1847, John Day Missionary Correspondence to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.
21. The family of Day's direct descendant, Dr. Thomas Day V.
22. Kay Moss, *Southern Folk Medicine, 1750-1820* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 46. "Specifick balsam" is most likely a popular benzoïn-based patent medicine known as "The Balsam of Life." The 1744 invention of London merchant Robert Turlington, it was used for external and respiratory complaints. Pirated versions were plentiful in the colonies.
23. *Virginia Gazette*, November 13, 1778. Hobbs's signed notice, the eighteenth-century equivalent of a classified ad, appeared in page 3, column 1 of this popular newspaper published by Dixon and Hunter. The original is in the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, VA. For online version see: <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/BrowseVG.cfm> (accessed April 29, 2009).

24. Thomas A. Stewart, will dated September 22, 1804, Dinwiddie County, Virginia Wills 1801-1869, Microfilm Reel 57, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.
25. Ibid.
26. Peachy R. Grattan, *Reports of Cases Decided in the Supreme Court of Appeals and in the General Court of Virginia from April 1, 1848 to April 1, 1849*, vol. 5, no. 46 (Richmond: John Colin, 1849), 61-2. A summary of an appeal in the case of Worsham vs. Hardaway's administrators in 1840 cites the crux of the case of Stewart's slaves vs. Stewart's heirs in Chancery Court in Richmond and its dismissal in 1827.
27. Abraham Camp, quoted in Carter G. Woodson, ed., *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis, 1800-1860* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 2-3.
28. Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice* (Philadelphia: Quaker Press, 2009), 56-59.
29. *Milton Gazette and Roanoke Advertiser*, "Thomas Day, Cabinet Maker," March 1, 1827.
30. William L. Byrd III, *Against the Peace and Dignity of the State: North Carolina Laws Regarding Slaves, Free Persons of Color and Indians* (Westminister, MD: Willow Bend Books, 2004), 198-202.
31. *Journal of the House of Commons of North Carolina, 1830-1831*, 238, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC.
32. Ira Berlin, correspondence with Laurel Sneed, March 2007, Thomas Day Education Project Archives, Durham, NC.
33. Thomas Day to Mary Ann Day, n.d., copy from the collection of Mary Satterfield, donated to the Caswell County Historical Association, Yanceyville, NC.
34. David L. Lightner and Alexander M. Ragan, "Were African American Slaveholders Benevolent or Exploitative? A Quantitative Approach," *The Journal of Southern History* 71, (August 2005): 3. The authors conclude that in 1830, a white person was only three times as likely as a free black to own a slave. According to John Hope Franklin, free blacks totaled 2.61 percent of North Carolina's total population in 1830 and 3.01 percent in 1840. See Franklin's *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 18.
35. Juliet E. K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 39.
36. John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 237.
37. Lunsford Lane, *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of Raleigh, N.C., Embracing an Account of His Early Life, the Redemption by Purchase of Himself and Family from Slavery. And His Banishment from the Place of His Birth for the Crime of Wearing a Colored Skin, Published by Himself* (Boston: J. G. Torrey, 1842), 31.
38. David Sherman, *History of the Wesleyan Academy at Wilbraham, Mass. 1817-1890* (Boston: The McDonald & Gill Company, 1893), 284-286.
39. Thomas Day to Mary Ann Day, n.d., copy from the collection of Mary Satterfield, donated to the Caswell County Historical Association, Yanceyville, NC.
40. David Sherman, *History of the Wesleyan Academy at Wilbraham, Mass. 1817-1890* (Boston: The McDonald & Gill Company, 1893), 226.
41. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 199.
42. *The Liberator*, "A Card," vol. 5, no.32, August 8, 1835. Accessible Archives, Inc.© grants permission for the use of the article titled "A Card," and any accompanying cropped images, from the August 8, 1835 issue of *The Liberator*, from its online database, to the Apprend Foundation, Inc., for inclusion in a North Carolina Humanities Council-funded publication, *The Hidden History of Thomas Day*. Accessible Archives, Inc.© is a publisher of electronic full text searchable databases containing archival materials covering 18th and 19th-century American History and Culture. Information about Accessible Archives, Inc.© is available at www.accessible.com.
43. Ibid.
44. William Whipper is profiled in *The Black Abolitionist Papers: The United States, 1830-46* (London and Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 3:129-30, edited by Peter Ripley, Roy E. Finkenbine, Michael Hembree, and Donald Yacovone. The reference to Whipper's clandestine Underground Railroad activities is from William Still's *The Underground Rail Road* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872), 735-6.
45. Augustus Price's full name as well as his close relationship to Andrew Jackson is reported in *The Black Abolitionist Papers: The United States, 1830-46* (London and Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 3:153, edited by Peter Ripley, Roy E. Finkenbine, Michael Hembree, and Donald Yacovone. This relationship was also noted by James Parton, a nineteenth-century Jackson biographer who interviewed a relative of the president who knew Price, in his *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861), 3:606-7; and was noted by contemporary historian, Robert Vincent Remini in his *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845* (New York: History Book Club, 1998), 3:269.
46. Jefferson Morely, "The Snow Riot," *Washington Post*, February 6, 2005.
47. Robert Vincent Remini, *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845* (New York: History Book Club, 1998), 3:269.
48. James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861), 3:606-7. Faced with demands to fire Augustus, Jackson personally defended him. The President responded, "My servants are" responsible to "me alone," and are "entitled to protection at my hands."
49. Peter H. Wood to Laurel C. Sneed, June 13, 2007, Thomas Day Education Project Archives, Durham, NC.
50. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* with an introduction by Elijah Anderson, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Reprint of 1899 edition, 1996), 27-9.
51. *The Liberator*, "Negro Voters," vol. 5, no. 27, July 4, 1835.
52. Loren Schweningen, "John Carruthers Stanly and the Anomaly of Black Slaveholding," *North Carolina Historical Review* 67 (April 1990): 178. Schweningen concludes that Stanly owned more than twice as many slaves as the second largest free black slave owner in the South.
53. Ibid., 165.
54. Ibid., 177. Schweningen notes that in 1830, Stanly owned all but a few of the 163 slaves listed as living on his various properties.
55. Ibid., 192.
56. Stephen Franks Miller, *Recollections of Newbern Fifty Years Ago; with an Appendix Including letters from Judges Gaston, Donnell, Manly and Gov. Swain* (Raleigh: S. D. Poole, 1874), 21. The recollections of this 90-year old attorney, newspaper editor, and former New Bern resident are available through the Eastern North Carolina University Digital Library, <http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/historyfiction/fullview.aspx?id=mir> (accessed August 10, 2008).

57. Loren Schweninger, "John Carruthers Stanly and the Anomaly of Black Slaveholding," *North Carolina Historical Review* 67 (April 1990): 178. The author identifies John D. Whitford as the New Bern "resident" who described Stanly as a "harsh taskmaster." Colonel John Dalton Whitford, a local historian, was elected mayor of New Bern at 21, president of the Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad at 29, and a delegate to the State convention which voted for secession in 1861. See Bill Hand, *A Walking Guide to North Carolina's Historic New Bern* (Charleston: The History Press, 2007), 67.
58. John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 31.
59. Philip S. Foner and Robert J. Branham, eds., *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900*, Rev. ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 285. The text of the address was written by Sara G. Stanley (she added an "e" to her family surname) who was not allowed to address the male convention herself, so her remarks were read by delegate, William Harris. This excerpt is from *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 1:311, edited by Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker.
60. *The Liberator*, "Negro Voters," vol. 5, no. 27, July 4, 1835.
61. *Cape Fear Recorder*, September 10, 1830.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *The Colored American*, "From the Pennsylvania Freeman: Louis Sheridan," vol. 2, no. 24, August 4, 1838. The newspaper reprinted an undated article and anonymous letter that had appeared in *The Pennsylvania Freeman*, a publication edited by John Greenleaf Whittier. This letter provided the first appearance of Sheridan's description of colonization as a "humbug." *The Colored American* did not reveal the identity of the letter's author until four months later.
64. *The Colored American*, "Important Intelligence from Liberia," vol. 2, no. 42, December 8, 1838. Sheridan's lengthy letter from Liberia to abolitionist Lewis Tappan, Tappan's response, and this revelation that Sheridan had originally told him that he regarded colonization efforts as a "humbug" consumed the entire front page of this edition of the newspaper and part of the second.
65. Ira Berlin, correspondence with Laurel C. Sneed, March 2007, Thomas Day Education Project Archives, Durham, NC.
66. *The Liberator*, "American Anti-Slavery Society. Roll of Members and Delegates, Present at the Late Annual Meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society," vol. 10, no. 22, May 29, 1840.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *The Colored American*, "Our Future Course," vol. 1, no. 12, May 23, 1840.
69. Edward J. Balleisen, *Navigating Failure: Bankruptcy and Commercial Society in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 3.
70. R.G. Dun & Co. Collections, vol. 5, p. 187, North Carolina, Caswell County, 1845-1877, Baker Library, Harvard University Business School, Boston, MA. The credit ledger identifies Thomas Day as a "Milton Cabinetmaker." The quoted entry is dated July 21, 1858.
71. *Caswell County Deeds*, Book II: 778; Office of the Register, Caswell County Courthouse, Yanceyville, NC.
72. *Christian Recorder*, "A Few Strange Incidents from the South: Through the Carolinas," vol. 5, no. 15, April 15, 1865. The author, identified only as "Arnold," describes the fall of the city to Federal troops, the state of its schools, and identifies a number of free black citizens, including "Mr. Thomas Day."
73. *Ibid.* The same *Christian Recorder* article notes that "Misses Day, Sampsons and Cowan" had been teaching in Wilmington's "underground" schools for "a number of years." A letter from "Miss Mary A. Day," datelined Wilmington and describing her teaching experience there, establishes her presence in the city at the same time as her brother. See Mary Ann Day, correspondence to the American Missionary Association, August 1865, American Missionary Association Archives, No. 100127, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.
74. Meeting of October 9, 1864, Records of the Presbyterian Church of Milton, NC, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Montreat, NC. The church's records show that on this date, Mrs. A. Day "requested a letter of dismission to the Presbyterian Church of Wilmington, North Carolina." Martha Spencer's transcription of the church minutes appears online at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nccaswel/misc/milton-ses2.htm> (accessed August 10, 2008).
75. *Christian Recorder*, "A Few Strange Incidents from the South: Through the Carolinas," vol. 5, no. 15, April 15, 1865. The author, identified only as "Arnold," describes the fall of the city to Federal troops, the state of its schools, and identifies a number of free black citizens, including "Mr. Thomas Day."
76. *Ibid.* The article notes that Mary Ann, the Sampson sisters, and Miss Cowan had helped Brigadier General Hawley organize the enormous school for nearly 700 children and that it was in "splendid running order" at the time of the meeting.
77. *Ibid.*
78. George W. Sampson's name appears in the Day family Bible as the witness to Thomas Jr.'s second marriage. Born in 1842, he became a carpenter and is listed as a member of the James Sampson Wilmington household in the 1850 U. S. Census, but after that as a resident of Cleveland. Found in: James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1887-1889), 32.
79. Mary Ann Day, correspondence to the American Missionary Association, August 1865, American Missionary Association Archives, No. 100127, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.
80. M. B. Goodwin, *History of Schools for the Colored Population in the District of Columbia* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 216, 239. This book is a reprint (with original pagination) of chapters that originally appeared in Section C, Part 1 of the *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education on the Condition and Improvement of Public Schools in the District of Columbia* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871). The Report was submitted to the Senate in 1868 and to Congress in 1870 by Henry Bernard, the first U. S. Commissioner of Education. A section titled "Miss Washington's School" notes that she was "educated chiefly under Rev. John F. Cook and Miss Miner" referring to the white abolitionist teacher, Myrtilla Miner.
81. C. Peter Ripley, Roy E. Finkenbine, Michael F. Hembree, and Donald Yacovone, eds., *The Black Abolitionist Papers: The United States, 1859-1865* (London and Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 5:251-252.
82. M. B. Goodwin, *History of Schools for the Colored Population in the District of Columbia* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 239.
83. Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York and London: The New Press, 2007), xxii-xxiii.
84. George E. Carter, C. Peter Ripley, and Jeffrey Rossbach, eds., *Black Abolitionist Papers 1830-1865: A Guide to the Microfilm Edition* (Microfilming Corporation of America, 1981), 1-4.

For Further Reading on the Social History of Thomas Day and the Experience of Free Blacks in the Upper South

Barfield, Rodney D. **Thomas Day Cabinetmaker: An Exhibition at the North Carolina Museum of History.** Raleigh: Museum of History Department of Cultural Resources, 1975.

This is the catalog for the first major exhibition of Thomas Day furniture at the North Carolina Museum of History made possible by contributions from chapters of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority throughout North Carolina.

Barfield, Rodney D., and Patricia M. Marshall. **Thomas Day: African American Furniture Maker.** Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 2005.

See Barfield's essay, "Thomas and John Day and the Journey to North Carolina" and Marshall's essay, "The Legendary Thomas Day: Debunking the Popular Mythology of an African American Craftsman." Barfield synthesizes the findings of other studies about the Day brothers' early years. Marshall identifies myths about Day, their origins and interpretations. She and Jo Ramsay Leimenstoll have co-authored a book on Day's life and work, to be published by the University of North Carolina Press in late 2009.

Berlin, Ira. **Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South.** 1974. Reprint, New York: The New Press, 2007.

This is considered the classic work on the free black experience with an updated introduction that mentions Thomas Day and the current interest in him. Dr. Berlin has long been a valued advisor to the Thomas Day Education Project.

Carter, Janie Leigh. **"John Day: A Founder of the Republic of Liberia and the Southern Baptist Missionary Movement in the Nineteenth Century."** Master's Thesis, Wake Forest University, 1998.

Carter transcribed over 100 letters John Day wrote to the corresponding secretary of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board when he was the superintendent of their missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1846-1859.

Ely, Melvin Patrick. **Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s Through the Civil War.** New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.

A winner of the prestigious Bancroft prize in American history, this book focuses on one free black Southside Virginia community, Israel Hill. While this is a study of one community, it provides much important contextualization and description of the daily life of free blacks in rural Virginia during the antebellum period.

Franklin, John Hope. **The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860.** Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

This was one of the first scholarly studies of the free black experience and included seminal research on Thomas Day including the discovery of the Aquilla Wilson Day petition to the state legislature.

Heinegg, Paul. **Free African Americans of North Carolina, Virginia and South Carolina: From the Colonial Period to About 1820.** 2 vols. Baltimore: Clearfield Press, 2005.

Heinegg's multi-year, ever-evolving genealogical study has identified members of hundreds of free black families, including the Day and Stewart families.

Paquette, Michael A. **"Thomas Day: An Inquiry into Business and Labor Practices in an Antebellum Cabinetshop."** *Journal of the North Carolina Association of Historians* 6-7 (Fall 1998-1999).

A highly skilled traditional cabinetmaker, Paquette uses his knowledge of the craft and business of furniture-making in this study of how Day managed his labor force and production in his shop.

Prown, Jonathan. **"The Furniture of Thomas Day: A Reevaluation."** *Winterthur Portfolio: A Journal of American Material Culture* 33, no. 4 (Winter 1998).

The first evaluation of Day by a major decorative arts historian, this article defined Day as a significant artisan. It was reprinted from a speech given at the Winterthur Museum & Country Estate when Prown was curator of furniture and sculpture at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Today, he is executive director and chief curator at the Chipstone Foundation in Milwaukee, WI. Prown is a long-time advisor and supporter of the Thomas Day Education Project and other efforts to tell the story of the man and his furniture.

Robinson, William A. **"Thomas Day and His Family."** *The Negro History Bulletin* 8 (March 1950).

This article, written by the son of Annie Day Shepard, provides long excerpts from several letters Thomas Day sent to his daughter, Mary Ann, when she was a student at Wesleyan Academy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts.

Rogers, Patricia Dane. **"Carved in History: Thomas Day, a Success in an Unlikely Time and Place."** *The Washington Post*. February 13, 1997.

This was the first major article on Thomas Day to appear in a national newspaper and received a very favorable response from the Post readership nationwide. Rogers located Day's Bible when researching this article.

Schweninger, Loren. **Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915.** 1990. Reprint, Chicago, Springfield, Urbana, Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

This comprehensive study focuses on black property owners, most of whom, like Thomas Day owned slaves.

Sneed, Laurel C. and Christine Westfall. **"Uncovering the Hidden History of Thomas Day: Findings and Methodology, a Report to the North Carolina Humanities Council."** Durham: Thomas Day Education Project, 1995.

This study discovered Thomas Day's parents, Mourning Stewart Day and John Day; his maternal grandfather, Dr. Thomas Stewart; and his brother, Rev. John Day, who became an eminent religious and political figure in Liberia.

I think Thomas Day is a very good example of a person who has lived the American dream in a sense. He started very modestly and became skilled in his profession. He defies being typed. He is not what comes into your mind when you think of a black man who lived in between 1800 and 1860 ... so he's not stereotypical of anything except a set of qualities and a set of ideas that we usually associate with success.

Dr. John Hope Franklin



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