

# VERMONT

*The  
Proceedings of the  
Vermont Historical Society*

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# HISTORY



SPRING 1993

VOL. 61, No. 2



# The Working Lives of African Vermonters in Census and Literature, 1790-1870

*As in other states, the white majority  
delegated most blacks to menial  
positions, reserving for Anglo-Saxon  
whites high status jobs and social  
privileges.*

By ELISE A. GUYETTE

**I**magine the history of Vermont through the eyes of the black servant whose feet froze one winter while clearing Castleton for a white settlement, or through the eyes of young black girls indentured to white families, who must forsake everyone they know and serve strangers on the northern frontier. Concentrating on Vermont history from their points of view provides a glimpse of past society often missing from our written history.

Discovering the overall pattern of black settlement and employment in Vermont requires examining the federal census reports. The housing and occupational patterns gleaned from census data are especially helpful in forming interpretations concerning market place practices and social status.<sup>1</sup>

In studying the historical evidence regarding the experiences of nineteenth-century blacks in Vermont, the theme that stands out above all others is the constant struggle of black workers to gain independence from white households and their continuous relegation to menial positions in Vermont society, making independence difficult. Although there are notable exceptions, this theme emerges from the statistics and literature of the period under study.

## THE POPULATION

Black Vermonters were a small group from 1790 to 1870, between 271 and 924 people composing between .2 percent and .4 percent of the popula-

TABLE I  
Five Largest African American Communities  
in Vermont, 1840-1870

1840:		Number	Percent	1850:		Number	Percent
1	Rutland	67	2.5%	1	St. Albans	67	1.9%
2	Bennington	47	1.4%	2	Burlington	62	1.0%
3	Woodstock	45	1.4%	3	Woodstock	58	1.9%
4	St. Albans	40	1.5%	4	Bennington	54	1.4%
5	Burlington	38	.9%	5	Rutland	37	1.0%
Others: Hinesburgh 2.9%				Others: Bristol 2.4%			
Benson, 1.8%				Vergennes 2.2%			
1860:		Number	Percent	1870:		Number	Percent
1	Rutland	93	1.2%	1	St. Albans	86	1.2%
2	Woodstock	53	1.7%	2	Burlington	77	.5%
3	Bennington	49	1.1%	3	Bennington	75	1.3%
4	Burlington	46	.6%	4	Rutland	69	.7%
5	Hinesburgh	30	1.8%	5	Castleton	58	1.8%
5	Castleton	30	1.0%				
Others: Bristol 2.1%				Others: Salem 1.6%, Woodstock			
Plymouth 1.8%				1.7%, Westminster 1.5%, Windsor 1.5%			

tion. These statewide statistics, however, mask the higher concentrations in certain towns. In the first four decades of statehood, some towns had high percentages of blacks, the likes of which have not been seen again. In 1790, Vergennes had a 7 percent black population. The five servants in Hungerford (now Sheldon) accounted for 12.5 percent of the population. One of these domestics was Old Mary, "a servant of Colonel Sheldon, who bought her in Connecticut where she was sold for the commission of some crime."<sup>2</sup>

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the twelve blacks who lived in Hyde Park in their own households made the town 11 percent black; Philadelphia (now part of Chittenden) had a 7 percent black population. In 1810 Windsor and Sheldon each had thirty-two black settlers, accounting for 4 percent of each town. In 1820 Fletcher was 4.2 percent black, all members of the Virginia family, whose patriarch was a Revolutionary War veteran. By 1830 the Virginias had all moved to other towns. No town that decade was more than 2 percent black, as the numbers of blacks in the state fell for the first time since statehood.<sup>3</sup>

From 1840 to 1870 the black population in the largest towns remained between 1 and 3 percent (Table 1). The towns attracting the most African Americans stayed essentially the same: Rutland, Bennington, Woodstock, St. Albans, and Burlington. One could also meet a relatively large number of black people in Hinesburgh and Castleton.

#### BLACKS LIVING IN WHITE HOUSEHOLDS

Before the 1840s it is difficult to tell what these small numbers of African Vermonters were doing to survive economically, since counts of male occupations were first available in the 1820 census and then not again until 1840. Women's occupations were not counted until 1860. The housing patterns, however, provide clues. In 1790 and 1800 at least 80 percent of blacks were living in the households of whites, implying that they worked for them as domestics and farmhands.<sup>4</sup> Preliminary evidence from incomplete data from 1810 to 1830 suggests that the numbers of live-in servants decreased until 1830.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1840s and 1850s, when the data base is 95 to 100 percent complete, we still see at least half the households containing blacks headed by white men or women (Table 2). Blacks living with white heads of households included those on poor farms, in prison, and living in hotels and rooming houses. Those living in hotels were usually cooks, waiters, porters, and the like. Most live-in Africans, however, were farm laborers or domestic servants.<sup>6</sup>

TABLE 2  
African American Housing Patterns in Vermont,  
1840-1870

Decade	Number of African Headed Households	Number of African Headed Households with Multiple Surnames	Number of European Headed Households with Live-in African Americans
1840	126 (44%)	-	160 (56%) +
1850	137 (50%)	39 + +	136 (50%)
1860	126 (55%)	23	104 (45%)
1870	151 (40%)	25	224 (60%)

+ Percentage of African American households.

+ + This phenomenon surely existed earlier, but only the names of the heads of households were recorded prior to 1850.

By the 1860s and 1870s, when occupational data for both men and women are available, we find men working mostly as laborers and farmhands. The farm workers usually lived-in, a tiny minority of them with black farmers. Women were usually live-in domestic servants, the second most common occupation for blacks as a whole (Table 3). During Vermont's first eighty years of statehood, therefore, most blacks probably lived in and worked for white households.

Census takers began gathering gender and age information for blacks in 1820. In that year, most of the servants found by this study were at least fourteen years old, but one-third (twenty-four) were children thirteen years old or under, probably indentured by parents unable to care for them. Two-thirds of these young servants were girls. In 1830 one-fifth (sixteen) of Vermont's black servants were nine years old or under, two-thirds of them girls. Thirty-four youngsters under eleven toiled in white households in 1840. These children were generally the only blacks living in the households.

The census numbers alone cannot reveal the experiences and emotions of these children, given up by parents who could not care for them. Novels, travelers' journals, and protest pamphlets condemning social injustice expose the human toll behind the numbers.

An excellent source about the lives of these young indentured servants in Vermont and New Hampshire is Harriet E. Wilson's autobiographical novel, *Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North. Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There*. By "Our Nig," written in 1859. It is the earliest novel published by a black in North America and the only book of any kind from a black woman's point of view for this early period.<sup>7</sup> One of Wilson's reasons for writing the book was to illuminate racism in the north and, like the white women of the time, Wilson "used fictional forms to indict social injustice."<sup>8</sup>

The main character, Alfrado, was a seven-year-old girl indentured to the Bellmonts, a New Hampshire family. This mirrored Wilson's own experience; in the 1830s, Wilson's mother had indentured her at age seven to a New Hampshire family, the Samuel Boyles, originally from Marshfield, Vermont. For the next eleven years she labored in their household.

In an appendix to *Our Nig*, included to ensure that readers understood the autobiographical nature of the book, Margaretta Thorn, a friend of Wilson's, charged that the white family ruined Wilson's health during her servitude just as the health of Alfrado, the central figure in the novel, was weakened. "Those very people calling themselves Christians, (the Lord deliver me from such,)" wrote Thorn, ". . . ruined her health by hard work, both in field and house. She was indeed a slave, in every sense of the word; and a lonely one, too."<sup>9</sup>

Wilson's portrayal of Mrs. Bellmont, the mistress of the household, supported Thorn's claim. Even when Alfrado was sick or injured from beatings, Bellmont forced her to do the work of two people. On different occasions Alfrado wished she were born white or wanted to die, but she did not want to go to a heaven where whites resided. She thought of running away, but had never been far from the Bellmonts'. She thought of poisoning Mrs. Bellmont, but she did none of these things. She stayed with the Bellmonts until the end of her indenture at age eighteen and then moved in with a more kindly white family nearby.<sup>10</sup> By then her health had failed, but she subsisted with books as "soul refreshment."<sup>11</sup>

A powerful technique for illustrating the experiences of many servants was Wilson's usage of the term "our nig." In his introduction to the 1983 reprint of the book, Henry Louis Gates reported that the term was "the most feared and hated epithet by which the very humanity of black people had been demeaned."<sup>12</sup> Wilson successfully used the term to portray for the reader the gradual reduction of Alfrado's humanity. At the beginning of the novel both the narrator and other characters called her by name. After her indenture, the Bellmonts called her "our nig," but the narrator continued to use her name, Alfrado. A quarter of the way through the book, however, the narrator joined in calling her "nig." Her loss of identity and humanity slowly unfolds for the reader, just as the process moved slowly for many black servants.

The use of the term by a family originally from Marshfield, Vermont, suggests that Vermonters used the term for their servants. Another piece of evidence showing the use of this dehumanizing term was an advertisement in a Cuttingsville newspaper in 1861 offering a reward for the return of a small black dog named Nig.<sup>13</sup> In someone's mind the term was suitable for blacks and dogs; Wilson knew this all too well.

Other former indentured servants fared far better than Wilson. One was Lemuel Haynes, whom Wilbur Seibert described as a "magnetic revivalist," who was the minister for the Congregational parish in West Rutland from 1788 to 1810. During that time he "tripled the size of his congregation" and earned a master of arts degree at Middlebury College.<sup>14</sup> Previously Haynes had fought under Benedict Arnold when Ethan Allen and Arnold took Fort Ticonderoga during the Revolution.

Another live-in black, Prince Saunders, appeared in the public records of Thetford in 1784. That year the nine-year-old Saunders, a member of the household of lawyer George O. Hinkley, was baptized. Hinkley sent him to local schools and sponsored him at Moor's charity school in Dartmouth, New Hampshire. Saunders later taught at African schools in Connecticut and Boston and persuaded a wealthy white man to bequeath thousands of dollars for four more African schools in Boston. In 1816 he emigrated from the United States to Haiti and spent much

of the rest of his life inducing blacks to join him in "the paradise of the New World."<sup>15</sup> He became an advisor to two emperors, wrote the *Haytian Papers*, a history of Haiti, and created Haiti's criminal code. He was attorney general there when he died in 1839.

Another Prince, Lucy Terry Prince, was not indentured, but was kidnapped from Africa at the age of five and grew up enslaved in Deerfield, Massachusetts. Lucy Terry and Abijah Prince were married in Deerfield in 1756 after working twelve years to buy Lucy's freedom. When the Princes decided to migrate north in 1764 they traveled to Guilford, Vermont, where Abijah had inherited one hundred acres.<sup>16</sup>

Lucy Prince was an unusual pioneer woman in many ways. Drawing on traditions from both her native Africa and New England, she exhibited a strong resistance to harassment and oppression.<sup>17</sup> In 1785 she traveled to Norwich, Vermont, to speak before the Governor's Council to ask for help against neighbors who were abusing her and her family. In Williamstown, Massachusetts, she debated with the board of trustees of a free academy who refused to admit her son because he was of African descent. At the age of sixty-seven this woman with no formal education argued her own land dispute case in court despite the fact that Isaac Tichenor, the soon-to-be governor of Vermont, had offered his services free of charge. Pitted against Royall Tyler, she nevertheless won her case.

While Lucy Prince was making her voice heard in southern Vermont, Alexander Twilight was born in Corinth in 1795 and indentured to a nearby farmer at an early age. He later bought the last year of his indenture and entered Randolph Academy in 1815. By 1823 he had earned his bachelor's degree from Middlebury College. Six years later he became the preceptor of the Orleans County Grammar School and minister of the village church, which met in the school. He designed and built a four-story, granite school and dormitory, which still stands in Brownington. Twilight served as Brownington's representative to the legislature in 1836-37, the first black Vermont representative.<sup>18</sup>

These notable African Americans were the exception, however. The occupational data suggests that prejudice was ubiquitous, and Vermont's white, Anglo-Saxon society relegated most blacks to roles quite separate from those of whites (Table 3).<sup>19</sup> As Vermont's economy expanded there were more and more jobs from which both races could choose. White men, however, always had more choices at higher wages than black men, and black men had more choices than women of either race. Black women worked for wages in much higher percentages than white women of northern European ancestry. Most white men and women farmed, while most blacks worked as laborers or domestic servants.

TABLE 3  
Occupations of the Total Population and African American Population of Vermont Compared, 1840-1870 +

	1840*		1850*		1860		1870									
	Total	Black	Total	Black	Total	Black	Total	Black								
1	AG	69%	AG	48%	FARM	40%	LA	52%	FARM	32%	LA	24%	FARM	26%	FMLA	40%
2	MFTR	1%	MFTR	8%	LA	18%	BARB	5%	FMLA	11%	SERV	20%	FMLA	18%	SERV	27%
3	PROF	1%	-	-	CARP	2%	FARM	4%	LA	7%	FMLA	13%	SERV	7%	LA	12.6%
4	COMM	1%	-	-	CORD	1%	EAT	3%	SERV	4%	BARB	10%	LA	5%	BARB	10%
5					BLSM	1%	SHOE	2%	CARP	2%	FARM	4%	CA/JN	3%	HOUSK	5%
6					MERCH	1%	-	-	TEACH	2%	LAUN	3%	MILL	2%	FARM	4%
7									BLSM	1%	EAT	2%	TEACH	1.5	EAT	3.5%
8									SHOE	1%	TEAM	1%	RR	1%	HORSE	2%
9									MERCH	1%	-	-	CLKS	1%	LAUN	1.5%
10									FACT	1%	-	-	QUARRY	1%	TEAM	1%
11													MS/CUT	1%	SERV/M	1%
12													SHOE	1%	-	-
13													BLSM	1%	-	-

ABBREVIATIONS

AG	- agriculture	HOUSK	- housekeeper (earned wages)
BARB	- barbers	LA	- laborer
BLSM	- black and white smiths	LAU	- laundress
CARP	- carpenters	MERCH	- merchant
CA/JN	- carpenters/joiners	MFTR	- manufacturing and trades
CLK	- clerks	MILL	- cotton/woolen mill
COMM	- commerce	MS/CUT	- masons/cutters
CORD	- cordwainers (shoes from cordovan leather)	PROF	- learned professions
EAT	- eating houses	QUARRY	- quarrymen
FACT	- factory hands	RR	- railroad men
FARM	- farm owner	SERV	- female servants
FMLA	- farm laborer	SERV/M	- male servants
HORSE	- stable workers (stables at inns)	SHOE	- shoemakers
		TEACH	- teachers (women)
		TEAM	- teamsters

\*Only men's occupations counted.

+ Percentages based on those ten and over.



## FARMERS, BUSINESSMEN, AND LABORERS

The 1860 census is especially enlightening, since that was the first year that women's occupations were counted, farm laborers were distinguished from other laborers, and the census recorded personal and real estate holdings. By 1860, 32 percent of the whites in Vermont were farmers, the largest occupation for whites, while 4 percent of the blacks worked their own farms. The second most common way to earn a living among whites was as farm laborers (11 percent), while the female occupation of domestic servant was second most prevalent for blacks (20 percent). For blacks the largest occupational group was that of non-farm laborer (24 percent). No blacks worked as carpenters, teachers, merchants, blacksmiths, or factory workers. Secondary occupations for blacks were in the service sector as barbers, laundresses, and waiters.

The roots of this system, where most blacks did the menial work on white-owned farms and in white-owned businesses, surely originated earlier in the century. More blacks might have owned farms initially, just as whites had, but as the farms got larger to accommodate grazing merino sheep, those who could afford to expand and buy out others swallowed up the smaller farms. Blacks and foreign travelers asserted that white institutions discriminated against blacks by denying them credit, which would have enabled them to retain and expand their farms.

Many historians assert that northern whites felt threatened by the advancement of free blacks. In *The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, Leon Litwack asserted that whites accepted only blacks who fit the ignorant, submissive "Sambo" image and penalized those who attempted to leave their "place" in society.<sup>20</sup> In *Black Yankees* William Pierson stated, "Unlike other immigrant groups who were remunerated economically and socially for their initiative and perseverance in assimilation, blacks were, more often than not, punished for such behavior by a white community that feared black advancement might threaten the stability of caste relationships."<sup>21</sup>

As a result, it was difficult for blacks to obtain loans from the white community for their business undertakings. A French traveler to New England, Jacques P. Brissot de Warville, noticed this phenomenon as early as 1788:

Those Negroes who keep shop [or farm] live moderately, and never augment their business beyond a certain point. The reason is obvious; the whites . . . like not to give them credit to enable them to undertake any extensive commerce nor even to give them the means of a common education by receiving them into their counting houses. If, then, the Blacks are confined to the retails of trade, let us not accuse their capacity, but the prejudices of the Whites, which lay obstacles in their way.<sup>22</sup>

Not only did blacks have a difficult time in business and farming, but as the immigrant population increased in the mid-nineteenth century, blacks were even edged out of their menial positions. The immigrants who competed with them for jobs were largely the Irish and French Canadians. By 1850, the first time census takers recorded place of birth, the largest group of foreign-born in Vermont was Irish: 15,377. The second largest immigrant group in Vermont, 14,470, was from "British America," mostly French Canadians. By 1870 there were 47,155 foreign-born in Vermont.

Frederick Douglass had lamented that "Every hour sees the black man elbowed out of employment by some newly arrived immigrant whose hunger and whose color are thought to give him better title."<sup>23</sup> The occupational statistics suggest that a similar phenomenon occurred in Vermont. In 1850, 52 percent of all black men had found jobs as laborers. By 1860 only 24 percent had. If we add farm laborers and laborers, as was done in 1850, the numbers of black laborers stood at 37 percent in 1860, still way below the 1850 figure. As in other states the competition seemed to have come from immigrants.

While some jobs became unavailable to blacks as the century continued, new jobs opened up. One new job appearing on the 1870 census was caring for horses at private stables or inns. The increased migration of blacks after the Civil War helps explain this. Many freedmen and women left the south for other parts of the country, and Vermont's black population jumped 30 percent that year. Many enslaved black men had been experts at caring for and breeding horses on southern plantations. Some might have found paying jobs in the same area after the war.

#### SERVANTS, HOUSEKEEPERS, AND LAUNDRESSES

While the changes and continuities in those essentially male jobs are apparent by comparing the statistics from 1840 to 1870, women's jobs cannot be analyzed until 1860, the first year their occupations were enumerated. That year, 20 percent of black women were employed as domestic servants, making them the second largest group of black workers. White women working for wages were largely domestic servants (4 percent) and teachers (2 percent).<sup>24</sup> By 1870, 27 percent of black women ten and older were domestic servants. Others worked as housekeepers and laundresses. Thirty-four percent of all black women labored in those positions (Table 4). Only 9 percent of white women were working as servants, mill workers, and teachers. No black women worked in the mills or as teachers, clearly white women's spheres.

Black women often supplemented the wages of their husbands and fathers, since jobs in the black sphere were on the low end of the pay scale. Some women were married to unemployed men who were pushed

TABLE 4  
African American and European American Women's Occupations  
in Vermont in 1870, Compared\*

African American Women:		European American Women:	
1. Domestic servants	27%	Domestic servants	7.2%
2. Housekeepers	5%	Teachers	1.5%
3. Laundresses	1.5%	Cotton/woolen mill	.5%

\*Based on the total population ten years old and over.

out of the labor market by European immigrants. Many others headed their own households and had no other wages on which to depend. The percentage of black households headed by women ranged between 7 percent and 13 percent from 1840 to 1870 (Table 5). The 1860 occupational statistics suggest that women throughout this period survived as domestic servants and laundresses.

In 1870 two new categories of domestic service appeared on the census. One, perhaps affected by the war, was that of "serving man." For the first time black men were reported as domestics. Former slaves had probably conveyed the idea to Vermonters when in the south with the Union Army. The New England tradition was to have women as household slaves or servants; the southern tradition placed both men and women in that role. Some of the black men working for the troops as cooks and laborers had undoubtedly been servants on southern plantations and may have accompanied soldiers home after the war.<sup>25</sup>

TABLE 5  
Female-Headed Households among African  
Americans in Vermont, 1840-1870

Decade	Female Head of House (Number)	Total Households (Number)	Female Head of House (Percentage)
1840	26	286	9%
1850	35	273	13%
1860	28	230	12%
1870	26	375	7%

The other new category was that of "housekeeper," which included anyone earning wages by managing a household—either her own or another's. It is hard to tell from the census schedules if black housekeepers were working in white or black households. Of the sixteen housekeepers in the census report, three lived in white households, obviously working for whites. The rest lived in households headed by black men. In four of those black households people were engaged in from three to six different occupations. It is possible that they paid to live there, which left the women as wage-earning housekeepers in their own households. The rest were most likely managing other people's households in Vermont.

"To know the position of a people, it is only necessary to know the condition of their females."<sup>26</sup> So wrote editor and lecturer Martin R. Delany in *The Condition, Elevation, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. "Our best ladies being washerwomen, chamber-maids, children's traveling nurses, and common house servants and menials, we are all a degraded, miserable people, inferior to any other people as a whole, on the face of the globe."<sup>27</sup> His book was not well received by other blacks. He admitted that he would offend people in saying such things about domestic service, but he was trying to change attitudes.<sup>28</sup>

Blacks, Delany wrote, had been in the service of whites for such a long time that they "consider it a favor to get into the service of the whites, and do their degrading offices."<sup>29</sup> But this "moral and mental servitude, is as obnoxious as a physical servitude, and not to be tolerated."<sup>30</sup> Blacks must root out their attitudes of "submission and servitude, menialism and dependence," he wrote, which have "become almost a physiological function of our system."<sup>31</sup>

#### ANTI-SLAVERY ATTITUDES AND OCCUPATIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Delany, the grandson of slaves, had once been optimistic that white anti-slavery men would help raise blacks from their menial positions by hiring them into their businesses. The "qualification and talent manifested by different members of the [National] Convention [of Colored People]" in 1830 had convinced many whites, including William Lloyd Garrison, to abandon their colonizationist ideas and profess an interest in elevating blacks in their own country. The only way to elevation, claimed Delany, who had started a business later destroyed by prejudice, was through employment by white anti-slavery men. "There was no other ostensible object [of anti-slavery] in view. . . . But in all this we were doomed to disappointment, sad, sad disappointment."<sup>32</sup>

Delany's lament is confirmed by Vermont's occupational statistics of the period. They indicate that Vermont was no different from the rest of the north. The list of important white anti-slavery men in Vermont included railroad men, merchants, congressmen, and quarry owners. It

included men who worked to develop the state building businesses, offices, and new homes. However, not one black railroad man, quarryman, mason, cutter, joiner, or carpenter appeared in Vermont censuses from 1850 to 1870. The state had one black clerk in 1850 and none thereafter. Apparently, freeing blacks from slavery and hiring them in one's business were two unrelated actions in the minds of Vermont business owners.

Furthermore, while Vermont was known nationally as the most anti-slavery state in the union, some anti-slavery Vermonters raised black youngsters in their homes for lifelong domestic duties. Vermonter William Slade, thought to have given one of the first anti-slavery speeches in Congress, had in his Middlebury home in 1850 a black servant by the name of Eliza Dodson. According to Dodson's obituary, her mother had been born a slave in Washington, D.C., and later had given her seven-year-old daughter to a family from Vermont.<sup>33</sup> It is likely that family was the Slades. Anti-slavery people or not, some whites in Vermont raised black children as domestics and relegated many blacks to a lifetime of menial work.

There were a few blacks who owned their own businesses and did not depend on the hiring practices of whites. These included barbers and farmers.<sup>34</sup> While the percentages of blacks in other categories fluctuated, the percentage of barbers stayed steady at 10 percent in 1860 and 1870. Black farmers stayed at 4 percent from 1850 to 1870.<sup>35</sup> The individuals in these groups had real estate and personal possessions worth more than those of other occupational groups. Their wives generally defined themselves as "keeping house" on the census, the same unpaid occupation of most white women.

The farmers seemed particularly well-off and established in the community, having worked their way up the occupational ladder. John Fairbanks of Stowe, who had been a fiddler in 1850, appeared on the 1870 census as a farmer with \$1,000 worth of real estate. John Falls, who first appeared on the 1810 census in Plymouth and worked as a laborer and farm laborer in the intervening years, appeared on the 1870 census as a Mount Holly farmer with \$1,000 worth of real estate. By 1870, Edward Williams, who had farmed in Hinesburgh during the fifties and sixties, owned \$2,500 worth of real estate in South Burlington. As during other times in the state's history, a small number of blacks succeeded in areas where most could not.

After the Civil War, the freedmen and women of the south used their newly won freedom of movement to search for loved ones and start new lives away from southern plantations. The 30 percent jump in Vermont's black population in 1870 suggests that many migrated to Vermont. Because of their fame later in life, we know why William Anderson and George

Washington Henderson chose Vermont: they were influenced by soldiers they met during the war.

Henderson, who later graduated from the University of Vermont, was born a slave in Virginia. After the war he came to Underhill and attended school there prior to being accepted at the university. During his summers he worked as a farmhand in Waitsfield. Researcher Margaret H. Muller believes that he had traveled north with Lt. Byron Ward. In a letter from Virginia in 1865 Ward wrote, "Johnson's army is being sent home. Some of the soldiers are coming here. You ought to see the darkies that come into the army. I have got a darkey boy about nineteen or twenty—a real good boy. Perhaps I shall take him north when I go."<sup>36</sup> This "boy" graduated as valedictorian and Phi Beta Kappa twelve years later.

In 1866 William Anderson also came north with a soldier, Col. Charles Hunsdon of Shoreham. The seventeen-year-old former slave lived with Dr. William Hitchcock as a hired hand and later bought his own farm and hired out his sleigh and wagon to earn extra money. He married Philomen Langwire of French Canadian and Indian heritage, and the couple had two children. Their daughter, Mary Annette, graduated from Middlebury College as valedictorian and Phi Beta Kappa in 1899 and later taught at Howard University. Their son, William John, became an apple orchardist and later the second black man to serve in the Vermont legislature.<sup>37</sup>

Apparently, the experiences of Anderson and Henderson as live-in farm laborers was not unusual after the war. The housing patterns for 1870 (Table 2) show that the numbers of blacks living in white households jumped by 24 percent in the years following the Civil War, and those working as farm laborers jumped by 22 percent. Some obviously had an opportunity to gain an education and took full advantage of it. Most, however, found that the niche carved for them in this ardently anti-slavery state reflected the old ways of thinking, which directed blacks toward roles as laborers and domestic servants.

#### CONCLUSION

The 1790 to 1810 schedules of the federal census reports illustrate, in a simple way, the demarcation between the worlds of European Americans and African Americans. Census takers named all white families and recorded the age and sex of family members. The government relegated blacks to a small column at the edge of the page provided for the number of "other persons" in the household and recorded no age or sex. Blacks, considered "other," were not deemed important enough to be treated as individuals and named or to gather information about. Not until 1820 did separate columns appear on the census for "free coloured persons"

with spaces for name, age, and sex of the black members of the household.

This change did not signal an acceptance of blacks as equals; the idea of non-Europeans as "other" had been a part of the European psyche for too long. Nineteenth-century literature confirms what the census figures imply. A deep and palpable prejudice imbued the country affecting the races in different ways. Whites grew up with false feelings of superiority over blacks. Blacks felt the sting of prejudice everywhere: in banks, in the business world, in houses, and on farms where they worked. It negatively affected their abilities to live independently, to find decent work, and to care for their children.

Nowhere in nineteenth-century writings by either blacks or whites, Americans or foreigners, did anyone suggest that there was a place in the United States where blacks could escape prejudice. On the contrary, all the writers used in this study mark the prejudice in the northern states as just as bad as that in the southern states. Prince Saunders, who grew up in Thetford, spent much of his adulthood exhorting free blacks to migrate to Haiti to escape the oppressive racism and prejudice of America. He did not choose Vermont as the black "paradise of the New World" because he knew firsthand that it was little different from the rest of the north with respect to racism.<sup>38</sup>

Although Vermont society was non-elitist in many respects, the aristocratic idea that bloodlines governed one's status was ubiquitous during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As in other states, the white majority delegated most blacks to menial positions, reserving for Anglo-Saxon whites high status jobs and social privileges. The door of opportunity seemed to open on occasion for Vermont's black minority, and during those times a few were in a position to take advantage of it. In each period, however, economic hardships and white prejudice slammed the door again. It appeared that gains could not be sustained in times of adversity. As a result, black Vermonters exhibited very little social mobility from 1790 to 1870.

The Vermont census statistics and nineteenth-century literature affirm what Alexis de Tocqueville's companion, Gustave de Beaumont, wrote prophetically in 1835: "In vain will the blacks receive their liberty. . . . [Prejudice] will influence the whole future of American society."<sup>39</sup> Even in Vermont, which led the way in abolishing slavery, the spoils of emancipation seemed meager indeed to most of the black men and women who migrated north in the hopes of finding equality only to find their color barred them from true liberty in their adopted state. Neither black nor white seemed to find a way to break free for any length of time from the old ways of thinking and relating in Vermont's first eighty years of statehood.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The author and a number of people from the University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies collaborated in creating a data base for the census information from 1810 to 1870. Much of the information had been collected from census reports in the National Archives by Thomas D. S. Bassett in previous years. The data from 1840 to 1870 are from 95 to 100 percent complete. All the tables herein are based on statistics from that data base.

<sup>2</sup> Abby M. Hemenway, ed., *Vermont Historical Gazetteer* (Burlington: n.p., 1867), 2:372.

<sup>3</sup> This decline could be explained by a number of factors including the decrease in soil fertility and resulting migrations west, interracial marriages with children being defined as white on the census, black farmers' inability to afford enlargement of their farms for merino sheep due to prejudicial attitudes on the part of lending institutions, increased racism and resulting inability to find suitable work due to the "Sambo" image imbedded in the minds of whites.

<sup>4</sup> The census data upon which this assertion is based is 100 percent of that collected in those two decades. Only seven households appeared to be interracial marriages, all black men and white women.

<sup>5</sup> In 1810 there appeared to be four interracial marriages; eight in 1820, and nine in 1830. All marriages were of black men and white women.

Unfortunately, some census takers in 1810 simply entered a total number for blacks in town, including no other information about them. The collection of information on blacks living with whites in 1820 and 1830 was incomplete at the time of this article.

Two blacks in Vermont in 1810 were recorded as slaves on the census. They lived in Leicester (home of Joseph Woodard) and in Salisbury (home of Epaphras Jones).

<sup>6</sup> Some of these households have been identified as interracial marriages—one in 1790 and six in 1800.

<sup>7</sup> A novel by a Brazilian black woman was published the same year as *Our Nig*, making both novels the first books published by black women in any language. Black men had published fiction before this time but not novels.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., introduction to *Our Nig*, by Harriet E. Wilson (1859; reprint, New York: Random House, 1983), xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, 139.

<sup>10</sup> The 1777 Vermont constitution states that forced servitude must end at age eighteen for women and age twenty-one for men.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, 116.

<sup>12</sup> Gates, xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas D. S. Bassett, unpublished research on blacks in Vermont, courtesy Dr. Bassett.

<sup>14</sup> Wilbur H. Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1937), 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur O. White, "Prince Saunders: An Instance of Social Mobility among Antebellum New England Blacks," *Journal of Negro History* 60 (October 1975): 532.

<sup>16</sup> For more on Prince's life see Hemenway, 5: 78-80 and Bernard and Jonathan Katz, *Black Woman* (Toronto: Pantheon, 1973).

<sup>17</sup> For information on African resistance to slavery and racism in New England see William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1988), especially chapter 12.

<sup>18</sup> Gregor Hileman, "The Iron-willed Black Schoolmaster and his Granite Academy," in *Middlebury* (Spring 1974): n.p.

<sup>19</sup> Privileged whites were those from northwestern Europe, with the exception of the Irish. Southern and eastern Europeans, along with the Irish, felt discrimination. For more on prejudice against white ethnic groups see Elise A. Guyette, "Behind the White Veil: A History of Vermont's Ethnic Groups," in *Many Cultures, One People* (Middlebury, Vermont: Vermont Folklife Center, 1992), 17-27.

<sup>20</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 103.

<sup>21</sup> Piersen, 47.

<sup>22</sup> Litwack, 154-55; see also Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 305, and Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), 84.

<sup>23</sup> Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 184-85.

<sup>24</sup> The occupational chart shows jobs in which at least .5 percent of the population worked. A tiny percentage of white women worked as seamstresses and laundresses, but their jobs do not appear on the chart. By the same token, the one black dressmaker does not appear either.

<sup>25</sup> The possibility exists that some African Americans may have accompanied black soldiers to Vermont, since some men of the all-black 54th Massachusetts Regiment were Vermonters. Six graves in St. Albans belong to men who fought in that regiment during the Civil War.

<sup>26</sup> Martin R. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968), 199.



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<sup>27</sup> Delany, 199.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Quarles, introduction to Delany, n.p.

<sup>29</sup> Delany, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Delany, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Delany, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Delany, 23, 27. Colonization in Liberia was not the answer to this problem, since "being the offspring of slavery -- is in itself, sufficient to blast it in the estimation of every colored person in the United States" (35). He suggested instead that blacks become pioneers, like the Puritans, and migrate to Central and South America. "God has . . . designed this great portion of the New World," he believed, "for us, the colored races" (183). This suggestion was enough to cause many blacks to deplore Delany's work.

<sup>33</sup> Bassett, n.p.

<sup>34</sup> In 1860 Rutland had a black restaurant owner, a black grocer, and black bookbinder. That same year, a black dressmaker had her business in Windsor.

<sup>35</sup> Before 1850 no distinction is made between those who owned farms and those who worked them.

<sup>36</sup> Margaret H. Muller, "The Strange Tale of George Washington Henderson," *UVM Alumni Magazine* 48 (April 1968): 7.

<sup>37</sup> Elsie B. Smith, "William J. Anderson: Shoreham's Negro Legislator in the Vermont House of Representatives," *Vermont History* 44 (Fall 1976): 203-211.

<sup>38</sup> White, 532.

<sup>39</sup> Gustave de Beaumont, *Marie* (1835; reprint, Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1958), 6, 214. Tocqueville and Beaumont traveled extensively in the north in 1831-32. During the final phase of their journey, they steamed up Lake Champlain on the *Phoenix* to the Champlain Canal. Although they never mentioned Vermont in particular, they often wrote about the northern states. Both men viewed *Marie* as a companion volume to Tocqueville's *Democracy*, revealing those left out of the democratic process.