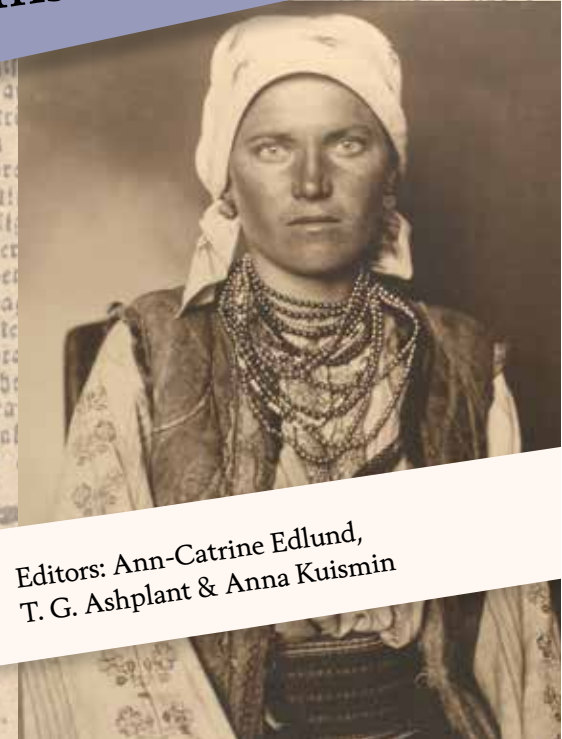




Reading and Writing from Below

Exploring the Margins of Modernity



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“Sparse and Multiple Traces”

The Literacy Practices of African-American Pioneers in the Nineteenth-Century Frontier

ABSTRACT. The Beech Settlement in central Indiana was one of several communities of African Americans that flourished in the nineteenth century. This settlement was unique in that its settlers, led by a core of highly literate individuals, organized a circulating library. The circulation records and meeting minutes of the Board of Directors survive, as well as a list of some of the books that were held in the library. This article examines the surviving documents and other primary materials to portray a community of readers, writers, orators, and educators, who, although denied legal access to education until their migration, had learned to read and write, and had developed the skills to create a thriving community of readers.

KEYWORDS: nineteenth-century African Americans, library history, reading communities, African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church

Introduction

In her work, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, Elizabeth McHenry points out that the study of reading and literacy of eighteenth and nineteenth century European Americans is aided by the existence of a plethora of resources, such as diaries and magazine subscription documentation. By contrast, evidence of the reading of African Americans, particularly in the early nineteenth century, is scarce, and the little surviving evidence is scattered. She argues for “reconstructing” the reading practices of nineteenth century African Americans “through what Roger Chartier has called the ‘sparse and multiple traces’ that remain” (McHenry 2002:8). This article seeks to use such “sparse and multiple traces,” including surviving manuscript documents and locally-printed works, to uncover the literacy practices of the Beech Settlement, a nineteenth century rural community of free African Americans in Indiana.

In antebellum America, African Americans, as a rule, were denied literacy and access to education. That did not mean, however, that the entire African American community was unable to read or write. Many African Americans, both free and enslaved, learned to read as well as write, and they taught each other – especially their children. Writing about free African Americans in urban areas of the North, McHenry states that literary societies provided space for reading and discussion, which also helped in the development of rhetorical strategies. She goes on to suggest that, informed by Enlightenment emphasis on the life of the mind, they found reading a means of acquiring knowledge, and writing as a tool for asserting authority, recording information, and communication on a public scale (McHenry 2002:23). Their organized activities were seen as a way to inform their fellow African Americans and to prepare them for life as full American citizens. Likewise, the organizers of the church and library in the Beech Settlement used similar strategies: they established an organization (in their case, a church that also housed a library), wrote documents that stated their purpose and intent, and maintained and preserved those documents.

North Carolina in the 1800s was home to a large community of Quakers. As they became increasingly uncomfortable with, and finally opposed to, the institution of slavery, they began to consider migrating to a free state. Indiana was one such free state, and in 1820 land became available for sale at low prices. The Quakers in North Carolina journeyed to Indiana, made land claims, and began migration to the frontier. From 1820 to 1840, Quaker families moved to Indiana and established small farming communities, from Richmond, on the border with Ohio and westward toward central Indiana and beyond. Many African Americans came with them and settled in the Quaker villages or on farms nearby. The history of the Quaker settle-

ment and the relationship with their African American neighbours is well documented: friendships and business relations were strong and in many cases continued years beyond the pioneer years.

This article focuses on one of many African American settlements that developed near Quaker villages in nineteenth century Indiana. The Beech Settlement, as it came to be known, was settled by several families who were friends of white Quakers in eastern North Carolina. The settlement was located about two miles northwest of the Quaker village of Carthage in Rush County, Indiana. Many bought land with holdings up to 320 acres and were successful farmers. They established churches and schools, and in 1842, established a lending library in the church that affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The library's circulation records and the minutes of the annual meeting of the library members are held in the library of the Indiana Historical Society in Indianapolis. Using those library records, in addition to many other primary sources and genealogical records, as well as personal interviews with descendants, this article aims to bring to light a community of readers and writers who were largely self-educated, and who fostered and promoted education for their children and their community.¹

The Library

In 1832 the Beech residents held a meeting to organize their church. This meeting was recorded in a manuscript, a photocopy of which is included in the Roberts Settlement Collection in the Indiana State Library:

We the Coloured people of this Neighborhood being desirous to unite and build A Meeting House to the use of the Methodist Episcopal Church and we think on Land of James Roberts near the large spring to be a sootabel and convenient place To build one. Therefore we the under signers do bind ourselves to pay soms next to our names in gitting lumber for the building or otherwise in Cash. July the 18th 1832. (Indiana State Library: Roberts Settlement Collection)

Below these paragraphs are listed the names of the subscribers and the sums that they paid, ranging from 12½ to 25 cents.

Although originally organized as a Methodist church, the church in the late 1830s converted to the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) denomination. In 1840 the Indiana Conference (an official regional designation) of the A.M.E. Church was organized at the Beech Settlement. The A.M.E.

¹ Nesbitt, Anne. Phone and personal interviews, and email correspondence with the author. Vincent, Martha Sanders. Personal interviews and email correspondence with the author.

Church early on developed a Book Concern and Publications Department. The Book Concern published and distributed denominational materials such as Hymnals and Disciplines, and, more important for this study, the *Christian Recorder*, a weekly newspaper. (Kachun, 2006:649). The *Recorder* circulated, with the assistance of local subscription agents, throughout all areas of denominational reach, including the Beech Settlement. It included local church news, commentary on various subjects, as well as poetry and fiction.

In an article on a serialized novel published in the *Recorder*, Mitch Kachun provides an overview of the early history of Book Concern and its evolution during the nineteenth century. He writes that before the 1840s, it struggled financially and organizationally. During the 1850s under the leadership of Bishop Daniel A. Payne, it expanded its publishing beyond materials such as hymnals to more varied works, aimed at providing high quality reading material for its readership. By 1861, when Elisha Weaver became editor, the A.M.E. denomination was the most influential and successful black organization in the U.S. During the 1860s, the Book Concern grew and increased profits to the extent that it was able to purchase a building for production. (Kachun, 2006:651)

The Beech residents undoubtedly had access to publications of the Book Concern and the *Recorder*. Evidence of readership among Beech residents abounds in reports and articles in African American newspapers, such as *The North Star* and *The National Era*, as well as A.M.E. publications.² Clearly, the *Recorder*, and probably other publications of the Book Concern, formed a central body of reading material for the Beech families, and thus were influential in their education and their lives.

In 1842, ten years after the organization of the church, the library, called Mt. Pleasant Library, was organized. Minutes of the organizational meeting reflect a similar procedure to that of the church: the intent was stated in the opening paragraphs, followed by Articles of the Constitution, after which were listed the names of subscribers and sums paid. The William Henry Smith Library at the Indiana Historical Society holds two manuscript notebooks that contain the records of the Mount Pleasant Library. One notebook records the meeting minutes of the first and subsequent annual meetings. The other contains the circulation records from 1842 to 1869, listing each name, the accession number of the book that was checked out, the date it was checked out, the date it was returned, any relevant notes pertaining to the condition of the book after its return, and fees that were paid

² I have used the *Accessible Archives* database of nineteenth-century African American Newspapers to find evidence of Indiana readers.

for overdue returns or injury. Unfortunately, the names of the books are not recorded in the manuscript notebook.

The minutes notebook records a meeting at which a constitution for the library was written, officers and trustees were named, and the names of subscribers, with the respective amounts in dues paid, were entered. The articles of the constitution consisted of the official name of the library, the subscription fee (25 cents), the date of the annual meeting, the duties of the board of managers, secretary, and librarian, the proportion of library members required to amend the constitution, and a restriction against "novels, romances, or writings favourable to infidelity." This short phrase says much about the purpose of the library and the intention of the founders. "Infidelity" at this time meant unfaithfulness to Christian doctrine. This restriction, then, against novels, romances, and unfaithful writings suggests that the library was intended for moral as well as intellectual and educational development.

The same manuscript notebook records the proceedings of the first meeting of the board of managers. At that meeting, held on April 30, 1842, the books were "received, numbered, and placed in the Library", and by-laws (which were listed) were adopted. The by-laws were concerned with circulation rules, fines for overdue or damaged books, specific procedures for regularly examining the condition of the books and the Librarian's "register" (circulation and fee records), and evaluation of the Librarian's work. Finally, two persons were appointed to "assess the Librarian according to the 4th Article of the by-laws and report to the next annual meeting." There are 60 names on the list of charter members in the Library's minutes, six of whom were white residents of Carthage. Many lived on farms within a mile or two of the meeting house, while others lived in Carthage and the surrounding area. Not all of the names on the list of charter members appear in the circulation records. However, they well may have used the library without checking out books. Several were involved as officers or trustees, a few of them continuously serving in some capacity every year for which records are extant.

Every charter member paid at least 25 cents to join the Library. Some paid more: two of the white members paid \$1.50. James D. Roberts (on whose land the building was located) paid \$1.00. Daniel Watkins, one of the largest landowners, also paid \$1.00. Wright and Macklin Jeffries, who figure prominently in the history of the library as well as the community, paid \$0.50, as did Uriah Bass (a shoemaker in Carthage) and two others.

From the dates in the circulation records, it appears that the Library was open one day every two weeks or so – not always on the same day. Of the 53 charter members listed, 22 checked out a book on the first day the Library

was open; 21 others checked out books within the first two months; and 20 checked out books with some regularity over a period of time, such as a year, two years, or several months. Several patrons, especially from the Roberts, Jeffries, and Winburn families, checked out books every two weeks or every four weeks, with few gaps, which were often in the summer months when the work of farming was at its height. Some books were checked out repeatedly by the same person. For example, book number 129 was checked out at least eighteen times in the first two years, and nearly everyone who borrowed it did so at least twice. William Roberts borrowed it fourteen times between May of 1844 and May of 1846. He was almost the exclusive borrower of number 129 between November of 1845 and May of 1846, renewing it every four weeks.

The Reading Community

It is significant that many of the subscribers to the church congregation were the same as, or closely related to, the library subscribers. This suggests that the same families who were interested in organizing a church congregation were also interested in literacy and education. Many of these families played active roles in the Library's organization, maintenance, and use.

Brothers Anthony, James D., John, and Elijah Roberts came to Rush County around 1831 from Northampton County, NC. Anthony was a charter member of the library. He served as secretary to the library in 1844, 1845, and 1849; as assistant librarian in 1848; as librarian in 1850 and 1852; and as trustee in 1867, when the library's collection was relocated. In addition, Anthony was one of ten who in 1853 contributed to pay the library's debt of \$1.88. Two of Anthony's ten children, Abner and Dudley, became A.M.E. ministers. Anthony owned an 80-acre farm approximately a mile from that of James D. Roberts, and, consequently, also from the library and A.M.E. Church. Anthony taught school sessions in the Beech neighborhood.

Anthony's eldest son William was also a charter member of the library and one of the heaviest users of the library. Like his father, he also played a leadership role, serving as secretary in 1843 and 1850; librarian in 1844 and 1845; and assessor of damages in 1848.

James D. Roberts, Anthony's brother, owned the land on which the Mt. Pleasant Meeting House was built, as stated above. He was the first librarian, appointed at the first meeting, and served also as President in 1843, as treasurer in 1844, and as assessor of damages in 1845. He died May 29, 1849, leaving three orphaned children: Robert R., Jonathan, and Frances. Although he died early in the life of the library, his children and their descendants passed on the Roberts legacy of education.

After James D.'s death in 1849, guardianship of his children was given to Macklin Jeffries, another founding member of both church and library and

prominent community member. The circulation records show that Macklin Jeffries and Jonathan Roberts, age 14, visited the library and checked out books on June 5, 1849, one week after the death of Jonathon's father. Frances Roberts, James D.'s surviving daughter, married Irving Jeffries, who was a teacher and son of Walker Jeffries, a large landowner – an example of the many connections between these two families so active in education.

Robert R. Roberts, the youngest of James D.'s children, was an important member of the community and the church, and his children and later descendants exemplify the strong drive for educational achievement that is characteristic of the Roberts family. It was said of Robert R.:

In early life he was very strong, agile with his ax doing much in clearing and rail splitting in the early settlement of this county. [...] He was orphaned in his youth and had but little chance in the public schools, but being a great reader he was well informed and his knowledge was above that of the average man. He always attended old Mt. Pleasant Church and was attached to it as a child to its mother and in the last years of his life worked very hard to make it a comfortable place in which to worship (William Henry Smith Library: Carter).

Although Macklin Jeffries held legal guardianship of Robert R. when he was orphaned, the U.S. Census of 1850 for Rush County shows Robert living in the home of Wright Jeffries. Wright Jeffries appears to have been the most important teacher in the Beech Settlement, and the backbone of the Library. One wonders how much influence Wright Jeffries may have had on his interest in reading, and how he might have used the library.

Robert R. married Martha Watkins, daughter of Daniel and Frances Watkins, among the largest landowners in the neighborhood, and also users of the library. Among their children were Robert Alpheus, teacher, and Daniel, physician. Robert Alpheus became a successful educator, beginning his teaching career at age 16 in the Beech school, ending with a 22-year stint as principal of the Lincoln High School in Quincy, Illinois. The obituary in the *Knightsdown (Indiana) Banner*, December 2, 1938, provides some enlightening details on Robert Alpheus's life:

He attended school in The Beech, then taught this school at the age of 16, for seven years. He then taught two years each in Cambridge City and Greenfield, and was principal of the Shelbyville colored schools for nine years. He had been a student at Spiceland Academy and graduated in June of 1901. He held the highest grade Rush county teacher's license for 16 years and acquired a state license. Mr. Roberts also taught at Bloomington [the location of Indiana University] and attended Indiana University about 1902. After teaching at New Albany he left for

Terre Haute to attend and graduate from State Normal, and there he was married to Stella L. Horner. He was a brilliant scholar and instructor throughout life. The deceased won a pronouncing contest at the Shelby County Teachers' Institute, and on May 17, 1901 he won the state inter-Academic Oratorical contest. He became an Odd Fellow in 1886. [...] For 22 years he was principal of the Lincoln School at Quincy, and was a member of the A.M.E. Church there, also acting as a treasurer of the board of trustees and superintendent of the Sunday school.

Many descendants of several of the children of Robert Alpheus Roberts became teachers.

Brothers Macklin, Walker, and Wright Jeffries migrated to Rush County from Greensville County, Virginia, by way of Ohio, around 1831. Descendants of Occaneechi Indians, there was little (if any) African ancestry in the Jeffries family. However, they were usually labeled as mulattoes or free Negroes in tax and census records. Other Jeffries family members settled in Ohio and other parts of Indiana. Macklin and other Jeffries went to court to prove that they were white after they were denied their right to vote. Some of the Jeffries descendants married white partners and moved away from Rush County. Others married African Americans and became part of African American communities. Robinson Jeffries, son of Walker, for instance, became a minister in the A.M.E. church and served circuits and congregations in Indiana and Michigan.

Macklin, the eldest of the three brothers, was a charter member of both the A.M.E. church and the library. Later, he was a founding member of the Christian Church in Charlottesville. With the exception of the 1843 meeting, every library meeting for which there are records lists Macklin as a trustee. In addition, he helped to pay the \$1.88 debt in 1853, and in 1867 when the collection was relocated, he and Anthony Roberts selected pamphlets from the collection to be given to its members. Macklin owned a large farm on two parcels, one adjacent to the James D. Roberts farm, the other on the western edge of the settlement.

Wright Jeffries, the youngest of the three Jeffries brothers, was a teacher, as well as founding member and frequent officer and user of the library. His wife was Atlanta Winburn, daughter of Lewis Winburn, who, along with his brothers, was another frequent user of the library. None of the children born to Wright and Atlanta lived to adult age. However, the censuses of 1850 and 1860 show other children living in their home. As stated above, Robert R. Roberts, age 10, was living with them in 1850.

Wright was living in the home of his nephew Thaddeus Jeffries, one of Macklin's sons, when he died in 1911. He had kept his school books, the remaining library books, and the manuscript records of the library meet-

ings and circulation until his death. These were donated to the Indiana Historical Society by Thaddeus's daughter, Mary Jeffries Strong, in 1954. Mary was only thirteen years old when Wright died, but her granddaughter, who knew her well, tells of her close relationship with him and great admiration for him. Mary attended Butler University in Indianapolis, became a teacher, and was an avid reader. Wright told her about his teaching career and about the library, which, he told her, only included "classics." He obviously had a strong influence on her, which is exemplified in the fact that Mary preserved the books and records of the library for half a century after Wright died, and then donated them to the Indiana Historical Society.³

Of the books that Mary Jeffries Strong donated to the Indiana Historical Society, only one appears to be still in the collection: David Miller, *The Practical Horse Farrier: Containing a Treatise on the Different Diseases of Horses, and Cures for the Same* (Rushville, Ind.: For J.M. Taylor [by] George W. Hargitt, printer, 1851.) This book was apparently not used in either the library or Wright Jeffries' school, but was in his personal collection. The only evidence of what books may have been donated is the list of books recorded at the time of her gift to the Indiana Historical Society, and reference to two books that were recorded as damaged: *Goodrich's United States*, and *Leigh's Dictionary*. The provenance record in the Indiana Historical Society Library states that Wright Jeffries "kept the books after the library ceased to function. [...] The record and remaining books had been kept together by the donor," Mary Jeffries Strong. The books that Mrs. Strong had in her possession until 1954 included several song books; histories of the world, the United States, and New York; theology works; *Arator*, by John Taylor (a collection of essays on agriculture); a textbook on hydrostatics and pneumatics; textbooks on arithmetic, grammar, rhetoric, geography, and penmanship; Byron's works; Plutarch; Thomas a Kempis; and a travel book by Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*. The provenance record states that the books "were in the Mount Pleasant Library, or were used in school taught by uncle Wright Jeffries." Only seven of the 36 books on the list identify a call number. Therefore, it is difficult, or impossible, to ascertain exactly what was in the Library.

Writing: Rhetoric, Memoir, Poetry

The library records plus the information from census records and other primary sources begin to sketch out a picture of the reading community in the Beech Settlement. In addition to the library books, the community certainly had access to newspapers and periodicals, in addition to those available

³ Anne Nesbitt, phone interview with author, December 3, 2004.

through the A.M.E. book concern. Several abolitionist newspapers circulated widely from the 1840s, and articles, letters to the editor, and other news items indicate that they were read and subscribed to in Indiana. Many of the agents (people enlisted to obtain subscriptions) were among the Quaker communities between Indianapolis and Richmond, Indiana, and they certainly were circulated among Rush County Quakers. Carthage was a site on the Underground Railroad, confirming the abolitionist work of Carthage Friends.

In September, 1865, a convention was convened by the African Americans of Rush County, and held in the Beech settlement (probably in the A.M.E. church), to discuss and prepare for a state convention of the Indiana African Americans the following month. The document that resulted from the Rush County meeting was published (presumably by a local printer) as *An Appeal to the Friends of Humanity by the Colored People of Rush Co., Indiana*. The opening paragraph states that the purpose of the county convention was "taking into consideration their political condition in that State, their grievances, and the best mode of procuring a redress of the same, their rights and how to obtain them, and to appoint delegates to attend the State Convention of the colored people, to be held in Indianapolis" (October 24, 1865). The document then lists resolutions that were "unanimously adopted."

The *Appeal* is written in a formal, official document format and uses language that draws from the Declaration of Independence. It states that inalienable rights have been denied to much of the population (African Americans), and that "these rights have long been flagrantly, wickedly and most inhumanly violated, by the degenerate sons of noble sires". It states their commitment to "a Republican form of Government;" and that they "will petition the Legislature of this State, at its next session, to grant us access to the public school funds".

This document is an example of use of writing and rhetorical strategy to demand, in McHenry's words, "full citizenship and equal participation in the life of the republic." Describing the literary societies in the urban North, she states that they "were aware [...] of the centrality of written texts of national construction to both the legitimacy of the new nation and to their status in it." The *Appeal* functions exactly as such a text.

The Mt. Pleasant Library was most active in the 1840s and 1850s. During the 1860s circulation declined, probably due to the increased availability of books, newspapers, and magazines. As stated earlier, the A.M.E. publications and the *Christian Recorder* were readily available, there was at least one bookstore in nearby Knightstown. In 1869, the library dissolved and most of the books were moved to the newly-built and public school library in Carthage. The remaining library books, and records of circulation and meetings, were preserved by Wright Jeffries, a school teacher and

prominent member of the community as well as a founding member of the library.

Thomas P. Weaver was a member of a mixed race family that included Native Americans and African Americans. He was six years old when he and his family migrated from Guilford County, North Carolina, to Indiana in 1847. In 1922 he published a sixteen-page pamphlet of his memoirs in which he describes in detail the journey from the South to Indiana, his schooling in Quaker-taught schools, his later teaching four school terms, and his work up to the time of the pamphlet's publication. About half of the memoir, though, is an extended description of his time during the Civil War. He accompanied Elwood Hill, a Quaker from Carthage, as his servant when Hill enlisted in the Union Army. The incidents and experiences he describes in minute detail are enlightening, and provide a first-hand report of some important events of the Civil War.

The writing style of the memoir belies the facts of his early life: the child of a family in poverty, with an abusive, and probably alcoholic step-father, working from the time he was five years old, and leaving home at age 16, in order, as he says, to avoid being killed by his step-father's beatings. The first paragraph is a good example of his writing style:

After the lapse of 76 years the author of this Memoir will undertake to pen some of the scenes of his life from North Carolina to Indiana. The writer of this memoranda was born in Guilford County, North Carolina, February 17, 1841, and my father and mother started to Indiana, September 28, 1846. The first thing that happened after we had been only three days on the road, I, with another little boy, were stolen. The mode of theft was by enticing us into a shop by showing us bright, new tin cups, something we had never seen before. It took all the afternoon to find us. Had it not been for a kind lady that saw the man take us into his shop they would never have found us, and I can now say, thank God for the lady, as she gave the snap away. She saved us from being taken away that night and being sold (Weaver 1922:2).

Where the narrative relates events that were traumatic or dramatic in some way, he quotes poetry, usually a stanza of a hymn. The memoir includes many events of hardship, including nearly dying in a prisoner-of-war camp, but only when describing his step-father does he display deeply felt, painful emotion:

I shall now state that this man I called father was only my step-father, as I never saw my own father. I wish the Lord to forgive me as to what I may write as to my life with this step-father. As it is said, 'Let the dead rest.' If I write this sketch of my life and would leave these transactions out I would be a failure (Weaver 1922:4).

He then tells of when his father beat him so severely that he nearly died. In closing the memoir, after expressing thanks to God for bringing him through trials, and to friends throughout his life, he adds: "I hope friends will pardon me for calling the dead [i.e., his step-father] in question and relating things that perhaps had better not have been said, but as for me they had better never been done" (Weaver 1922:16).

Thomas Weaver also wrote some articles in the local newspaper, *Carthage Citizen*, including "Narrative on the Underground Railroad," in the May 13, 1921 edition. His youngest sister, Emma Weaver, was also a writer. She published a collection of poems called *Gleanings* in 1917, evidently through a printing office in nearby Knightstown. She worked as a maid in Knightstown until late in life. On the page facing the title page, she states the following:

This book preserves in memory the people, their deeds and old familiar places found within their pages.

I was born February 14th, 1859. My home was in a country home, in Grant county, Indiana, ten miles south of Marion, which is the county seat. I received my early education at Bethel, a county school; latterly at Carthage and Knightstown. I am a descendant of the Cherokee tribe of Indians.

There are numerous other examples of the reading and writing life of the early, as well as later, generation of Beech residents. The Indianapolis newspapers reported on "Colored Conventions" held to promote voting rights and support for education for African Americans. Those reports included writings by delegates from around the state to those conventions, including members of Roberts and Jeffries families. The *Christian Recorder* also published writings of Beech residents and descendants. Finally, the daughter of two of the original Library founders, Martha Harris McCurdy, moved to Georgia where she was active in the temperance movement and served as secretary to the noted A.M.E. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner in Atlanta. An autobiographical sketch of her life in James T. Haley's *Afro-American Encyclopaedia* states that in 1886 when she arrived in Atlanta she became a member of the good Bishop's family:

and when that learned divine caused to appear on the 25th of September, 1886, the neat journal, known as the *Southern Recorder* she became its efficient secretary and served as editor *pro tem* of the same for at least half the time that it was the property of Bishop Turner, and was therefore styled the mother of the *Recorder* by many of its supporters. The good Bishop enjoyed frequent hearty laughs over many things said in other papers concerning the wise sayings in his paper that were thought

to be his but were things said by Mrs. M. A. Mason, the secretary. [She was at the time the widow of her first husband, a Mr. Mason.] (Haley 1895:137)

Conclusion

As stated above, the Beech Settlement was one of many such settlements in Indiana, as well as Ohio and Michigan. The settlements in Indiana declined by the end of the nineteenth century as the children of the first generations moved to cities in search of employment. However, the descendants of several of the settlers continue to hold annual reunions that bring hundreds to the original sites every summer. The reunions at the old Beech Settlement site, held in the one-room church that once held the library, commemorate their history by having a worship service, a report on activities of various individuals, a remembrance of those who have died since the last reunion, a meal on the grounds outside the church, and much socializing. They are also attended by many white descendants of the Quaker settlers of Carthage with whom many of the African Americans had come to Indiana. The continuing maintenance of the church building (which is no longer in use as a church) and grounds, the work involved in having an annual reunion, the ongoing relationships among descendants who still live in the area as well as those who live elsewhere, and finally, the ritual of commemoration, serve to keep telling the story. The 'sparse and multiple traces' of the first generation of settlers are brought back to the Beech where they are annually remembered and celebrated.

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