BETRAYAL OF A FUGITIVE, BUFFALO, NEW YORK, 1857

Note: The following document is a newspaper account of a meeting held at the Vine Street African Methodist Episcopal Church in March 1847, to discipline a local man who had betrayed his wife into slavery. The people who organized the meeting represented the three African-American churches in Buffalo at this time: Deaton Donnell was Pastor of the Vine Street AME Church, and William Burton was a trustee; Peyton Harris and William Qualls were trustees of the Michigan Street Baptist Church; James M. Whitefield, the poet and author, was closely associated with the East Presbyterian Church (Colored) on Elm Street.

Frank H. Severance in Old Trails on the Niagara Frontier (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1903), pp. 197-8, gives an account, told to him by Samuel Murray, an African-American who was an underground railroad agent in Buffalo in the 1850s, of the whipping in Buffalo of a man who "made a business of informing Southerners of the whereabouts of their slaves." I have not located any contemporary account of this incident, which presumably occurred after Murray came to Buffalo in 1852.

BUFFALO (NEW YORK) COURIER, THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 1857.

At a large and enthusiastic meeting of the colored citizens of Buffalo, held pursuant to previous notice at the Vine Street Methodist Church, on Tuesday evening, March 3rd, Peyton Harris was appointed Chairman, and J.M. Whitfield, Secretary. On motion, a Committee of three was appointed by the Chair, consisting of Rev. Deaton Dorrell, Rev. D.W. Anderson, and A.S. Brokenborough, to prepare a resolution of the expressive of the sentiments of the meeting.-- The committee reported the following resolutions, which were received, and after a general discussion adopted by acclamation, only three persons dissenting (The names of those three persons are Eliza Dover, Mary Ann Field and N.D. Thompson).

Whereas, William Cooper, a resident of this city, himself a fugitive slave, has endeavored to betray into slavery his wife, who has for more than twenty years been legally free, therefore,

Resolved, That we pledge ourselves individually that we will not associate with William Cooper, nor permit him to enter our houses; and that we will discountenance any colored person who shall hereafter associate with him, or permit him on their premises.

Whereas, true repentance produces its own fruits.

Resolved, That if William Cooper will pledge himself to a Committee, and bind himself in writing to devoted all the real estate he has, to be sold for money, to be used in the purchase of his wife out of slavery, providing his great sin should be the means of her return into slavery, this indignant public will forgive him, otherwise, we will not.

On motion, a committee of three was appointed by the Chair, consisting of Wm. Qualls, Moses Burton and B.C. Taylor, with instructions to have the proceedings of the meeting published in all the city papers, and in Frederick Douglass' Paper, of Rochester, and the Provincial Freeman, of Chatam, C.W.

Adjourned. PEYTON HARRIS, Ch'mn.
J.W. Whitfield, Sec'y.