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Oliver Cromwell Gilbert: A Life

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Oleiv, Cromwell Gilbert

Oliver Cromwell Gilbert

A Life

By Jody Fernald and Stephanie Gilbert

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Cover photo Gilbert Family Private Collection.

In Memory of Mary Anne and Carl Lomison

Introduction

A winding, tree-lined drive leads to the property called Walnut Grove in Clarksville on Maryland's western shore. Walnut Grove includes a stately two and ½ story stone house built circa 1810 by Gassaway Watkins, a Revolutionary War veteran, gentleman farmer, and slaveholder. The 1810 house improved on earlier dwellings on the property that Watkins had inherited. Watkins's enslaved people once transported the family in horse-drawn carriages to and from this comfortable home that retains the refined southern charm of its former owners. While this Walnut Grove represents a southern past, another Walnut Grove located in New England stands as a symbol of the life of a Quaker family. A wooded dirt road traversed by local farmers leads past the property called Walnut Grove in Lee, New Hampshire. The clapboard structure was built in the eighteenth century and enlarged in the early decades of the nineteenth century by the Cartland family of Quaker educators, farmers, writers, and anti-slavery activists. These two otherwise unrelated properties represent important stages in the life of our protagonist Oliver Cromwell Gilbert. Gilbert ran from a childhood in slavery in Maryland through various cities in the Northeast until he returned to his last home in Philadelphia. The following is his story as he dictated it to his wife Maria in the early twentieth century and as verified and explicated by extensive research.

After his death, Oliver Gilbert's story persistently resurfaced to tell itself. For many years his name was known in the histories of Lee, New Hampshire as the only tangible evidence of the anti-slavery activities of the Cartland family. Other than the fact of his having escaped from slavery and having stayed in Lee, his life has remained an enigma in local New Hampshire history. Once I was introduced to this story, I wanted to know who he was, where he came from, and how he ended up spending time in this small rural town. I spent nearly a decade in archives and libraries in search of his identity and his relationship to the Cartland family. Thinking I had exhausted all possible sources, I was ready to give up the search when Oliver Gilbert's great-great granddaughter, Stephanie Gilbert, found me. Oliver Gilbert's story persists through newspaper accounts

of his activities; his letters to white abolitionists and the family of his former enslavers; his personal narrative and his family's oral and written history. The people who preserved records of his life include Gilbert's descendants; William Lloyd Garrison; the Cartland family descendants and neighbors of Lee, NH; the Warfield family of Maryland who owned members of Gilbert's family; the Quaker Rowell family whose members were educated by the Cartlands; and an antique dealer who rescued some of Gilbert's ephemera from an uncertain fate in Philadelphia.

Oliver Gilbert wanted the world to know him. He wanted his story to be published as had other slave narratives in the nineteenth century, including those of Frederick Douglass, the most well-known. Fate, years of research, and the Internet brought me together with Stephanie Gilbert, his descendant, and we now introduce Oliver Gilbert in the twenty-first century. Our thanks go to Laura Gund for sharing her knowledge of the Cartlands and items from her private collection; and posthumously to Carl and Mary Anne Lomison, Cartland descendants, for their persistence in bringing this story to its rightful place in history and their generosity in sharing family records. Although it is impossible to really know Oliver Gilbert, his papers combined with historical records including census records, newspaper records, and related letters housed in archives and private collections reveal a glimpse of this proud, brave, talented, and resilient man. Stephanie Gilbert and I honor his memory by presenting here as complete a picture of him as we have been able to piece together. His flaws and his talents remain equally entrancing. Oliver Gilbert was no ordinary man.

Jody Fernald



Fig.1 Walnut Grove, Clarksville, MD

Photo courtesy of the Maryland Historical Trust



Fig.2 Walnut Grove, Lee, NH. Courtesy of Laura Gund.

Early Life

Oliver Gilbert remembered Maryland as “the place I was born...my old home.” Although he appeared to have had some fond associations with his birthplace, Gilbert had been born into slavery as had his mother Cynthia Snowden. On Maryland’s western shore, Cynthia Snowden served the Watkins family at Walnut Grove, Clarksville, Maryland, as cook and household slave. Her status as enslaved meant that her children would also be “owned” by her master as property. Few records exist of Cynthia’s life, but she did survive the end of her enslavement for a life with her second husband, farmer John Brook. Both husband and wife remained illiterate. Cynthia’s mother Rachel had also served the Watkins family and died at Richland, a neighboring Watkins property she informally managed. Both had probably been born in the Maryland vicinity, and Rachel to a possibly African-born mother, Celia. Oliver Gilbert’s family had been servants of the Watkins family as least as far back as the American Revolution.

Cynthia’s domain, the kitchen, was located in the basement of the main house where a five foot fireplace remains. Two deep pits traversed by the family’s slaves were located behind the main house and were connected to the well house or ice house. Various outbuildings housed the enslaved on the nearly 600 acres of “prime agricultural land.” Walnut Grove, though not large by the standards of the Deep South, was described as an “unusually fine home.”¹

When Revolutionary War hero Colonel Gassaway Watkins, owner and builder of Walnut Grove in Clarksville, Maryland, died in August, 1840 he left a comfortable, fairly self-sufficient farm that specialized in crops of grains: primarily wheat and oats along with corn and hay to feed the cows, oxen, pigs, and sheep required to sustain a large household.² Those who performed the manual labor required by this acreage and household were twenty-one enslaved people ranging in age from 70 years to 9 months.

¹ Narrative of Oliver Cromwell Gilbert. Gilbert Family Papers. Census of 1870, Howard County, State of Maryland. Maryland Historical Trust Worksheet, Nomination Form for the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service. Maryland State Archives.

² Inventory of the personal estate of Col. Gassaway Watkins, Sept.21, 1840. Probate records of Howard District, Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

Those enslaved people were listed as items of property in the estate inventory. Oliver, listed as an eleven-year-old “Negro boy,” was assigned a value of \$350.00, a relatively high price because of his potential for a long life of laboring for the Watkins family. This white man’s estate inventory had been the only known record of Oliver’s childhood in slavery until Gilbert recalled his early life in letters to a descendant of Gassaway Watkins in the last half of the nineteenth century.³

Few specifics surrounding Gilbert’s family origins have been found, but a general history of slavery in Maryland can put his ancestry in context. Prospective slaves had been brought to Maryland from the West Indies and directly from Africa since the seventeenth century, but by 1780 high duties on imported slaves made the foreign trade increasingly impractical; in addition, the early efforts by Quakers to abolish slavery, or at least the slave trade, in Maryland also began in the eighteenth century. Oliver Gilbert was farther removed from African culture than his mother who had been enslaved in Maryland since her birth circa 1803. Her parents may have been the descendants of West Africans enslaved in Virginia where the Watkins family of Clarksville originally settled in the seventeenth century. As generations died off and inheritances were granted, families moved their enslaved workforce around.

Oliver Gilbert was the son of Cynthia Snowden, the Watkins family’s cook, and Joseph Kelly, a free black man from nearby Owingsville, Maryland.⁴ The child Oliver and his mother labored in the Watkins household and as a result had more contact with the white family than did field workers. Household servants were more highly valued than field workers, and developed more complex relationships with their masters.⁵ They were more closely watched and more susceptible to the changing moods of the master. While household servants remained in constant demand, the need for agricultural workers in Maryland decreased. When tobacco crops had depleted Maryland’s soil, many farmers in the State switched to less labor-intensive grain crops. Over time, grain farmers, some Quakers, from Pennsylvania had crossed the border into Maryland.

³ See Fernald, Jody. “In Slavery and in Freedom: Oliver C. Gilbert and Edwin Warfield Sr.”. *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Summer 2011. Pg.140-161.

⁴ Although the custom is to refer to the protagonist by his last name, Oliver changed his name when he escaped from slavery. In the early years, I refer to him as Oliver, later by Gilbert.

⁵ For more on the relationship between Oliver Gilbert and his masters see: Fernald, Jody, “In Slavery and in Freedom: Oliver C. Gilbert and Edwin Warfield Sr.” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Baltimore, MD: Maryland Historical Society, 2011. Summer 2011, p.140-161.

Maryland's enslaved populations became healthier and more fertile than their progenitors, and numbers of native-born enslaved people increased. Since fewer field hands were required in grain production than in tobacco production, masters employed more domestic servants and hired out some of their enslaved laborers as craftsmen or servants while still profiting from their labor.⁶ Gilbert, his mother, and grandmother remained as household servants while some of his siblings were hired out to a local blacksmith and to other households in Baltimore. Gassaway Watkins's death split up Oliver Gilbert's family further when some of the enslaved people were distributed among the Watkins children. Oliver went to Gassaway Watkins's daughter Margaret Watkins Warfield but she had too many servants, so she gave Oliver to her brother William Watkins. William Watkins owned the family homestead Richland near his parents' home Walnut Grove, where Oliver had been born into service. Oliver Gilbert moved to a farm separated from Walnut Grove by only one property, but his world would change dramatically under the younger Watkins.

It's tempting to picture Gilbert as a boy catching a glimpse of himself in the parlour mirrors at Walnut Grove when no one was looking. He always loved an audience, loved to make music, and spoke eloquently for a man of his background. He was a born performer as his life story reveals. Despite his illiteracy, Gilbert would utilize his many skills in communicating with others as he found his way to freedom. As Gilbert grew into adolescence, his resentment of slavery increased and inspired several escape plans formulated with both siblings and men enslaved on neighboring farms.

For those tempted to believe that Watkins's treatment of Oliver and his family had been relatively benign, Gilbert's narrative tells a different story. Gilbert recalled both psychological and physical abuses in his early life, primarily at the hands of William Watkins. Watkins told Gilbert that his brother Remus had met the terrible fate of being sold into slavery in the South, while Watkins' daughter secretly revealed to Gilbert that Remus had escaped and not been captured. Mid-Atlantic slave owners often sold their enslaved people to the Deep South where slavery could be far more brutal in the cotton fields and on the rice and sugar plantations. Watkins did later sell William Dorsey, a

⁶ Morgan, Philip D. *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia. 1998. P.82-3.

cousin of Gilbert's, despite the desperate pleas of Dorsey's wife. Gilbert described the whipping of Sam Blackson and his permanent disappearance from the hayloft where Gilbert slept with the rest of the enslaved men and boys. None of them ever knew what had happened to Sam. Gilbert claimed that with the intervention of Dr. John Watkins he was able to talk his way out of a whipping at the time of Sam's vicious beating. Sam Blackson's sister Airy reportedly was beaten and jailed for several months after hitting her master, but eventually she returned to her position as Mrs. Watkin's favorite maid. As Oliver Gilbert remembered, both physical and psychological torture had affected the lives of William Watkins' enslaved people.

According to his narrative, Gilbert entertained the idea of escape as other slaves in the area were restless and attempting to flee. Local stories fuelled the unrest of the enslaved. Neighbor Nicholas Worthington had freed his slaves on his death, but his son-in-law was said to have cheated the enslaved of their freedom. Rumors of Watkins's intention of selling his slaves to Georgia hit close to home for Gilbert. Slave buyers had been in the area looking over the enslaved as prospective purchases. The time seemed right for Oliver Gilbert to run for freedom, and he was not alone. Advertisements for the recapture of escaped slaves appeared regularly in the *Baltimore Sun* in 1848, the year Gilbert would escape. Young men of Gilbert's age, around sixteen, were the most likely to attempt escape from slavery in Maryland.

Escape

Maryland borders both Delaware and Pennsylvania, states where Quakers and African Americans had been involved in anti-slavery activities even before Oliver Gilbert reached young adulthood. Quaker abolitionists in Delaware began petitioning the state legislature to end slavery as early as 1786. They succeeded only in promoting legalized voluntary manumissions of the enslaved in 1787. Quakers in Delaware brought the state to prohibit the foreign slave trade and to restrict selling slaves only to licensed sellers in the South by 1789. Free blacks were said to have outnumbered enslaved blacks in

Delaware by 3 to 1 by 1810.⁷ Also in the late eighteenth-century, Pennsylvania Quakers succeeded in getting their legislature to fine anyone attempting to enter a vessel into the slave trade, and to consider any enslaved people brought into the state by new residents to be free. Visitors, including George Washington, could legally bring their servants with them to Philadelphia only for temporary stays. Washington, who reportedly complained that happy servants should remain with their masters rather than be seduced by Quakers to run away, lost his enslaved woman Ona Marie Judge to escape while visiting Philadelphia.⁸

Maryland lawmakers proved less influenced by abolitionists, but Quakers actively opposed slavery there as well as in Pennsylvania and Delaware. Around 1830, Quaker Benjamin Lundy was editing his abolitionist newspaper *The Genius of Universal Emancipation* in Baltimore with assistance from Massachusetts abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.⁹ In addition to being bordered by states with some controls on enslavement, enslaved people in Maryland had a history of local mobility. Slavery and freedom were not as mutually exclusive in the Baltimore area where some people were indentured, enslaved for a term, free, or fully enslaved. Regardless of their status, African Americans in antebellum Baltimore were likely to work or live closely together. Neighboring farms were often within walking distance and Maryland's various waterways made mobility possible for the enslaved with the permission of their masters. The common practice of hiring out the enslaved brought them into contact with other enslaved people as well as with free people.¹⁰ Gilbert's mother Cynthia Snowden must have met his father Joseph Kelly via this local socializing and working. In mid-August 1848, Oliver Gilbert took full advantage of Elizabeth Watkins's request for him to accompany her to attend local Methodist camp meetings run by Rev. R.W. Brown, despite Oliver's master's hesitations.

⁷ Drake, Thomas E. *Quakers and Slavery in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950, pg.95-6.

⁸ *Ibid*, pg.96. Sammons, Mark J. and Valerie Cunningham. *Black Portsmouth: Three Centuries of African-American Heritage*, Durham, NH: University Press of New England, 2004. Pg.71-73. Ona Marie Judge settled in Greenland, NH where she married and had a child.

⁹ Garrison cited Lundy as his first connection to the cause of emancipation in his letter of June 4, 1874 to Zebina Eastman. Garrison, William Lloyd. *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. VI, 1868-1879. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981. Pg. 326.

¹⁰ Phillips, Christopher. *Freedom's Port: the African-American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860*. Urbana and Chicago; University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Rev. Brown, a slaveholder, was quoted by Oliver as:


...preaching to the colored people, "Servant obey your master. He that knoweth his Master's will and do it shall not be beaten with many stripes. Do you know what it means servant to obey your masters? It means to be faithful industrious servants, also you must not steal, you must not go into the smoke house and take out a ham or shoulder or go to the hen roost and take off a chicken without permission. This is all sinful, but you be faithful, upright, and industrious and great will be your reward." Old Uncle Dick, sitting in the Amen corner with his eyes shut, would shout and hallo Amen, Amen! Preach it, and the very first chance he would get he would go and take another ham or chicken.

Oliver had other rewards in mind at this meeting than those promised by Rev. Brown. According to his narrative, he had prearranged an escape with fourteen others. At 6pm., Rev. Brown told the black people they could hold a praise meeting while the white people took a recess. The hundreds of black people present took the seats formerly occupied by their masters and mistresses. The singers moved to the front, Oliver among them. "We paid no attention to formality, but went into our religious work with our whole souls. The white people would look on and some of them would cry Amen at the singing and shouting of their slaves. The white people then returned to the seats and the Reverend Brown had begun his evening service. We were waiting for the chance to get away unnoticed. So after, we got together, fifteen of us. We knew the route. Mr. Fisher, the miller, had explained it to us every minute by way of Westminster. We started, it was very dark and raining and we went feeling our way."¹¹

Oliver's passage to freedom had just begun and would be fraught with danger all along the way. Oliver's description of the initial phase of his escape could match any contemporary accounts for the dangers and difficulties they endured. The fifteen escapees began their journey at night with the sound of the wind whistling in the trees and the roar of a nearby river. Every wagon that passed by was a potential threat from which they hid. Even a simple crossroads posed difficulties because none of the fifteen

¹¹ Mr. Fisher was probably a member of the local Quaker community. He directed them to Pennsylvania where others would be ready to help them when needed.

could read the directional signs. Oliver, the most literate of the group, claimed to know only the letters A and B taught him by his mistress. They chose what appeared to be the most-travelled route that brought them to Westminster, Maryland, where as Mr. Fisher had warned them, patrolmen were lying in wait for fugitives. They skirted the town as advised and late at night they arrived at Hanover Junction, Pennsylvania. There they took another wrong turn and were advised by a white man, "Boys, thee is going the wrong way." They continued on and asked directions of an "old white lady" for the way to Little York (now York), PA. The group of young men thought at that point they were "just ten miles from Canada." In reality, they were about sixty miles from Baltimore. Noticing a group of people around the hotel up the road looking at them, they crossed into a field and "bounded" over a fence. Along the way they encountered several more individuals and some ominous-looking groups of men near to them. They could trust no one. Since William Watkins had advertised the escape of Oliver and several others immediately in the newspaper, word was out of a reward for their capture.¹²



\$600 REWARD will be given for the delivery in Baltimore or Howard District Jail, or \$200 for either, of the following described NEGRO BOYS, who left the Camp-Meeting at Hobbs' School House, Howard District, on Sunday evening, 20th instant:
BEN, a tall Black Boy, about 20 years of age.
SAM, a tall Mulatto; impediment in speech; brother of Ben.
OLIVER KELLY, a stout, thick set Black, about 20 years of age, 5 feet 7 inches high. Address Clarks-ville, Howard District.
WM. CLARK, or
DR. WM. W. WATKINS.
 a22 St*

Fig.3 Runaway advertisement for Oliver Kelly Gilbert).¹³

The fifteen young men were armed with various weapons they had "borrowed" from their masters. Oliver said, "O you my dear reader will call that stealing." By Tuesday morning they had stopped at a farmer's house and asked directions to Little

¹² Runaway advertisement from the Baltimore Sun, August 22, 1848. William Clark owned the farm located between Walnut Grove and Richland. Collection of Maryland Historical Society as well as the American Antiquarian Society.

¹³ Runaway advertisement from the Baltimore Sun, August 22, 1848. William Clark owned the farm located between Walnut Grove and Richland. Collection of Maryland Historical Society as well as the American Antiquarian Society.

York. It was seventeen miles, so they rested in a cornfield eating green corn, their only meal so far. They arrived in Little York by sunset. As they heard people in the street talking about “that gang of slaves,” one colored man followed them down the street. An abolitionist named Mr. Goodrich [sic] came out to speak to them.¹⁴ The group reached the Susquehanna River by midnight, arriving in Wrightville opposite Columbia. According to Gilbert, at the bridge across the river, they were trapped between gates on the bridge. When they reached the Columbia side, they “pulled a bell very gently” and a man let them in. According to Gilbert, they thought they had reached Canada, the Promised Land. Lying down in the sand, Ben encouraged Oliver to sing as follows:

“I run away one moonlit night, Old Massey followed me
But soon I left him out of sight, for the land of liberty
Old Massey prayed both night and day,
that his Negroes never would run away
And always stay at home, for old Massey don’t you come
After me,
For I have just arrived in Canada, where colored people are free.”

The next morning their illusion of safety was shattered when a man woke them and informed them they were still in Pennsylvania, and that gangs of men were searching for runaway slaves in the area. After telling them that Canada was about five hundred miles away, he set them on their way to Lancaster, Pennsylvania where they arrived about noon at 45 South Queen Street, the home of abolitionist lawyer Thaddeus

¹⁴ William Goodridge, born into slavery in 1805, was a black barber and commercial and residential property owner in York. His activities in aiding escaping slaves are discussed on multiple Pennsylvania Underground Railroad history sites. His home has been made into a museum: http://www.goodridgefreedomhouse.com/html/william_goodridge.html

Stevens. According to Gilbert, the group told him they were looking for work and he directed them with a note to Daniel Gibbons at Bird-in-Hand (Burdenhand in Oliver's account). The elderly Quaker Gibbons and his wife Hannah fed the group knowing by their dress (according to Oliver "full southern dress, tow linen shirt, pants, coat of the coarsest kind") that they were escaping from slavery. Oliver remembered that Hannah Gibbons had said to him, "Now that thee is free, thee must respect thyself and thee will always be respected." Early the next morning they all heard a rap at the door. A warrant had been issued for their arrest and they must flee again. Gibbons drove them in a wagon to another Quaker, James Jackson in Bart Township. There Oliver was reunited with his brother Reuben, who had been working as a waiter in a local hotel. Reuben's adventures had included an attempted train ride from Baltimore to Philadelphia in his eventually successful escape. He was to have met up with Oliver's group on an earlier unsuccessful escape attempt. Reuben had been helped by some "colored people" for a few days and then by another Friend, Amos Gilbert, of Lancaster County.¹⁵ The Quaker helpers advised the men to change their names to protect themselves, and Reuben changed his to Amos Gilbert, while Oliver Kelly became Oliver Cromwell Gilbert. Once Reuben had recovered from an illness, the pair went to Philadelphia where they stayed with Greenberry Howard whose "wife was a distance relative of my mother by white blood." Oliver added that in Lancaster he had worked for Joseph Moore and others, and he had "become well known to many Abolitionist Quakers." Many of the men whose names Gilbert mentioned were black men, some of whom who had once been enslaved. In their daily activities as farmers and businessmen, they regularly interacted with the Quaker families Gilbert mentioned. The

¹⁵ The Gilbert family's daily activities are partially documented in the Bushong Diary Collection at the Lancaster County Historical Society: http://www.lancasterhistory.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2945:bushong-diary-collection-1850-1853-1858-1869&catid=37:manuscript-groups&Itemid=57

cooperative venture of white Quakers and black families in helping others escape from slavery grew out of their friendships and shared commitments.

In the spring of 1849, Oliver found a position as a waiter on the steamship Penobscot running from Philadelphia to New York. A year later, he was waiting on table at the Columbia Hotel in Cape May, New Jersey, a community where Harriet Tubman had also stayed. While there, Gilbert found that a Mr. Thomas Dorsey, from his master's circle, had come to board, so knowing it would be unsafe to continue there, he took the steamboat to New York. In New York, Gilbert's skills as a waiter served him well again when he found work at the Earle Hotel.¹⁶ Gilbert claimed to be happy and contented working there until his encounter with Mr. William Warfield, brother-in-law of his master, who appeared to recognize Oliver Gilbert. Gilbert remembered the day as follows:

I ran down the stairs and came out on Ann St-down Ann St to Broadway with no hat on, white jacket and apron. I threw away the apron and crossed Broadway to Vesey, down Vesey to Church, up Church to Lizbernard St, there was the headquarters of the Underground Railroad. Mr Ruggles was the agent. There I was safe for the day. Reuben was now in New York waiting at the Rafburn House below the Trinity Church on Broadway. That day the news came out that two slaves had been taken back to the south. The abolitionist decided that it was [not] safe for me to remain any longer in New York.¹⁷

¹⁶ Oliver Gilbert and Amos Gilbert, ages 23 and 25, were listed as waiters at the Earle Hotel in the 1850 census of the 2nd ward of New York City in the New York State Census, August 16, 1850.

¹⁷ David Ruggles, the free-born black founder of the The New York Committee of Vigilance, had died in Massachusetts late in 1849. He had sheltered Frederick Douglass and ran a boarding house at 67 Lispenard St that was a gathering place for abolitionists. A prolific writer and abolitionist, Ruggles helped many in their escapes from slavery, and was well-known to the many abolitionists Oliver Gilbert would later meet. Oliver escaped from New York close to the time of Ruggles' death so he may have simply been giving credit to a man he had never met, or he may have recalled the time incorrectly since the

That night the pair was sent to Boston via Brooklyn and Greenport, New London, and Providence to Boston. Gilbert gave no specifics of this trip but David Ruggles, who had led the New York Vigilance Committee, was from Connecticut originally. He grew up in comfortable relationships with both black and white men. Ruggles had warned others in the past that New York City was not a safe place to hide from slavery, and he preferred sending people to New England when they left New York.¹⁸ In Boston, Reuben dropped from the memoir and Gilbert talked about his first destination in Boston, 2 Beach St., owned by abolitionist piano manufacturer, Deacon Timothy Gilbert.

Boston

Gilbert's memoir, filled with the names of the more prominent abolitionists of the mid-nineteenth century, strains its readers' credulity at times. How could a hardly literate man recently escaped from slavery be associated with so many of Boston's prominent abolitionists? Gilbert made no specific claims that have proven false, but his words do need elaboration. He idolized the men and women of abolitionist renown who had in some way assisted him, but his direct associations with them prove more complex and interesting.

Deacon Timothy Gilbert manufactured pianos, founded the Tremont Temple, and served as President of the Vigilance Committee of Boston. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, he reportedly stated that his door would remain open to runaway slaves despite the risk of punishment for those who harbored fugitives. Deacon Gilbert was said to have employed fugitives from slavery in his piano factory, and Oliver Gilbert stated that he did work for Timothy Gilbert as one of Gilbert's approximately

memoir was written several decades after the events happened. Oliver was a shameless namedropper, but research has supported many of his claims.

¹⁸ Hodges, Graham Russell Gao. *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City*. Chapel Hill: university of North Carolina Press, 2010.

eighty employees.¹⁹ Oliver said he finished his work each day and then was tutored in reading and writing by Mrs. Timothy Gilbert and others. Further details of his stay are missing in Oliver Gilbert's memoir, although he did say that while there he met William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Mrs. H.B. Stowe, Francis Jackson (treasurer of the Boston Vigilance Committee), Charles Sumner, Samuel J. May Jr, Stephen Foster and his wife Abbey Kelly, Lucy Stone, and Mrs. Wendell Phillips. Oliver Gilbert used the pronoun "we" in describing his stay in Boston indicating that he probably had not travelled alone but had accompanied other fugitives from slavery including his brother Reuben (Amos Gilbert).

Oliver Gilbert probably spent more time with one of Boston's best-known black abolitionists than he did with all of the famous names he cited earlier. After he had left Timothy Gilbert, Oliver Gilbert described working for William Lloyd Garrison at the office of his newspaper "The Liberator" on Cornhill Street and for William I. Bowditch at his law office on Court Square. In both locations, Oliver Gilbert would have worked with William Cooper Nell, one of Boston's more prominent black activists, an author, an advocate for integrated schools and churches, and a temporary editor of Frederick Douglass' newspaper "The North Star." Nell was born free in Boston to William G. Nell, a black abolitionist originally from South Carolina, and Louise Cooper of Massachusetts. W.C. Nell began his employment at the Liberator office in 1840. In a letter of August, 1850, W.C. Nell told Amy Post that "the mantle of antislavery activities at 21 Cornhill has been placed upon my shoulders" in the absence of Garrison and others who had business elsewhere. William Cooper Nell was a devoted member of Garrison's circle and often sided with Garrison over Frederick Douglass. Nell also had clerked in Bowditch's law office expecting to be admitted to the practice of law in 1850, having received a certificate after 2 ½ years with Bowditch.²⁰ Oliver Gilbert described spending "a good many nights" at 26 Essex Street, the wealthy Wendell Phillips's home, with William Nell. It seems likely the two men were not house guests but were housesitting while Phillips and his wife were away. Nell spent many nights watching Phillips's house in the spring

¹⁹ Gilbert's stay with Deacon Timothy Gilbert was mentioned by Massachusetts abolitionist M.M. Fisher in his letter of March 23, 1893 to Wilbur Siebert of Ohio State University. American Antiquarian Society. Proceedings, New Series XLV, Pt.1 , pg.43. Wilbur Siebert solicited accounts of reputed Underground Railroad activity and his collection resides at the Ohio State Historical Society.

²⁰ William Cooper Nell: Selected Writings 1832-1874. Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press. Pg 261-262. Letter from Nell to Amy Post dated June 2, 1850, Boston.

and summer of 1853 after it had been burglarized in Phillips's absence. Nell maintained a long-term correspondence with Wendell Phillips whom he had regarded as his benefactor and "immutable friend." Through William Nell, Oliver Gilbert associated with the aristocracy of Boston abolitionists, both black and white. Nell corresponded with William Wells Brown and Harriet Jacobs among other prominent formerly enslaved people. Nell also served as a junior editor of Frederick Douglass's newspaper.

Nell would also have introduced Gilbert to the culture of mid-nineteenth century-Boston. In addition to holding offices in many reform organizations like the Colored Citizens of Boston, Nell attended lyceums where the literary giants of the day lectured on various topics. In 1849 he attended Ralph Waldo Emerson's lecture at the Town and Country Club where he collected admission fees. Nell was well-known for his attraction to spiritualism and communicating with the dead. He also described having his skull read by the Fowler brothers who had learned the science of phrenology at Amherst College. The brothers travelled and lectured on the science of self-knowledge and the effects of physiognomy of the head on the character. In 1841, the Fowler brothers gave Nell a flattering reading of his cranium, extolling his persistence at elevating himself in society, and implying that Nell had started out as inferior. Phrenology described one's potential abilities in racial and ethnic terms calling Africans, "full perceives, and large Tune and Language. But retiring Causality, and accordingly are deficient in reasoning capacity, yet have excellent memories and lingual and musical powers." This was popular science to which Oliver Gilbert was probably exposed. Although Gilbert appeared to inherit all of the strengths of a primarily oral culture, he could never be described as lacking reasoning abilities. Oliver Gilbert would encounter the study of phrenology again during his experiences in Lee, New Hampshire. Moses A. Cartland repeatedly expressed his enthusiasm for phrenology in his diary of 1850. Cartland wrote that twenty people in Lee had collected money to subscribe to the *Phrenological Journal* published by the Fowler brothers. Cartland said, "But Phrenology will triumph. Truth ever must."²¹

²¹ William Cooper Nell: Selected Writings 1832-1874.ed. by Dorothy Porter Wesley and Constance Porter Uzelac. Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 2002. Pg.267-268, 334, 342 various letters to Amy Post from Wendell Phillips' house. Pg. 250 letter to Amy Post dated Dec.1849. Fowler, O.S. and L.N.. The Illustrated Self-Instructor in Phrenology and Physiology, with One Hundred Engravings, and a Chart of the Character. NY: Fowler and Wells Publishers, 1855, pg.vii and 41. Cartland, Moses A. Diary for the Year 1850, transcribed by Mary Anne Lomison and used with her permission.

Historians have recognized that phrenology formed part of a gradual development of “scientific racism.” Defining the limitations of the other by physical characteristics is but one way in which some races tried to prove themselves to be inherently superior, whether consciously or not. The animalization of enslaved people since the beginnings of slavery ironically became the reason that the enslaved were deemed incapable of handling freedom.²² Racism whether scientific or not did not impede Oliver Gilbert in his life’s journey. Through his actions and his words, Gilbert expressed his cognizance of a cultural branding of inferiority that his race had experienced, but he never gave up on his dreams.

²² Davis, David Brion. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. Pg.7.

SYMBOLICAL HEAD.



NUMBERING AND DEFINITION OF THE ORGANS.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 AMATIVENESS, Sexual and connubial love. | 21. IDEALITY, Refinement—taste—purity. |
| 2 PHILOGENITIVENESS, Parental love. | B. SUBLIMITY, Love of grandeur. |
| 3 ADHESIVENESS, Friendship—sociability. | 22. IMITATION, Copying—patterning. |
| 4 UNION FOR LIFE, Love of one only. | 23. MIRTHFULNESS, Jocoseness—wit—fun. |
| 5 INHABITIVENESS, Love of home. | 24. INDIVIDUALITY, Observation. |
| 6 CONTINUITY, One thing at a time. | 25. FORM, Recollection of shape. |
| 7 CONTRASTIVENESS, Resistance—defence. | 26. SIZE, Measuring by the eye. |
| 8 DESTRUCTIVENESS, Executiveness—force. | 27. WEIGHT, Balancing—climbing. |
| 9 ALIMENTIVENESS, Appetite, hunger. | 28. COLOR, Judgment of colors. |
| 10 ACQUISITIVENESS, Accumulation. | 29. ORDER, Method—system—arrangement. |
| 11 SECRETIVENESS, Policy—management. | 30. CALCULATION, Mental arithmetic. |
| 12 CAUTIOUSNESS, Prudence, provision. | 31. LOCALITY, Recollection of places. |
| 13 APPROPRIATENESS, Ambition—display. | 32. EVENTUALITY, Memory of facts. |
| 14 SELF-ESTEEM, Self-respect—dignity. | 33. TIME, Cognizance of duration. |
| 15 FIRMNESS, Decision—perseverance. | 34. TUNE, Music—melody by ear. |
| 16 CONSCIENTIOUSNESS, Justice—equity. | 35. LANGUAGE, Expression of ideas. |
| 17 HOPE, Expectation—enterprise. | 36. CAUSALITY, Applying causes to effects. |
| 18 SPIRITUALITY, Intuition—spiritual revery. | 37. COMPARISON, inductive reasoning. |
| 19 VENERATION, Devotion—respect. | C. HUMAN NATURE, perception of motives. |
| 20 BENEVOLENCE, Kindness—goodness. | D. AGREEABLENESS, Pleasantness—suavity. |
| 20 Destructiveness, Mechanical ingenuity. | |

Figure 4. Description of the areas of the head that determined the relative strength of a person's qualities, from *The Illustrated Self-Instructor in Phrenology and Physiology*, by O.S. and L.N. Fowler. NY: Fowlers and Wells, 1855.

In addition to the daily activities of abolitionism in Boston, Oliver Gilbert wrote of being present at the capture of Shadrach Minkins. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 supported the capture and return to slavery of those who had escaped from bondage and were pursued by their “owners.” Federal marshalls were obligated by law to enforce the capture and return of fugitives and those who interfered were subject to stiff penalties. It was on February 15, 1851 when Shadrach Minkins, a fugitive from slavery in Norfolk, Virginia, waited on tables at Taft’s Cornhill Coffee House. Unbeknownst to him, two of his customers were federal marshals who promptly arrested him as an illegal fugitive and transported him to the local court house. Late morning on the day of cold rain mixed with snow, Oliver Gilbert said he was watching William Bowditch’s law office during lunch when he looked out the window and saw two white men walk by with a black man in custody. Gilbert described running to the “colored settlement on Southac Street” (later Phillips Street) to sound an alarm for help to save Minkins. Lewis Hayden is the black man credited by most sources as leading the crowd to save Minkins. Gilbert claimed the men and women of Southac Street followed him to the courthouse around noon. It’s likely that Gilbert did participate in the crowd that freed Minkins and whisked him to safety, although we don’t know how prominent a role he played in that action.

Gilbert escaped punishment for his involvement in the Minkins affair, but said that all of Boston’s formerly enslaved were:

...stirred up. Hundreds of fugitive slaves fled Boston after that. Some went to Canada, some to Halifax and some to St John’s N.B. and spent the remainder of their days there. My brother, Reuben, went to Halifax, N.S. from there to St. John’s N.B. where he married and settled in business. He died at Frederickton near St. Johns, 1853 with Cholera. He left a widow and two children (girls) one is married to a fur dealer in Halifax and the other to a book keeper at the United States Shirt and Collar Company, Troy, NY. I left Boston with a letter of introduction to Geo. Marshall, an Englishman, Oxfordshire (Eng.). I went as far as Halifax. We had a terrible time in a storm and gale at sea, the vessel came near being lost on the rocks known as “The Three Sisters.” We put in at Halifax and I changed my mind about going to

Oxfordshire.²³ When I returned to Boston the excitement was over and the rescue of Shadrach had somewhat quieted down. I remained with the abolitionists at 21 Cornhill. In April Thomas Sims, another fugitive slave was arrested in Boston and after a hurried and summary examination before Commissioner Curtis he was given to his pursuers. He was sent back. He was placed upon a vessel at midnight called "Acorn" owned by John H. Pierson, the mayor of Boston, attended by his Marshall Tuky and two or three hundred policemen, all heavily armed to send him back to bondage again. Thus I became alarmed and left Boston again, this time I went to New Hampshire, to Moses A. Cartland, a noted Abolitionist among the Granite Hills of N.H., six miles back from the So. New Market, called South Lee. Here I arrived on the 16th of April, 1851, about two o'clock in the morning. It had been snowing all day and it was very deep. Everybody at Mr. Cartland's house were asleep in bed. I aroused him and handed him Mr. Garrison's letter. He read it and bid me welcome to his home.

Gilbert wrote no details of his trip from Boston to Lee, New Hampshire other than that he was carrying a letter from William Lloyd Garrison. The Vigilance Committee of Boston records for March 31, 1851 list Gilbert as one of the men for whom William Nell was reimbursed for aiding. This was possibly money needed for his passage to Lee, N.H. Nell was one of several black men who worked directly with fugitives while white abolitionists raised money for the cause. In his letter to Wilbur Siebert, an early historian of the Underground Railroad at Ohio State University, M.M. Fisher of Massachusetts recalled that in Ipswich and Newburyport there were men who moved fugitives out of Massachusetts. Richard Plumer, a merchant and Garrisonian abolitionist at 63 Federal Street in Newburyport, was said to have received those fleeing from Ipswich and moved them on to a Mr Jackman to the north. Jackman was said to have transported the fugitives to Lee, New Hampshire. Plumer was believed to have transported some people

²³ Oliver Gilbert, Labourer aged 23 is listed in the passenger records of the Brig Belle out of Halifax for Boston in 1851. Accessed at [http://immigrantships.net/halifaxlists/halifaxarr_depart_01.html#1852ISTG Halifa 1851-1872](http://immigrantships.net/halifaxlists/halifaxarr_depart_01.html#1852ISTG%20Halifa%201851-1872). African Americans had been moving to the Atlantic provinces of Canada since the American Revolution when many of them sided with the British in exchange for promises of freedom. Gilbert originally headed for England where he had hoped to find freedom as others had done before him.

to Amesbury where he left them with agents of the poet John Greenleaf Whittier, a cousin of the Cartland family in Lee. Other names were mentioned with routes to Epping, NH and on to Moses Sawyer at North Weare, at whose home Frederick Douglass was believed to have worked on one of his autobiographies. Moses Cartland had spent time teaching in Weare and was acquainted with Moses Sawyer who occasionally visited Lee. The participation of those mentioned in these accounts of aiding fugitives from slavery is not known to have been verified and cannot be treated as fact until verified.²⁴ The early historians of the movement to aide fugitives from slavery focused on the work of white people, while the Black History movement later swung the emphasis to the work of black people and the agency of the fugitives themselves. Now the “Underground Railroad” is viewed as a cooperative effort between whites and blacks with both playing important roles.

Lee, New Hampshire

When Oliver Gilbert arrived at the Cartlands’ Walnut Grove Farm in Lee, New Hampshire, he entered the mid-nineteenth-century world of educated, reformist Quakers who networked with like people across the Northeast and beyond. Moses A. Cartland was a Quaker educator and anti-slavery activist as well as a political reformer and journalist. Cartland’s cousin, poet John Greenleaf Whittier, had edited the newspaper *The Pennsylvania Freeman* for the American Antislavery Society for several years when he published a paragraph in the October 10, 1839 issue indicating that Moses A. Cartland had temporarily taken over the abolitionist paper until a replacement could be found.²⁵ In 1840, Cartland was invited to take over as editor of *The Pennsylvania Freeman* for his cousin John Greenleaf Whittier during Whittier’s ill health,

²⁴ American Antiquarian Society. Proceedings, New Series XLV, Pt.1 , pg.57. The Account Book of Francis Jackson, Treasurer, 1850-1861, the Vigilance Committee of Boston. Bostonian Society, 1924 reprint. Pg.14. Also available at: <http://www.primaryresearch.org/bh/vcaccountbooks/vcaccountbooks.pdf>.

²⁵ Cartland edited the paper from July-September of 1839.

but he declined the position fearing that voicing his opinions might conflict with the tenets of the Society of Friends.²⁶ Whittier would later warn Cartland to “beware of the elders,” presaging Cartland’s eventual split with the Dover, N.H. Meeting. John Greenleaf Whittier was also a financial supporter of the Boston Vigilance Committee that had financed Gilbert’s trip to Lee. Jonathan Cartland joined his brother in political and social activism in New Hampshire; sisters Anna and Phebe Cartland attended women’s reform conferences and were said to have taught literacy to those who stayed with them and worked for them. Joseph Cartland and his wife Gertrude Whittier were educators who settled in Newburyport, Massachusetts after a history of teaching in various Quaker schools. Although Gilbert’s description of his arrival in Lee reads like the ubiquitous mythology of the Underground Railroad—arrived at 2am in a heavy snow storm—in fact, historical weather reports support his claim. And those who live in the area know that a snow storm in April is no unusual occurrence in New Hampshire. Gilbert had travelled from the Walnut Grove of his childhood in slavery to the Walnut Grove of his journey in search of freedom.

The Cartlands operated the Walnut Grove Quaker School across the dirt road from their home where many long-term students boarded. Moses Cartland was teaching in Lee from 1848 to 1853, the period during which Oliver Gilbert sought refuge there. During the winter months, sleighs and horse-drawn carriages transported the travelers from the railroad in nearby New Market. Quakers from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and greater distances sent their children to be educated at the Walnut Grove School under the guidance of a family that had extensive experience in education at the Haverford School in Pennsylvania and the Moses Brown School in Rhode Island. Although the Cartland family was careful not to leave any contemporary trace of their activities with fugitives from slavery, people associated with them were not as circumspect. Members of the Quaker Rowell family of Loudon, New Hampshire attended the Walnut Grove School in Lee at various times as did some of their friends. A young woman named Clara who boarded at the Cartland school wrote from Lee to

²⁶ Whittier served as editor of *The Pennsylvania Freeman* from 1838-1840. Beginning in 1847, Whittier was editor of Gamaliel Bailey's *The National Era*, an abolitionist newspaper. Moses Cartland also wrote for *the National Era*. Whittier, J.G., Letter to Moses A. Cartland. Philadelphia, October 31, 1839. Whittier and the Cartlands, ed. by Martha Hale Shackford, Wakefield, MA: Montrose Press, 1950. Page 8-9.

Sarah Rowell that:

O I must tell you we have a Fugitive Slave here with us-he's from Boston-he's been here two or three days-some of the abolitionists in Boston sent him to Moses – as the officers were around picking them up-I don't know what his name is-but he is quite a smart fellow. He left a wife and child-Don't let any one see this for fear some one will find out where he is and then I don't know what would be done Moses thinks it will not be well for them to come after him I don't think it would either burn this as soon as you get it and then there will be no danger.

The former slave mentioned was probably not Oliver Gilbert because we don't know that he left a wife and child behind, but this letter confirms that at the time the Cartlands were helping other fugitives from slavery.²⁷

“Moses is a sort of Autocrat in the community in matters of Taste, Literature, politics, & Abolition,” said John Greenleaf Whittier of his cousin Moses Cartland.²⁸ Oliver Gilbert wrote that he participated in a school session at Moses Cartland's school the next morning after his arrival. Phrenology, letter-writing, grammar, geology, arithmetic and Bible studies were all part of the curriculum in Lee. The students also participated in evening lyceums where various speakers debated the topics of the day. In 1850, there were sixty scholars in the school, forty of whom were boarding with the Cartlands. The Cartland home bustled with activity. One evening in 1850, Moses Cartland described fifty people as gathered in the family “Mansion” of boarders. The majority of students were young men, but six were young women, not common at the time. Moses Cartland espoused his support for literature, anti-slavery, temperance, the intelligence of women, a free mail system, and other causes. He warned his students against drinking, dancing, novel-reading, card-playing, and the “soulless corporations” that could devour them. Jonathan Thompson, an instructor in the school, also noted in his diary that a fugitive slave had spoken in the school. Again no name was mentioned and the person

²⁷ Letter from Clara to Sarah Rowell, Lee, N.H., March 2nd, year illegible. Rowell Family Papers, 1846-1894, (bulk 1849-1853), MSS 511, Rowell Family papers, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

²⁸ Whittier, John G., Letter to Elizabeth Lloyd, Amesbury, MA. November, 2, 1840. Published in “Elizabeth Lloyd and the Whittiers, a Budget of Letters edited by Thomas Franklin Currier. Harvard University Press, 1939, page 36.

who spoke could have been Frederick Douglass who visited at Moses Cartland's invitation several times and spoke to Cartland's pupils.²⁹ This notation is further confirmation of the Cartland's activities with fugitives from slavery.

In addition to speaking to the students, Oliver Gilbert apparently cooked for the Cartland family during his approximately two-year stay there.³⁰ It's clear that Gilbert did not hide from anyone while staying at Lee. He used his oratorical and household skills in his stay in Lee where he finally felt safe. In Lee, he was exposed to the nineteenth-century culture of white Quaker reformers. In his correspondence with the Cartland family decades later, Oliver Gilbert indicated that he had remained eternally grateful for their assistance. Although he would go on to live a life very different from theirs, Gilbert called the Cartlands "noble friends and abolitionists."³¹ In the surviving copies of letters that Gilbert wrote to the Cartland family in the late nineteenth century, he recalled that Anna and Phebe Cartland had taught him to read. Gilbert was impressed that the "fine of \$1000.00 and six months in prison for harboring a slave" made no difference to Moses Cartland.³²

²⁹ Diary of Jonathan Thompson, private collection.

³⁰ Letter from Mrs. George O. Durrell (Ann Jane Jewell) stating that she was at the school at the time and remembered a colored man by the name of Oliver who was a cook. Dover, NH: Fosters Daily Democrat, July 26, 1910. Moses Cartland diary for 1850.

³¹ Gilbert, Oliver. Untitled narrative. Page 42. Gilbert family collection. Diary of Jonathan Thompson. Private Collection.

³² Gilbert, O.C.. Letters to Phebe Cartland and Charles Sumner Cartland dated January 10, 1898 and July 22, 1902. Private collection of Cartland descendants. Used with permission.

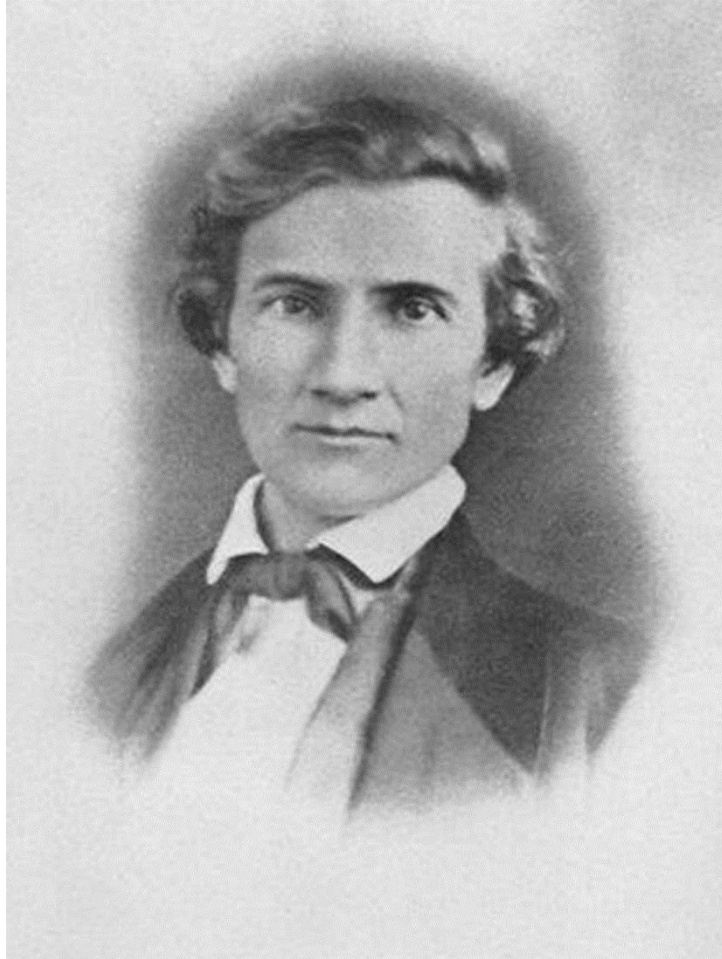


Fig.5. Moses Cartland

As kind as the Cartland family was to Oliver Gilbert, he must have been both a curiosity and an abolitionist's prize to the people of Lee, New Hampshire. Despite his welcome by well-meaning people, Gilbert remained the "other" in a world of white people. In speaking before students and local citizens, the performer in Oliver Gilbert likely relished the attention he garnered. Gilbert probably began his lecturing career in Lee, where the Cartlands held regular evening lyceums and brought guest speakers for the Quaker school. However, Gilbert would have found no community of individuals from similar backgrounds in Lee as he had found in Boston. He was undeniably different in color, in background, and in education. The thread that tied these people together was their opposition to slavery in the South. New Hampshire had both literally and figuratively buried its own history of slavery by that time. A few people formerly enslaved in New Hampshire and their descendants still lived in the state but they had been

marginalized for the most part. Slavery had become a sectional and national political issue not a New England issue, and Moses Cartland became fully involved by writing for national publications and running for public office. Abolitionists in Pennsylvania knew his name as did those in New York State, Massachusetts, and Maryland. Cartland was published in national newspapers and a frequent contributor to the *New Hampshire Patriot*.³³ He served as head of the New Hampshire delegation to the convention in Buffalo that nominated Martin Van Buren for the Free Soil candidate for the presidency in 1848.³⁴ Oliver Gilbert certainly observed the Cartland family's strong commitment to using literacy and politics as tools for fighting slavery. He would later take an active part in promoting political and legal reform for the people of his community.

Oliver Gilbert was probably influenced by the Cartland family in many ways including political activism and literacy, although he never heeded Cartland's warnings about dancing and an overabundance of music. Moses Cartland was a staunch proponent of letter-writing and his students both sent letters out and received letters in return from family, friends, and recipients of assigned projects in the school. Cartland even wrote a humorous poem about the local postmaster's fondness for large amounts of mail.³⁵ What we know of Oliver Gilbert comes partly from the letters he wrote to William Lloyd Garrison, the Cartland family, and former Maryland Governor Edwin S. Warfield. Toward the latter part of his life Oliver Gilbert wrote many letters as well as visiting the sites where he had travelled during his journey toward freedom. Through his letters saved by the Cartland family, his name has persisted in the history of Lee, NH.³⁶

During his time in Lee, Oliver Gilbert said he first learned of the location of his sister Sarah who had run away from Maryland circa 1841. She was in Plymouth, Massachusetts and he met with her before he returned to Boston. When Gilbert escaped, he left five sisters in slavery-Louisa, Betty, Mary, Alice, and Isabella. Brothers Remus, Reuben, and sister Sarah had escaped. Betty ended up living next to her mother in Maryland. Isabella was probably brought to Boston from Maryland through the efforts of William Lloyd Garrison, J. Miller McKim, Theodore Parker, and Wendell Phillips. Gilbert said he

³³ Moses Cartland served as Washington correspondent for the *The National Era* and *The Independent Democrat*.

³⁴ *New Hampshire Patriot*. Concord, NH. Published by William Butterfield and John Hill.

³⁵ Cartland, Moses A. Diary for 1850. Used with permission of Mary Anne Lomison, the copyright holder.

³⁶ Stephanie Gilbert has retraced Oliver's journey and met and corresponded with Cartland descendants as well as visiting the Cartland house.

approached a black friend in Boston (probably William J. Watkins originally from Maryland) to arrange the passage for Isabella. On March 19, 1853, William Lloyd Garrison wrote to J. Miller McKim that he had been approached by “a very worthy colored young man, (a fugitive slave from Maryland) who has a sister at Baltimore, also a slave.” Garrison assured McKim there would be no risk of detection if he would follow instructions to get the girl out of Baltimore and on to Boston. Isabella was light-skinned and blue-eyed, according to Gilbert and to family lore, making her escape seem easier to accomplish, and despite many difficulties she did reunite with Gilbert. The entry for July 28, 1853 in the account book of the Boston Vigilance Committee reads “Oliver C. Gilbert for his sister from Baltimore \$30.00.” According to Gilbert, Isabella died in 1882 in Baltimore. She had worked for a Dr. Ryder before returning to Maryland.³⁷ The details of this exchange help to explain Gilbert’s lasting affection for the prominent abolitionists who had helped him.

Finding Community

As comfortable as Oliver Gilbert may have felt in Lee, he would have missed the African-American friends and community he had in Boston. There were descendants of New Hampshire’s enslaved people living in the area near Lee, New Hampshire at the time, but there is no evidence that Gilbert ever came into contact with them. After about two years in Lee, Oliver Gilbert thought things had calmed down in Boston and returned to live there. He guessed wrong in that case. In his narrative, he describes the recapture of Anthony Burns in 1854, the last rendition of a fugitive slave from Boston. Gilbert said he was a coworker with abolitionists in Boston at the time and remained there for a few years (he said until 1860). In the latter half of Gilbert’s life, he focused on family, music, activism, and revisiting his past through lecturing, corresponding and travelling. He wrote about his life and hoped that his story would be published. His life adventures had shaped his identity as a free black man seeking the freedom he knew he deserved as a human being. He did not want the history of slavery to be forgotten like

³⁷ The Account Book of Francis Jackson, Treasurer, 1850-1861, the Vigilance Committee of Boston. Bostonian Society, 1924. Garrison to J. Miller McKim, March 19, 1853 in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: From Disunionism to the Brink of War: 1850-1860*, ed. by Louis Ruchames, 6 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 4:54.

other the men and women who wrote of their experiences in slavery after Emancipation.³⁸

By June 1854, Gilbert was lecturing on the “recent slave hunt in Boston” at the Zion Church in Rochester, New York. A newspaper account described Gilbert’s speech as “a thrilling account of those murderous proceedings.”³⁹ His lecturing career must not have been profitable, because in July 1855, a man named O.C. Gilbert was accused of begging on the streets of Rochester, New York. William J. Watkins, junior editor of *Frederick Douglass Paper* at the time and born free in Maryland, lashed out at the beggars who claimed to be collecting money to save others from slavery while pocketing it themselves. Watkins called them “either ashamed or too lazy to work.” Since Watkins had never been enslaved, he was being a bit presumptuous in criticizing those trying to find a way out of it. Watkin’s critique evidently had no effect since in December 1855, a man from Troy, New York wrote to the paper to expose O.C. Gilbert as “a base imposter.” Watkins again lashed out saying he had known Gilbert for six years and had warned him against such behavior. He provided a physical description of Gilbert to aid the public in protecting themselves from such thievery. Gilbert was described as, “a large robust man, about 5 feet nine or ten inches in height, dark brown or black complexion, partially bald, and quite bow-legged.” Members of the Gilbert family did remember Oliver Gilbert as dark and bowlegged. Gilbert did what he deemed necessary in order to survive. Finding paying work was difficult for a black man in the mid-nineteenth century Northeast. Gilbert would find creative ways to support himself and his young family in upper New York State.

³⁸ From *Bondage to Belonging: the Worcester Slave Narratives*, ed. by B. Eugene McCarthy and Thomas L. Doughton. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007. Pg.li-ii.

³⁹ *Frederick Douglass Paper*, June 30, 1854. Carol Hunter found that some African Americans who took to begging had actually been hired by proslavery activists to give former slaves a bad reputation. Bishop Loguen had been discounted as a dangerous vagrant primarily because he remained the cornerstone of aid to the formerly enslaved in New York State. Many of his funds came from Ladies’ Aid Societies but money was always in short supply. The black poor were easily discounted by adversaries as worthless, lazy, and dangerous.



Fig.6 Maria Gilbert. Gilbert Family Collection.

Family would be important to Oliver Gilbert. By 1861, he was still in New York State where he had married Maria Thompson, a younger woman from New York State who was of mixed race. In Saratoga Springs, New York during the 1860's and 1870's, Gilbert and his wife managed a boarding house in a building owned by another black man, John Wood, who listed his occupation as barber.⁴⁰ Saratoga Springs had a long history as a resort town with the first hotel in the United States built there in 1802. The location would have provided Gilbert with service work related to the tourist industry in its several large hotels, as well as a community in northern New York State where African Americans had long agitated for equal rights. Gilbert listed his occupation to census takers as musician, although newspaper accounts indicate that he ran the Gilbert Hotel in Woods's property. He also ran an ice cream shop. Bishop Jermain Loguen, who

⁴⁰ United States Census. New York State. 1870. Saratoga County, Saratoga Springs, p.70, lines 21-26.

wrote his own account of his enslavement and was ordained by the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1842, stayed at the Gilbert Hotel. Loguen, who lived in Syracuse, NY, was well-known for his prominent participation in the rescue of Jerry Henry from men who intended to capture him in Syracuse in October, 1850, and return him to slavery. Frederick Douglass also stayed with Gilbert in Saratoga Springs.⁴¹ Gilbert wrote that he ran the boarding house business “for the Elite of the land.”⁴²

Loguen and Douglass both were among the African-American leaders who led regular conventions of their peers aimed at securing suffrage and freedom and opposing colonization and the Fugitive Slave law. Both also travelled extensively on the abolitionist lecture circuit. Besides hosting the preeminent black lecturers on the anti-slavery circuit, the Gilbert House hosted its share of fun. The gossip column in the local newspaper reported that “a Hop was enjoyed” by the guests of the Gilbert House on a Monday evening in August of 1871. Gilbert did not neglect to mention the prominent people “of the more favored race in Saratoga” whom he numbered among his friends. Specifically, he listed Waldo Potter, David Ritchie and Benjamin Judson, editors and publishers of the *Daily Saratogian*, as well as Mr. and Mrs. David Holland and the late judge General George Bachelor. Oliver Gilbert remembered them “with a lively satisfaction” always cognizant of the importance of maintaining important connections in the white community. From singing at the Methodist camp meeting (from which he escaped) to dancing and singing in his boarding house and then on to a touring career as the Gilbert Family Singers, music remained central to Gilbert’s life and the lives of his children.

Ironically, during the time Gilbert spent in Saratoga Springs, many of those who vacationed there were wealthy slaveholders from the South. Paul Cameron, of North Carolina, was dismayed to find that that “nearly every male servant at one hotel was a runaway slave from the South.” Saratoga Springs, Boston, New York, and Newport were the favorite vacation spots for many of the elite planters of the Deep South. The Heyward and Pringle families, prominent members of South Carolina’s slaveholding

⁴¹ Loguen, J.W. (Jermain Wesley). “The Rev. J.W. Loguen as a Slave and as a Freeman. A Narrative of Real Life.” Syracuse, NY: J.G.K. Truair & Co., 1859. *The Saratogian*. Saratoga Springs, NY. Aug. 31, 1871 and Dec. 14, 1871.

⁴² Gilbert memoir, pg.46. Dr. Carol Hunter thoroughly covers the African-American political and religious activism in northern New York State in her book *To Set the Captives Free*. Hyrax Publishing, 2013. 2nd Edition.

society, spent extended vacations in Saratoga Springs as well as Boston and Newport.⁴³ Escaping to the North did not mean that former slaves would escape all contact with their former oppressors. In Gilbert's case, he would later even correspond with the family who had once enslaved him.

Singing and Lecturing

Gilbert and his family travelled to Philadelphia in 1876 to the visit the centennial celebrations of the founding of the nation that was to be devoted to the equality of all men. Not long after, the family moved from Saratoga Springs to Philadelphia where he said they dedicated their time to Christian work in temperance and in the progress of freedom. The Philadelphia City Directory for 1879 lists Gilbert as a lecturer whose home was at 1943 North 20th Street. Gilbert's devotion to temperance and universal emancipation took the form of lecturing and singing his messages across the Northeast. "As the children grew, we formed ourselves into a family of singers and became noted far and near as such. Thus making a national reputation few colored singers are better known throughout the land than the famous Gilbert family." Gilbert said he did the public speaking in the interest of "the colored and the elevation of our people."

The Gilbert family of singers promoted the temperance movement as a means of proving the virtue of their race. Many African Americans recognized the importance of their remaining free from dependence on alcohol if they were ever to achieve the more important goals of suffrage and respect as free and equal citizens. In 1882, the family sang for over three months in Providence under the management of the Temperance Movement Gospel. The optimist in Gilbert recalled that, "Our efforts proved a great success, almost revolutionized the liquor traffic in that state." Gilbert mentioned several leaders in the movement: "the reformed drunkard" Thomas W. Doughty, the late Dr. Fulton, and Neal Dow, although he did not specify his associations with them. Neal Dow was the force behind Maine's legal prohibition of the sale of alcohol except

⁴³ Scarborough, William Kauffman. *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth Century South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003.

for medicinal, mechanical, or manufacturing purposes in 1851. A number of states followed by 1855 although Rhode Island would not adopt such a law until decades later.

Temperance was considered to be one of the moral reforms that blacks should embrace in order to elevate themselves to moral superiority as a means of becoming accepted by white people. One justification for slavery had been that black people were inherently inferior and needed the “protection” and guidance of whites. As early as 1834, William Whipper told the Philadelphia Colored Temperance Society that black men must become morally superior if they were ever to be accepted by whites. Lyman Beecher had earlier compared the social devastation of intemperance to that of the slave trade. Different classes, genders and races all weighed in differently on the subject of intemperance, but Oliver Gilbert seems to have followed his Methodist experiences and the advice of William Whipper in aiming for moral perfection.⁴⁴

Additional performances of the Gilbert family singers included: forty consecutive nights at Rand’s Opera House, Troy, NY; ten nights at the town hall in Saratoga Springs; seven nights at Bradley’s Opera House, Fort Edward, NY; and the Masonic Temple at 23rd Street and 6th Avenue in New York City. The 1875 Masonic Temple at 23rd and 6th had just been finished in 1875 and was an imposing five story granite structure. The Grand Lodge Room that held up to 1,000 people could be rented for lectures and church services.⁴⁵ This was an impressive venue indeed for Oliver Gilbert and his family.

Appearances indicate that the family performed to sympathetic audiences in locations where abolitionists had lived and worked. The Gilbert family performed in Monson, Massachusetts (near Springfield) in 1888 where Gilbert lectured on the progress of freedmen and their schools in the Methodist church, accompanied by a few gospel selections and followed by a full family concert the next evening. Monson was home to Monson Academy where suffragist and abolitionist Lucy Stone attended school. Lucy Stone organized the Worcester, Massachusetts Women’s Rights Conference in 1850 that was attended by William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Abby Kelly Foster, the women of the Cartland family, and a number of the most prominent of the white abolitionists. Stone also edited *The Woman’s Journal*, the newspaper of the

⁴⁴ Dorsey, Bruce. *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*. Cornell University Press, 2006. p. 123

⁴⁵ <http://daytoninmanhattan.blogspot.com/2012/10/the-lost-1875-masonic-temple-23rd.html>.

American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). A year later the Gilbert family performed at the Poultney, Vermont Methodist Church with a lecture on “slavery days.” Temperance and labor union advocate, founder and editor of the *New York Tribune* Horace Greeley had attended school and had apprenticed at a newspaper in Poultney. Moses Cartland knew Horace Greeley, who was born in Amherst, New Hampshire, and wrote for his paper on occasion. In 1890 in New York, Oliver Gilbert attended a “grove meeting conducted by Miss Gabrielle Greely [daughter of Horace Greeley] in a pine grove planted by her father 40 years earlier. Among attendees are old, personal friends of Mr. Greely. Among those present was O.C. Gilbert, once a Maryland slave. Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Greely were warm friends. Mr. Gilbert was visiting with his family and was invited to attend the grove meeting, where he sang jubilee songs.”⁴⁶ Gilbert did indeed have important connections far and wide.

Through the 1890’s, the Gilberts visited Worcester, Massachusetts, St. Alban’s Vermont, New Jersey, and other locations in New York State where he was variously described in newspaper accounts as “colored” and a “former slave.” Their songs became described as “plantation songs” or a “plantation shout” by the early twentieth century. The venues were usually Methodist or Baptist churches or an occasional Masonic lodge. The *Trenton Evening Times* in New Jersey described his visit to Allentown in 1908 as follows:

The Rev. Oliver Gilbert, of Philadelphia, an old negro slave, gave a very interesting lecture Tuesday evening, in the basement of the M.E. Church. A silver collection was taken, which was given to Mr. Gilbert to help educate his son, for the work among negroes in the South.

Gilbert was still identified as a “negro slave”, partly because he made his living with that persona and partly because he was still a curiosity and the “other” to his white audiences on the opposite side of America’s racial divide. He did not want memories of the horrors of slavery to disappear from the nation’s history despite an official end to slavery. His goal of becoming truly free would prove elusive, but he continued to pursue not only what he called “the improvement of my race” but the rights due to him and his community as citizens.

⁴⁶ *New York Tribune*, August 6, 1890.

Gilbert solicited letters from the organizers at the various venues where he performed as proof of his experiences. In 1907, John Loeffler, pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Attica, New York, responded with a lengthy description of the worth of Gilbert's performance. Loeffler wrote:

If you are looking for something almost unique, and like a page torn from the faithful record of the Past; you may certainly find what you want in the delightful evenings that the Gilberts can give you! Oliver C. Gilbert draws wonderful pictures of the days "fo 'da wa.'" Last night a large and appreciative audience heard the singing- so full of the heart-stirring cadences of the long ago- in the church of which the writer is Pastor....For a reminder to those who lived in the generation to which Mr. Oliver belongs, and as a revelation to the children and youth of the present day, the Gilberts should be heard in every community of the Northland.

Loeffler followed with a postscript stating that he lived 16 years in the South and knew whereof he spoke.

Politics

Before Gilbert left Saratoga Springs, he participated in the Colored Labor Convention of 1870. Gilbert was named to the executive committee of the State Labor Union along with Henry Highland Garnett and seven others including several doctors and a reverend. The *New York Herald* described the meeting as follows:

In the deliberations of the Convention many of the delegates displayed to great advantage the faculties given them, and it is but fair to say that their knowledge of debate and their intellectual character has been demonstrated to such a degree that it is beyond question that many of them are equal in expression, equal in ability to defend their rights and institutions to many of the white political stump speakers in the land who are “cracked up” as being able to control public opinion.⁴⁷

The newspaper continued by stating that participants did not claim to be omnipotent and only hoped to work quietly to be heard when they spoke to the Senate. In other words, the participants were well-behaved, more intelligent than most had expected, and would not be the cause of any violent radical actions. There would be no cause for worry on the part of white citizens. There should be no revolutions or violent uprisings on the part of this group. The possibility of former slaves wreaking vengeance for their treatment never really totally disappeared from the minds of white men. In the August 25, 1870 issue of the same newspaper, it was noted that, “the character of the assembled delegates rather surprised the “white gemmen” present, as did the rather elaborate toiletted “colored sisters” that aided by their encouraging smiles the work of the morning.” The women’s movement had far to go for whites and for blacks. Men would gain the right to vote in 1870, but women both black and white had a long road ahead before they would reach that goal.

⁴⁷ “The Colored Labor Convention. The deliberations of our Colored Citizens—the Officers of the State Labor Union. *New York Herald*, August 27, 1870, vol. 35, issue 239, pg.8.

Literacy and Correspondence

Oliver Gilbert wrote letters. His many letters that have survived to the Cartlands, to William Lloyd Garrison, and to the Hon. Edwin Warfield, Governor of Maryland, complement his memoir as a source of his thoughts and feelings.

Early in the resort season of 1874, William Lloyd Garrison visited Saratoga Springs and Lake George with his youngest son. Gilbert said, “William Lloyd Garrison the great abolitionist and his youngest son, Franklin, paid us a very agreeable visit while we lived at Saratoga and on his return to Boston wrote me a beautiful letter and sent me fine photographs of Lucretia Mott, Wendell Phillips, and himself on the 18th of July 1874.” It’s not known exactly when Garrison was there, but two letters between Gilbert and Garrison have survived. Gilbert’s letter to Garrison dated July 22, 1874 is located in the Garrison Collection at Boston Public Library. A copy of Garrison’s letter to Gilbert dated July 18, 1874 resides in the Gilbert Family Papers Private Collection. Besides thanking Garrison for providing him with photographs of Wendell Phillips and Lucretia Mott (this one signed), Gilbert effusively praised Garrison as a great man and predicted his triumph on Judgment Day. He said, “Saratoga no longer wears the Slave collar and a Black man can now walk the streets of Saratoga Springs without fear of being recognized by some slave holders from whom he had made his escape.” A black man needn’t have been a former slave to be captured in Saratoga Springs at one time, as free black man Solomon Northrop discovered in 1841. Gilbert later requested more photographs from Garrison—one of Theodore Parker for himself and others to be purchased for the editor of the *Daily Saratogian* newspaper.⁴⁸ Both Gilbert and Garrison would have been saddened by the recent deaths of William C. Nell and J. Miller McKim. Religious and dramatic, Gilbert’s writing contrasted starkly with Garrison’s approach to letter-writing. Garrison wrote of his “great pleasure” of seeing Gilbert and his family under their own roof with no fear of slave hunters. He predicted that by the time he wrote, Saratoga’s “immense hotels and numerous boarding houses” must be crowded beyond their

⁴⁸ The photographs would have been the standard images prominent abolitionists sold to make money for the cause.

capacity, mentioning specifically the Continental, perhaps where he had stayed. Garrison gave the Gilberts his best regards and hoped for their prosperous future.

Oliver Gilbert's correspondence was not limited to Garrison. In 1876, Gilbert sent a copy of the newspaper *The Progressive American* to Dr. William Watkins in Maryland. Gilbert wanted his former enslavers to know that he had been active in organizing African-American voters in New York among his other accomplishments. He received a polite reply from Watkins's son (the elder Watkins was ill) praising his accomplishments and inviting him to visit. It would be eight years before Gilbert accepted that invitation and returned to "Dixie after an absence of thirty years to the place where I was born." Although William Watkins had since died, Gilbert did meet with some members of the family who had enslaved him including Maryland Governor Edwin Warfield Sr., grandson of Col. Gassaway Watkins and nephew of Dr. William Watkins. After visiting Warfield in his office, Gilbert began a decade-long correspondence with the Governor who was a child at the time his family had "owned" Gilbert's family.⁴⁹ Warfield would never treat Oliver Gilbert as his equal, instead he still felt obliged to help care for Gilbert and did send money to help with medical expenses at Gilbert's request. His justification of his families' enslavement of others as inferior beings unequipped for freedom persisted from earlier years. Slave-owners commonly believed the inherent inferiority of the very people whom they had treated as animals was a primary justification for slavery. Their correspondence ended with Gilbert's death in 1912. Maria, his widow, and Leon, his son, then needed the money for Gilbert's funeral expenses.

Gilbert seems to have sought out surviving abolitionists in areas where he had travelled. In records solicited for Prof. Wilbur Siebert of Ohio State University, Massachusetts abolitionist M.M. Fisher described talking to Oliver Cromwell Gilbert in March of 1893. Fisher said Gilbert listed the following names as living references for Underground Railroad information: Mrs. Melissa Dawes of East Cummington, Mass.; Fred Douglass of Washington, D.C.; and Robert Purvis of Philadelphia. Fisher said Gilbert would be willing to share more information "for pay." He described Gilbert as "very intelligent, great memory, is educating a son here for Southern Question and work

⁴⁹ For details of the correspondence, see Fernald, Jody. "In Slavery and in Freedom: Oliver C. Gilbert and Edwin Warfield Sr.," *Maryland Historical Magazine*. Baltimore, Maryland: Maryland Historical Society, volume 106, no.2 (Summer 2011). P.140-161.

South with the Freedmen.”⁵⁰ In many locations where Gilbert performed, admission was not charged but collections were taken to help educate his son to work with southern Freedmen.

Oliver Gilbert also visited Lee, New Hampshire in 1902, probably for a second time, with his son Leon and exchanged letters with the Cartland family several times. Two letters from Gilbert survived, one to Phebe Cartland in 1898 and one in 1902 to Charles Sumner Cartland, her nephew. Two years after Gilbert began a correspondence with Edwin Warfield Sr., a descendant of the Watkins family who had enslaved Gilbert, he was also corresponding with the Cartland family of Lee, New Hampshire with whom he had stayed when on the run from slavery. Gilbert had visited the Cartlands recently and promised Phebe Cartland that he would write to her in the future.

After reporting to Phebe Cartland that he and his son Leon had arrived home safely, Gilbert reminisced about the passage of time. According to his memory, it had been forty-six years since he had stayed in Lee the first time as a young man seeking a new life. In 1898, he was probably in his mid-sixties with thoughts of the end of life hanging over him (although he would live almost two more decades.) He said to Phebe, “We are fast hasting to our final home. Things that know us now will soon know us no more forever.” Although Gilbert had pleasant recollections, he acknowledged that things had changed in the interim of years. Moses and Jonathan Cartland had died. Moses died in 1863 of pneumonia and Jonathan died in 1885. Both men were the public face of the Cartlands’ abolitionism, temperance, and other reform causes of the nineteenth century. Their sisters Anna and Phebe participated in women’s conferences and ran the household, so they undoubtedly had much close contact with any fugitives who stayed at the house.

Oliver Gilbert returned to thank those who had assisted him and to show those who had enslaved him how successful he had become. Although Gilbert recalled fond memories to the Watkins and Warfield relatives of his enslavers, he was careful to stand his ground when they recalled how well they had treated their slaves. Gilbert recalled specific incidences of physical and psychological abuse in his correspondence with

⁵⁰ Siebert Collection. Ohio Historical Society. Letter from M.M. Fisher to Mr. Pierce. Massachusetts, Suffolk County, March 23, 1893.

Edwin Warfield. He also said to Warfield that he recalled Colonel Watkins speaking before him as a child:

I...heard the Colonel, time and time again, give his thrilling reminiscences of the daring and bloody conflicts he had in the Revolutionary struggle. Perhaps he thought me too ignorant to understand his talk.

Conclusion

The fascinating details of Oliver Gilbert's life notwithstanding, Gilbert's story also contributes to the greater picture of slavery in the United States and the lasting effects it had on American culture.

Gilbert owed his life in freedom to the aid of free African Americans and white abolitionists. Both black and white abolitionists played significant roles in his escape. Ironically, many of those abolitionists had once been colonizationists who would have sent him to a separate black colony in Liberia had he escaped a few decades earlier. Fate dealt him a different hand and he made a way for himself in a culture that has never made its peace with race or its history of slavery.

As an enslaved child and young man, Oliver Gilbert slept in a barn as domesticated animals would have done. He faced the prospect of being sold in the manner of livestock. He endured racism endemic in American culture throughout his life, but he never forgot the advice given him by Quaker Hannah Gibbons, "Now that thee is free, thee must respect thyself and thee will always be respected." Mrs. Gibbons was hopeful but perhaps overly optimistic.

The Revolutionary War awakened enslaved people to their right to a life in freedom. Both enslaved men and free blacks fought in that war with expectations of freedom after a victory for the colonists (or fought for the British who had promised them freedom). Petitions from the enslaved seeking legal freedom were filed in the

eighteenth century in multiple states, including New Hampshire. Abraham Lincoln “stressed in 1858 that the natural rights of the Declaration of Independence applied to blacks,” although he had no solution to the problem of integrating freed slaves. Lincoln ended up advocating the colonization of blacks.⁵¹ As Vermont black clergyman Lemuel Haynes wrote, “Twas an Exelent note that I lately Read in a modern piece, and it was this. ‘O when shall America be consistantly Engaged in the Cause of Liberty?’” In addition to his clerical position in Vermont, Haynes had served as a minuteman in the Revolutionary War and felt that the world was changing around him. Unfortunately neither his military service nor his religious beliefs would lead to the successful incorporation of African Americans into the new country by the time of his death in 1833.⁵² Decades later, Oliver Gilbert continued to fight for the ideals expressed by other black men who had come before him, but he too would not live to see the world he could imagine.

When Oliver Gilbert died in 1912, the newspaper headlines read, “Former Slave Dead.”⁵³ May we remember Oliver Cromwell Gilbert for his courage and his accomplishments rather than for the oppression he endured.

⁵¹ Davis, David Brion. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. P. 330.

⁵² Saillant, John, *Black Puritan, Black Republican*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2003. p.44-45.

⁵³ Baltimore Sun, July 14, 1912.