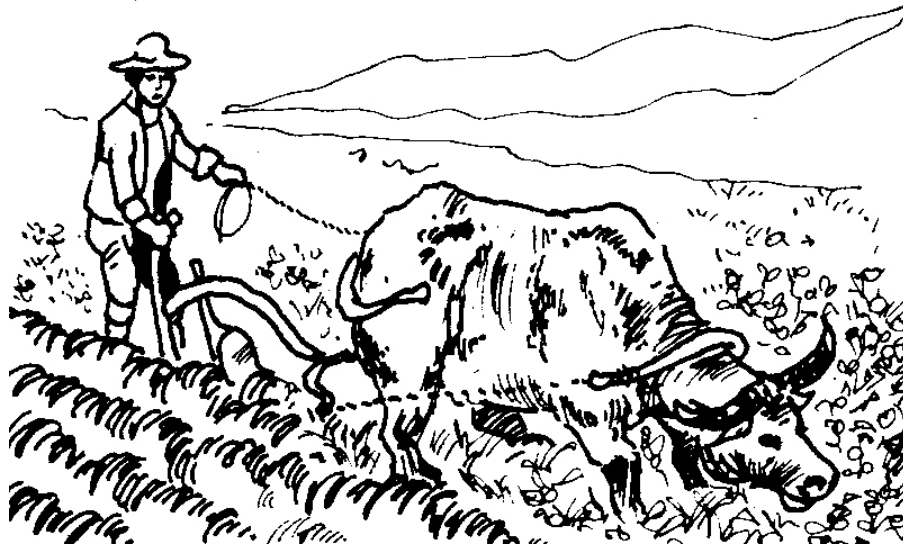


Nasa McCurdy (1759-1829)

A Slave's Transition to Freedom in Frontier Pennsylvania



Patrick McCurdy

Spokane, Washington

pmccurdy@me.com

March 2021

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Acknowledgements

Nobody does this type of historical research without extensive help from others. These are but a few of those who helped over the last thirty years.

Martha Frazee Beecham was a genealogical researcher in Greene County, Pennsylvania. When I first started this research about 1990, my father generously funded her work in doing locally what I could not do remotely. This was before the days of easy Internet research. Over three years she wrote nearly twenty letters detailing what she found. This was the first I ever knew of a black ancestor.

While researching in Greene, Martha encountered a local school teacher, Marlene Bransom, who was an avid researcher of African American history in Greene. I soon was in touch with her and we have been regular correspondents now for three decades. She did wonderful research on the Canadian McCurdys and her work on the Grinages is second to none. She has also been quite tolerant of pesky emails from me when I need someone to bounce ideas off of. There have been a lot of those over the years. Her careful analytical skills have helped tremendously.

No list could ever be complete of those who helped over a thirty-year period, but a few names that my poor memory reveals are Bill Richardson, Jan Slater, and Marilyn Toyne Susoeff.

And of course my McCurdy cousins, including Charles Lawson, Barry McCurdy, Howard D. McCurdy, Cindy Peterson, and Alvin McCurdy. I never spoke with Alvin, but his collection of family data in the Archives of Ontario is key. See the section on sources for more on Alvin's work.

Scope

This work is not an attempt to document all known descendants of Nasa McCurdy and his wife, Hannah. My own database includes about 1,500 known descendants, including spouses. The actual number is likely at least double that. Marlene Branson has done excellent work on the Grinages and the Canadian McCurdys, and I have done reasonably thorough work on the Joseph McCurdy and Hannah McCurdy Jones families. Nearly all of that can be found on FamilySearch, though Marlene's published work is rich in detail.

Instead, the current work focuses entirely on Nasa, his wife Hannah, and their children. It is detailed. Some will consider it boringly so. The intention is to include nearly everything knowable about Nasa, and to intelligently speculate where knowledge fails us. By taking contemporaneous history, everything known about Nasa and his family, and not a little speculative glue, hopefully we can come to a better understanding of this man who gained his freedom in mid-life.

More than any other area of genealogy, slave research is plagued by lack of records. I have been lucky in finding some highly revealing sources on Nasa, but admit that at times I base conclusions on circumstantial evidence. I have tried to be very clear where I have done so.

Earliest Records

Nasa McCurdy was born into slavery likely on a plantation in Maryland, about 1759. He was generally referred to thereafter as being mulatto. The first written record of Nasa is in the 1769 inventory of David Kennedy Sr.'s estate, in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania.¹

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|----|---|
| old Compasses — | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| a Cutting knife and Box — | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| an Old Riffled Gunn — | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| a Negro Winch Called Van — | 25 | 0 | 0 |
| a Lame Negro Man Called Cook — | 30 | 5 | 0 |
| a Mulattoe Winch Called Hanna — | 40 | 0 | 0 |
| a Mulattoe Called Neas — | 60 | 0 | 0 |
| Break and unbroke flax — | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Nine Geese — | 0 | 18 | 0 |

1769 Estate Inventory of David Kennedy Sr., Cumberland, Pennsylvania

There, as property of David Kennedy Sr., between the gun and the geese, is a mulatto slave called Neas. As we'll see shortly, he was about ten at the time. Note that this inventory also spells plate (as in dinner plate) "pleat," so the "ea" is a long A, meaning Neas would be pronounced Nase. Nasa McCurdy's name was variably spelled Nasa, Nace, Nase, Nassa, Nathan, and, in 1769, Neas.

David Kennedy Jr. subsequently showed up in Cumberland County tax lists with a single slave and continued, in those available tax lists that counted slaves, to have a single slave right up until 1780. In that year Pennsylvania passed a law to gradually emancipate slaves and this law required all current slaves to be registered. Nasa showed up in that slave register as the sole slave belonging to David Kennedy Jr., registered 27 October, 1783. Again, he was specifically mentioned as mulatto – the slave register was very specific about "mulatto" versus "negro." He was 24 years old.²

| | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| √ 231 226 | David Kennedy Peter Farmer | |
| boy Nase | a Male Mulatto Slave | 24 do |

1780 Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, Slave Register

Slavery in Pennsylvania

Slavery existed in all thirteen of the original colonies. While it faded out in the north by the time of the Civil War, it faded more slowly in rural areas than in urban centers. In Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, slavery was quite common in the mid 18th Century, with about one in ten farms having at least one slave.

Increasing pressure against slavery in Pennsylvania led to the passage in 1780 of *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*. This law required that all current slaves be registered and that they could be owned for life. Any children born to a slave mother after that point were to be considered indentured servants rather than slaves, and were required to work for the mother's owner until age twenty-eight. It was the slave register required by this law that shows Nasa as a slave of David Kennedy Jr. in 1783. By 1840, only 64 slaves remained in the state.

The Quakers were the loudest voice speaking out against slavery in Pennsylvania, though even amongst the Friends it was a controversial subject. But if Scotch Irish farmers in Cumberland County were hearing anti-slavery talk coming from the Friends, they certainly were not hearing it in their Presbyterian churches. The 1780 slave register lists four people with a profession of Reverend in Cumberland County – all were Presbyterian. In fact, no major denomination other than the Friends took an official stance against slavery before the Revolution.³

The Kennedys

One more diversion is necessary before we get back to Nasa McCurdy. To understand the life of young Nasa, we have to know something about the family of his owner.

There is no record of the wife of David Kennedy Sr. Family tradition has him married to a Native American, likely a local Seneca. His children were as follows:

1. John Kennedy (7/9/1736– 1/17/1805) m. Elizabeth Brownfield. He owned slaves. His descendants largely stayed in Franklin county, Pennsylvania, and there are numerous Kennedys there today descended from him. His grandson Lazarus settled on the original Kennedy land and is the source for much of the Kennedy family history.
2. Mary Kennedy (1740-1814) m. John Armstrong (1736-1822) and settled in Greene County, Pennsylvania, where most of their descendants stayed in that area for at least a couple of generations.

3. Alice Kennedy (1744-) m. 1767 Colonel William Crawford (1744-1826) and also settled in Greene County and started what is now a huge progeny.
4. Agnes
5. David Kennedy Jr. (b. after 1734, maybe as late as 1750, d. 1796) m. Rachel Frazier. After David's death, Rachel Frazier Kennedy remarried to James Russell. They lived in Greene and Fayette Counties, Pennsylvania. Rachel's daughter Catherine married David Bell and they lived on a piece of property in Greene County that was warranted by David Kennedy Jr. in 1769 and was less than a mile from where Nasa McCurdy lived.


Rachel Frazier Kennedy manumitted Nasa twice. First in Franklin County (previously part of Cumberland) in 1795, then again in Greene County in 1797. Toward the end of his life, several documents list David Kennedy Jr. as a "lunetik." In the 1797 manumission Rachel mentions her husband's "insanity." Nasa was legally owned by David Kennedy Jr., not his wife Rachel. When Rachel first freed Nasa in 1795, David was still alive so that manumission might be challenged as she had no legal right to free her husband's slave. This would explain why she signed another manumission in 1797, after David Kennedy's death, as Nasa was by then her legal property.

To all whom it may concern Be it known that I Rachel Kennedy of Montgomery Township in the County of Franklin and State of Pennsylvania, have on this day, being the fifth of January in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and ninety five, emancipated ~~and set free~~ and set free a Mulatto slave, named Nasa McCurdy and do hereby for my self my heirs and Executors... ^{Montgomery} ^{to} ^{manumitted, name} ^{McCurdy} relinquish and forever quit claim to his services so that he is as thoroughly invested with freedom as tho he had never been in bondage - and as I have done this after mature deliberation and with a real intent that it may operate as a complete and legal manumission I have hereto set my hand and Seal on the day and year above written.


Attested by
Sho. M. Pherrin

*N. B. * These words were inscribed before signing.*

Franklin County ss. The above writing was this 17th day of June 1795. acknowledged before me the Subscriber one of the Justices for said County.

Rachel Kennedy 

Robert Barker

True copy taken from the original the 30th day of December 1795. 

Manumission of Nasa McCurdy, 1795

Nasa's Life as a Boy

There is no written record of Nasa prior to the death of David Kennedy Sr. in 1768. We must rely on the records of the Kennedy family and of the history of the region in general.

Between 1739 and 1741, David Kennedy Sr. warranted three pieces of contiguous land in Cumberland County, the first on the north side of the confluence of the east and west branches of the Conococheague Creek,⁴ and the next two just to the south,⁵ totaling 700 acres. This was prime land, spanning the creek. Fertile, relatively level, and on a navigable waterway that led to the Potomac River, giving a means to ship crops to larger markets.

Early French and Indian War (1754-1763)

While Americans refer to this war as the *French and Indian War*, focusing on its impact on our soil, it is more generally known as the *Seven Years War* and was nearly global in scope. In America, it manifested as a war between the British and the French, with the latter often using Native Americans as proxy warriors. Oftentimes only a few French soldiers would accompany large raiding parties of Delaware, who reigned terror on settlers on the Pennsylvania frontier.

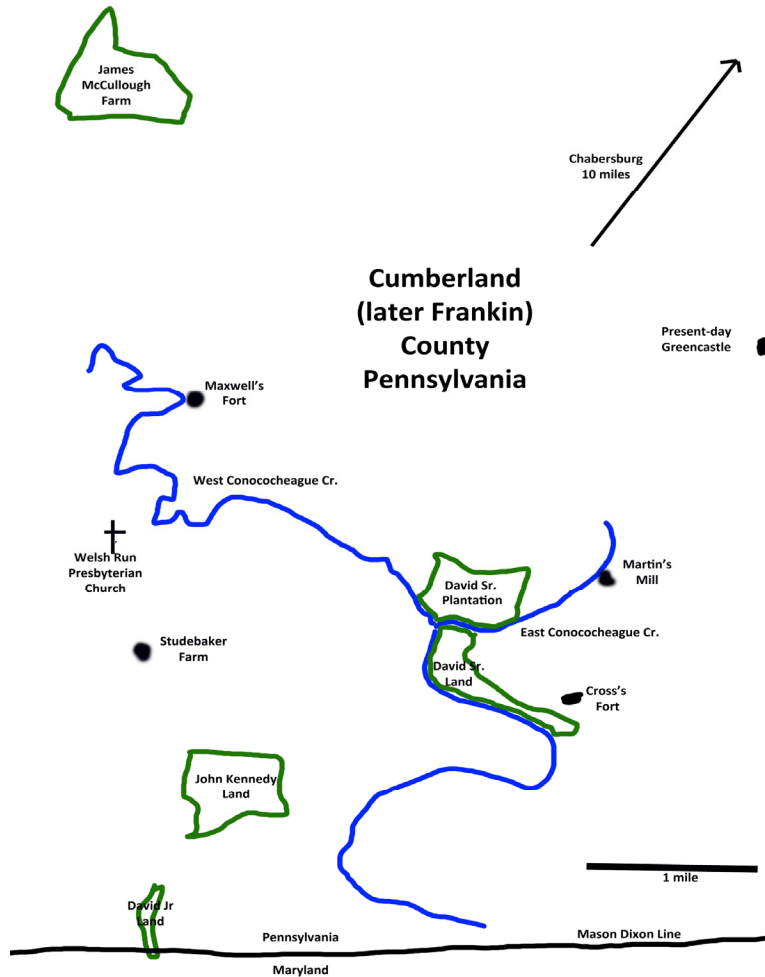
David Kennedy's 1741 land warrant application mentions this new warrant adjoined that of his 1739 warrant and his "plantation" there, so he had been well established on this land for nearly fifteen years when the war broke out in 1754. There is only one civil record of what Nasa or the Kennedys did during this period, a tax list entry for David Sr. in Antrim Township in 1758, though he could have been absent and still taxed. Many of the settlers relocated south or east during the war, though some stayed on their land and depended on local "forts" as protection. These forts were private structures, amounting to little more than fortified buildings that were defensible if attacked.

A neighbor of the Kennedys, James McCullough, lived just a few miles northwest of the Kennedy land. He kept a diary during this time and it repeatedly notes attacks up and down the Cumberland Valley.⁶ In June of 1757 McCullough notes that John Kennedy was shot while working his fields and escaped wounded to Cross's Fort, just about a mile south of the Kennedy farm. On July 26th, Indians captured McCullough's own sons, John and James. James would never be heard from again and John would remain a captive in western Pennsylvania for years. Calvin Bricker estimates that as much as 80% of the valley's population moved east toward Philadelphia and did not return until after the war.⁷

The McCullough's fled to the safety of Maryland but would make trips back to Cumberland to tend to the crops. We know that John Kennedy was present on the farm when he was wounded in 1757, but we don't know about the rest of the family or their slaves.

If the Kennedys did stay on the plantation, they would certainly have been keenly aware of the hostilities all around them. During the winter through summer of 1756, Indians, mostly Delaware, attacked at McDowell's Mill seven miles up the east Conococheague,

took Bigham's Fort thirty miles north, and sacked and burned McCord's Fort fifteen miles away, killing or capturing twenty-seven settlers.⁸ Much closer to home on March 3rd, 1756, just three and half miles southwest of the Kennedy plantation, a Delaware raiding party attacked the Studebaker farm, killing Heinrich Studebaker, his wife, and capturing three of his children who later lived among the Indians and were not released until 1764.⁹



Cumberland (now Franklin) County, Pennsylvania

Nasa would have been born during this period. Whether he lived with the Kennedys and they remained on the plantation with the constant risk of attack, or temporarily moved south or east to a safer location, is not known. The Kennedys may well have gone south into Maryland, as there were more colonial militia near Hagerstown. David Kennedy Sr. returns to the tax lists in the early 1760s, and continues there until his death in 1768. Or Nasa may have lived during this time on the Prather Plantation near Hagerstown, Maryland, as discussed below.

Life on the Farm

While we are left to imagine life on the Kennedy farm in its first three decades, we can paint a pretty full picture of it in 1769 when David Kennedy's estate was thoroughly inventoried. That inventory resides in the Cumberland County Historical Society Library, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

It is apparent from this document that David Kennedy Sr., likely as were most of his neighbors, was a tax cheat. In the tax list for 1768, the year he died, he admits to 3 horses, 5 cows, 3 sheep, and 1 Negro. His estate inventory, however, shows quite a busy farm, with 18 cows/steers/calves, 5 hogs, 5 horses/colts, 13 sheep, 9 geese, and 5 dogs. He also owned 4 slaves.

Most of the farmers in that area grew grain. Some, like McCullough, grew flax to make clothe. Many distilled their grain into spirits as it saved better than grain and was easier to transport. David Sr.'s estate inventory was taken in the winter, so much of his fields may have been fallow, but it still showed 7 acres in "winter crop," 9 acres in wheat, and 4 acres in "grain." Harvested grain included 2 stacks of rye, wheat stacked in the barn, and 1 hay cock.

The tools also give clues about life on the Kennedy farm and what his slaves' daily life might have included. He had 2 scythes, 4 guns, 4 axes, a loom, 2 spinning wheels, 2 augers, 2 cross-cut saws, 4 sickles, a wheelbarrow, and another older loom.

It is likely the farm provided most of its own food. Food stores that winter included salt, 17 pounds of tallow, 2 firkins of butter, and a little over 3 hogsheads of cider.

This estate inventory paints a picture of an active, prosperous farm. They raised their own livestock for work and food, raised grain for sale and likely spinning of cloth, and made their own butter and tallow. Though Nasa was only nine or ten at the time of the inventory, he would almost certainly have been required to work on the farm.

Religion

Most of the farmers in the area were Presbyterian. Two Presbyterian churches were within a few miles of the Kennedy farm. Mary Kennedy was baptized June 17th, 1741, by Rev. John Craig "at the west bank of the Connococheague, a stream in Pennsylvania."¹⁰ David Kennedy Jr. was later a pew holder in the Welch Run Presbyterian Church. Reverend Thomas McPherrin, of Welsh Run Church, was a witness to Nasa's first manumission. How regularly the Kennedys attended church, and whether or not their slaves attended with them is not known. No early records exist from either of these two churches.

By the time Nasa and his family settled in Greene County around 1800, they seem to have no connection to the Presbyterian Church, though the Kennedy's, Crawford's, and Armstrongs remained Presbyterian. The Canadian McCurdys were mostly associated with the AME Church.

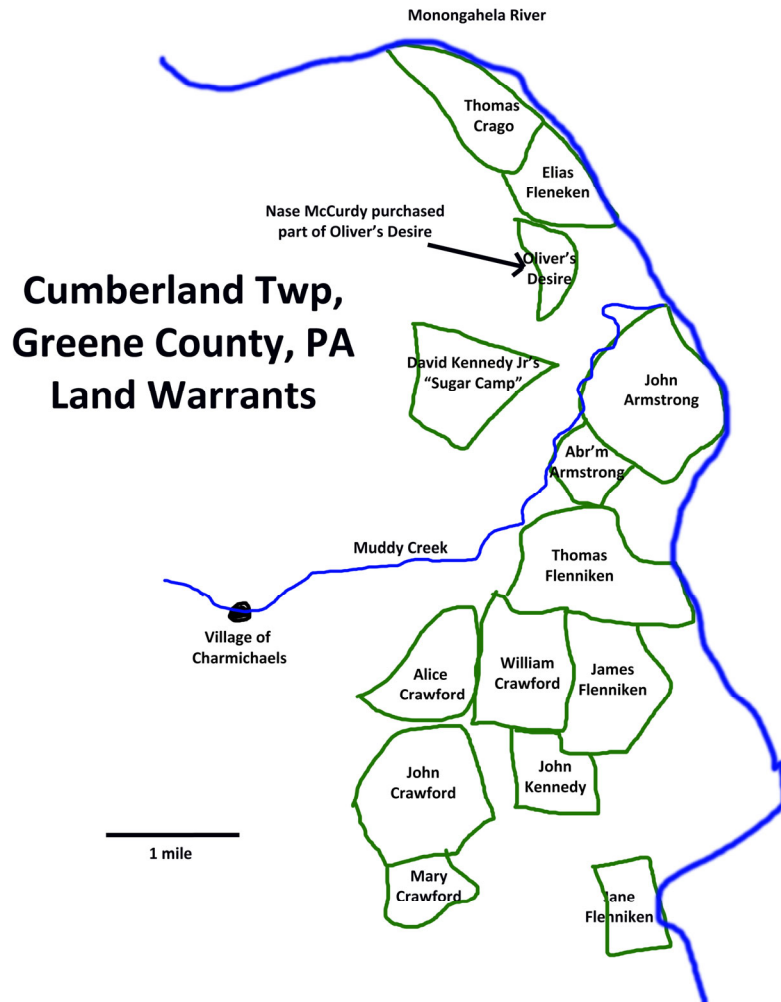
Education

There was at least one makeshift schoolhouse near the Kennedy plantation in the 1750s, as McCullough records that his daughter attended. This would have almost certainly required paying per child. There is no record of the Kennedy's attending school, much less their slaves. One of the slaves mentioned in David Sr.'s 1769 estate inventory was Cook. Cook was later owned by David Kennedy's daughter Alice who married Colonel William Crawford. *The William Crawford Memorial* gives us some clues about Cook's later life and claims that Cook was taught to read.¹¹ That seems unlikely, as neither John Kennedy nor David Jr.'s wife Rachel Frazier Kennedy could read, as they made their mark on legal documents rather than signing. If David Kennedy Sr.'s son was not taught to read and write, it seems unlikely his slave was, though Nasa did sign his name on later deeds.

Life After Manumission

Nasa married a white woman, Hannah, and raised his family in Greene County, Pennsylvania, where he was a farmer. He owned a number of pieces of land and lived on Muddy Creek near many neighbors also from Cumberland and Franklin counties. In 1816 Nasa purchased a portion of Oliver Crawford's tract of land called "Oliver's Desire" near the mouth of the Muddy Creek in Cumberland Township, Greene County.

Lecky's *Tenmile Country*¹² described John Kennedy as a "land jobber" who at one time or another owned much land near Muddy Creek. No deeds in Greene County support this, but it is not much of a stretch. Within a mile or two of the Muddy Creek were numerous people connected to the Conococheague region in Cumberland (see map).



Land Warrants in Cumberland Township, Greene County, Pennsylvania

Nasa lived close to Alice Kennedy Crawford's family and Mary Kennedy Armstrong's family. Likewise, the names Flenniken and Crago were from Cumberland County.

Nasa died March 30th, 1829. His wife Hannah died in July of 1836. Their children were:

1. Anne, b. abt 1795, m. George Hilton and died in late 1840. George died shortly thereafter, and the children were brought up by Hilton cousins.
2. Rachel, b. 1800/1805, very likely died before 1849.
3. Ruth, b. March 7th 1808, d. May 26th 1868. She married Benjamin Grinage. Some of their descendants remained black and some became white.
4. Mary Jane, b. 1807/1814. Likely died before 1849.
5. Nasa, Jr., b. March 30th, 1814, d. July 18th, 1886. Married Permelia Bailey. They moved first to Ohio, then to Amherstberg, Ontario, Canada. This branch of the family has remained almost exclusively black.

6. Joseph, b. April 15th, 1816, d. February 2nd, 1868, married Sidnah Martin of Ohio. They moved to Gratiot County, Michigan. After this move, Joseph and nearly all his descendants were considered white.
7. William Henry, b. May 3rd, 1818, d. January 20th, 1888, m. Mary Ann Grinage. They moved to Essex, Ontario Canada and their descendants are almost exclusively black.
8. George N., b 1820, d. about 1861, had a son, George Nelson with Rebecca; later married Harriet Woods. His descendants lived in Canada and Greene County and were exclusively black.
9. Hannah Jane, b. February 16th, 1825, d. February 8th, 1879. She married Joseph Jones and moved to Ohio where they have many descendants, most of whom are black.

Estate Inventory

As with his life as a boy, there is little on which to base our knowledge of his life as an adult. He was a farmer and did well enough that seven of his nine known children survived into adulthood and prospered themselves. What we can do is look to the estate inventories of both Nasa and his wife Hannah to infer what their lives were like on a day-to-day basis.

Buildings are either mentioned or inferred and include the house, barn, and several grain sheds. The home appears to have been humble, but comfortable, including three beds with bedding, a chest of drawers, cupboard, kitchen table with four split bottom chairs, rocking chair, candle stand, and a looking glass. They also had an old musket.

The main purposes of the farm seem to have been grain and livestock. Grain noted includes wheat, rye, millet, oats, corn, hay, and barley. There was a windmill in the barn. Animals include six horses, a cow, pair bison/oxen, fifteen old sheep some young lambs, and thirteen hogs.

Tools and implements are what you would typically expect for a small farm: numerous plows, harrows, scythes, a flax break and flax mill for haying, a half bushel measure and hayfork, cutting box, log chain, mattock, auger, hammer & file, a wagon, carryall with harness, and one sled. Two spinning wheels and a loom indicate they likely made at least some of their own clothes.

All in all, a typical Pennsylvania farm. Not a luxurious life by any means, but a nice setup for someone who spent the first forty years of his life as a slave.

Nasa's Wife

The only document that specifically mentions an age for Nasa is the 1780 Cumberland slave register which puts his age at twenty-four (the entry was from 1783, making his birth year about 1759). From Morgan County, Ohio, death records we know Nasa's youngest daughter, Hannah, was born in 1825.¹³ That means that Nasa would have been 66 the year he fathered Hannah. This points to Nasa's wife Hannah being considerably younger than Nasa.

Surname of Nasa's Wife Hannah

Numerous people on ancestry.com have Hannah's maiden name as McGill. There is no primary source evidence of this. Invariably the source for this information is the American Genealogical and Biographical Index, vol. 114, p. 235. This references the Pennsylvania Archives, vol. 8, p. 452.¹⁴ That does indeed mention two marriages for an Ann McGill, but neither of these marriages was to a McCurdy, much less Nasa. This appears to be a quirk in Ancestry's "Hints" system that recommends this AGBI as a source for Hannah.

Nasa's Ancestry

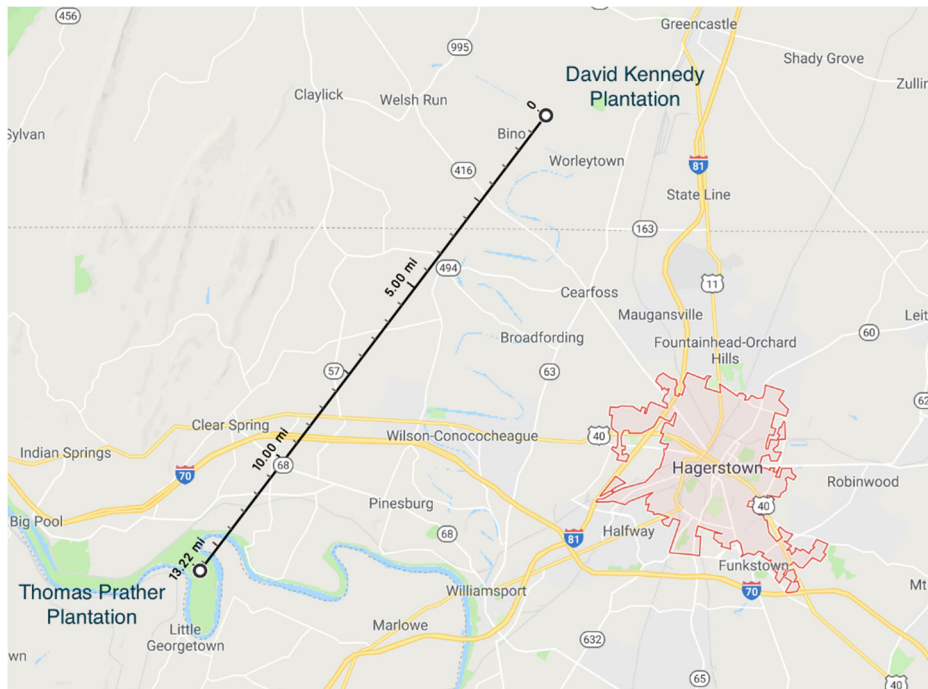
Autosomal DNA shows descendants of Nasa McCurdy and his wife Hannah share in common DNA with ancestors of both Thomas Prather and his wife Elizabeth Claggett. Therefore, either Nasa or Hannah had as an ancestor one of the children of this couple. The Prathers were a large and prosperous slave-owning family that lived in western Maryland. They were tobacco farmers and nearly all the Prather men served in the militia before, during, and after the Revolution.

In notes written by G.C. Haskell and located in the Alvin McCurdy Collection in the Archives of Ontario, Nasa and Hannah's great granddaughter Edith A. Jones said "great-grandmother Prather" had a father who was a slave owner.¹⁵ Edith Jones further states this great grandmother Prather's grandchildren were William H. McCurdy who married Mary Ann Grinage and Hannah McCurdy who married Joseph Jones. This indicates that the Prather ancestor was the mother of either Nasa or Hannah.

Barry McCurdy of Mississauga, Ontario, is in possession of a hand-written tree that starts with "Nathan McCurdy Sr & Unknown."¹⁶ (Nathan and Nasa were used somewhat interchangeable.) Near Nathan, but directly under Unknown, in a different ink, is written "Mary Jane Prather, daughter of a slave holder." In all court documents, Nasa's wife is consistently Hannah, so the above notes cannot refer directly to her, but could refer to her mother. So, we now have a given name, but still do not know whose mother Mary Jane Prather was, Nasa's or Hannah's. All DNA and paper trail evidence so

far supports either case. Edith Jones stated that great grandmother Prather was a midwife, wore long skirts, and rode side-saddle.

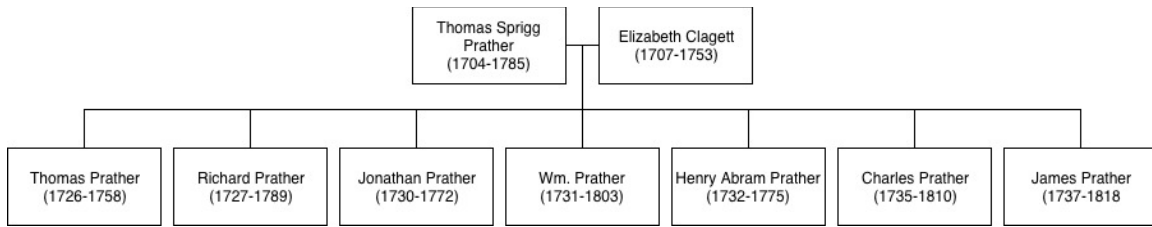
There was a clear connection between the immediate family of Colonel Thomas Prather from who Nasa and Hannah's children descend and the Kennedy family who owned Nasa. David Kennedy Sr. owned Nasa at the time of David's death in 1769. David's son John petitioned the court to buy the estate's land from the rest of the heirs. Of the four men he chose to value the land, one was Henry Abram Prather, son of Colonel Thomas and Elizabeth Claggett Prather. Thomas Prather owned a plantation on Prather's Neck of the Potomac, just upriver from Hagerstown, Maryland. This was only thirteen miles from David Kennedy Sr.'s farm in Pennsylvania.



South-Central Pennsylvania and Western Maryland

Hannah is consistently listed in the census as white, but Edith Jones' notes indicate her grandmother (she's somewhat ambiguous on exactly who she's referring to here) was very light skinned and could pass for white. In both of Nasa's manumissions, Rachel Frazier Kennedy states that he was "born into slavery," meaning his mother was a slave.

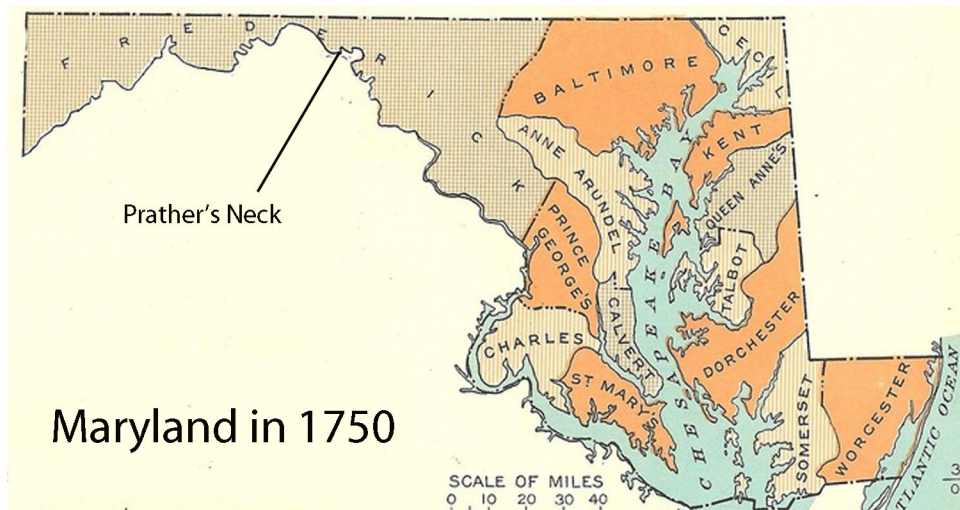
We simply cannot make a definitive case based on what we currently know. While the hard evidence is inconclusive, the circumstantial evidence seems to point toward Mary Jane Prather being Nasa's mother. He was born into slavery because his mother was a slave, herself the daughter of one of the sons of Thomas and Elizabeth (Claggett) Prather. But, if so, which son?



Sons of Thomas and Elizabeth (Clagett) Prather

Nasa was born in 1759. If we assume that Mary Jane Prather was at least fifteen years old when Nasa was conceived, she could have been born no later than 1744. If we further assume that her father was at least was at least fifteen when she was conceived, that means he would have to have been born no later than about 1729. Given a margin of error of a couple of years, this means it must have been Thomas, Richard, Jonathan, or William, most likely one of the first two.

It is unclear when Thomas Prather moved to his farm on Prather's Neck. The last of his children was born in 1743 in Prince George's County, Maryland. He located to Prather's Neck sometime shortly thereafter, living first for a short time in western Frederick County, Maryland. We assume Mary Jane Prather was born no later than 1744, so her mother must have been a slave on Thomas Prather's land in Prince George's or Frederick County.



Maryland Counties in 1750

Mary Jane Prather would initially have lived on Thomas Prather's plantation on Prather's Neck, though she may later have lived on one of his son's plantations, as all but Jonathan lived close by. Indeed, she may have grown up on Henry Prather's farm, within a mile or two of David Kennedy's farm in Cumberland, Pennsylvania. All of Thomas Prather's sons owned slaves.

Who Nasa's father was we have no clue, other than Y DNA testing proving it was neither a Prather nor a McCurdy. He may have been white, mulatto, or black. He might have been a slave or free.

McCurdy Land and the Enigmatic Anne Prather

Following the land transactions of Nasa and his family in Greene County further fleshes out his story, and Anne Prather is inextricably linked to these transaction as well as to the McCurdy family. It is nearly impossible to explore one without simultaneously exploring the other. Who Anne Prather was remains a mystery. Given her close association with the family of Nasa McCurdy, the strong possibility that Nasa was the son of a slave owned by the Prathers, and the fact that she left her entire estate to the McCurdys, it seems highly likely she was a sister or close cousin to Nasa McCurdy.

The first deed recorded by Nasa was in 1816, when he bought 101 acres from Oliver Crawford near the confluence of Muddy Creek with the Monongahela River, in Greene County, Pennsylvania.¹⁷ This was a part of Oliver's Crawford patent known as "Oliver's Desire." Nasa paid just \$50, which, at fifty cents per acre, is a curiously small amount. But the money wasn't paid by Nasa. The deed notes "...Oliver Crawford, for and in consideration of fifty Dollars to him in hand paid by James Blaine of Fayette County...".

Just six months later Nasa purchased 29.5 acres from the same James Blaine for \$250. This was a patent known as "Skipton." This land was contiguous to his 101 acres, and fronted the Monongahela River.¹⁸



Land on Muddy Creek, Cumberland Township, Greene, Pennsylvania

Anne Prather now enters the story when, just seventeen months after purchasing his 101 acres for \$50, Nasa sold the land to Anne for \$1,500.¹⁹ He was a nearly sixty-year-old man and his oldest son was barely out of diapers, so it is hard to imagine how much a middle-aged man could clear and otherwise improve that land in a year and a half to justify a thirty-fold increase in value.

These deeds bring up two interesting questions. First, why was the 101 acres sold to Nasa McCurdy by Oliver Crawford so cheaply? Second, why did James Blaine pay for it?

The likely explanation to the first question is found in the tax lists. After being freed by Rachel Kennedy, Nasa was without land, likely renting from Alexander McClellan as shown in the 1798 tax assessment. Starting in 1808, tax lists frequently show him with 100 acres, 50 of which was cleared. At this same time Oliver Crawford is shown with 170 acres and a ferry, though he cleared and owned the entire 290 acres of Oliver's Desire. These 100 acres of Nasa's in the tax lists starting in 1808 were almost certainly the 101 acres that Oliver Crawford sold him in 1816. Just a year later Crawford sold the remainder of Oliver's Desire to Jeremiah Davidson for \$2,500. He sold the land to Nasa for \$50, as Nasa was already living there and had cleared and improved at least half of it.

James Blaine was the son of Colonel Ephraim Blaine, a colonel in and Commissary General of the Continental Army during the Revolution. The Blaines were a very wealthy family. James had been formally educated in Philadelphia and twice as a teen sent to France to broaden that education. He was an attaché to the American delegation in France in 1791. A successful businessman and land developer, at the time he participated in these two deeds with Nasa he was a merchant and justice of the peace in Brownsville, in neighboring Fayette County. Why such an accomplished man paid for Nasa's 101 acres remains a mystery.

Nasa lived on Skipton until his death in 1829, and his widow Hannah lived there until her death in 1836. All their children were born and/or grew up there. Anne Prather held onto her 101 acres of Oliver's Desire until 1837, when she sold it for \$2,300 to neighbor John Flenniken.²⁰ So, Anne Prather and the McCurdys lived on contiguous properties for nearly twenty years. But this would not be the end of Anne Prather and the McCurdys' close relationship.

The Land Patent Called Logan

In 1836, Anne Prather executed a very curious deed with Nasa's sons Joseph McCurdy and Nasa McCurdy Jr. She bought from them what appears to be their interest in a four-hundred-acre land patent in Jackson Township called "Logan."²¹ This property would become the geographical focal point for most of Nasa's children until after Anne Prather's death in 1849.

The 1836 deed specifies that Anne will pay Nasa Jr. and Joseph \$400 the following April, then another \$400 each April until \$1,600 is fully paid, but she struggles to make these payments.

| | |
|---------------|-------|
| April 1, 1836 | \$400 |
| April 3, 1837 | \$400 |
| April 3, 1838 | \$255 |
| April 3, 1839 | \$300 |
| July 14, 1840 | \$128 |
| May 17, 1842 | \$117 |

Anne Prather Payments to Joseph and Nasa Jr.

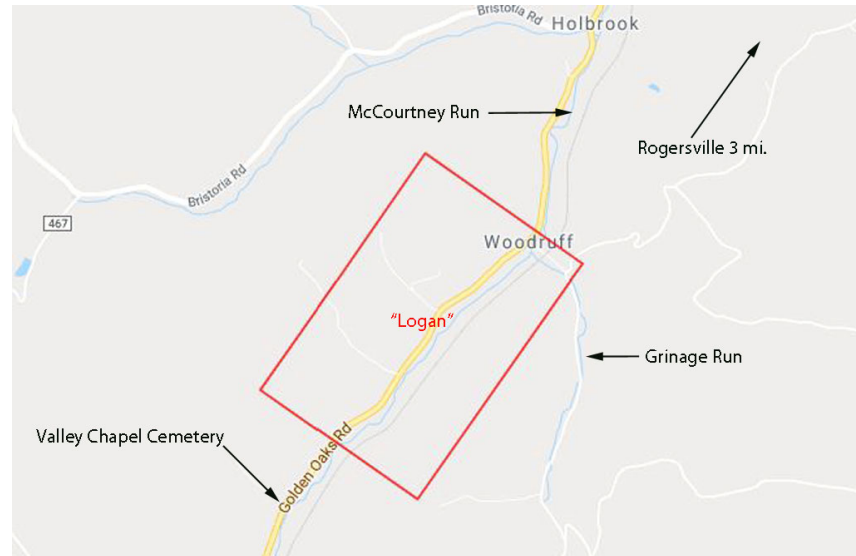
If the 1820 census is correct about her age, Anne would have been at least sixty-three in 1838, and it would appear she was not flush with money. Prior to 1840, tax lists show Joseph McCurdy with no land. Suddenly, in 1840, and continuing through 1844, he was taxed on 400 acres. His acreage dropped to 100 in 1845. It seems that maybe he was helping Anne Prather by paying the taxes on the land for a few years as she struggled financially, as Logan is the only 400-acre parcel ever associated with the family. It is likely Anne Prather lived with Joseph’s family in 1840. In the census that year, Joseph’s family included young people too old to be his own children (likely younger siblings George and Hannah), as well as a colored female over fifty-five. This was probably Anne Prather and helps explain why the 400 acres was taxed to Joseph from 1840 to 1844.²²

Hannah McCurdy married Joseph Jones in March, 1844. By the same year, Joseph McCurdy had four young children and another on the way. Perhaps his home was getting a little crowded and Anne Prather saw a way to help everyone out. Just months after Hannah married Joseph Jones, Anne Prather executed another fascinating deed. For \$10 Anne sold Joseph Jones her interest in 100 acres of Logan – “the property on which he now lives.” The deed noted that she “holds a reservation” on this land. As part of this deed, Jones was bound to build Anne Prather “a Room, cabbin or house fire place, bed, bed-clothes a sufficing of firewood cut at the door. Bread meat and other victuals prepared suitable for a Woman her age.” With this arrangement, Joseph McCurdy gets a little extra space for his growing family, newlyweds Joseph and Hannah McCurdy Jones get a fantastic deal on a 100-acre farm on which to start their new life, and Anne Prather gets a small cabin of her own where she can spend her golden years by a warm fire.²³

Anne Prather’s 1849 will gives further details on disposition of the 400 acres called Logan that was apparently owned by the McCurdy brothers. Referencing this land, she first states “Joseph and Nace McCurdy have had their Shares of Land.” Next, she leaves William H. McCurdy the 100 acres of land that he now lives on, and leaves another 100 acres to George McCurdy. She leaves her personal effects to Hannah McCurdy Jones,

Sidney McCurdy, and Ruth McCurdy Grinage. In essence, she left everything to the McCurdy siblings or their wives.²⁴

So, Anne Prather bought Nasa Jr. and Joseph's shares outright in 1836, and somehow gained ownership of William and George's share, though William lived on 100 acres of it. She sold 100 acres to Joseph and Hannah McCurdy Jones, sold another 100 acres piecemeal, and left 100 acres each to William and George McCurdy in her will. All four brothers ended up with equal shares this piece of land.



The 400-acre Land Patent called "Logan"

But there is still the question of how the McCurdy brothers, four mulatto boys only one of whom was of legal age, sons of an old man working a small farm, came into possession of a large piece of valuable land. For that we must step further back in time.

The Leiper Land Warrants

The process for obtaining public land was first to file a warrant for a piece of unowned land. You then had to show it was surveyed before being issued a patent, providing for formal ownership. Typically, only one warrant could be filed per person, but they could easily sell it to someone else. People with lots of money could thus acquire vast amounts of what had been public land by simply buying up warrants.

Thomas Leiper (1745-1825) was a Scotsman by birth and a highly successful Philadelphia businessman. He served in the Revolution, later becoming quite wealthy in tobacco and manufacturing. He was well-connected, having once built a house for, and rented it to, Thomas Jefferson when Philadelphia was the nation's capital. His correspondence with Jefferson runs to over one hundred letters.

On one day in 1892, Leiper patented forty pieces of land scattered over several counties in western Pennsylvania. Each of these roughly 400-acre patents had been previously warranted the same day in 1784 by different people. He appears to have hired someone in western Pennsylvania to pay people to warrant and survey land, with agreements to buy it at a later date. One of those forty pieces of land was warranted and surveyed by William Marshall. It was a roughly 400-acre parcel in Greene County on McCourtney's Run of the Tenmile Creek called "Logan".



Land Patent Map for "Logan", Greene County, Pennsylvania

Thomas Leiper died in 1835 still owning all forty of these land patents. His son George was the executor of his estate.²⁵ In late 1835, George managed the sale of all forty properties to his 21-year-old younger brother Samuel McKean Leiper for \$5,600.²⁶ On March 24th of the following year, Samuel sold the whole lot of forty properties again for a whopping \$40,000.²⁷ That's a nice profit for an investment that he only held for six months. One of those forty patents was Logan and *just six days later*, Nasa McCurdy Jr. and his brother Joseph sold that same piece of land to Anne Prather.

There is no recorded deed that shows how these two young men, one only nineteen so technically not able to buy or sell on his own accord, came to own this land. It stretches credulity to think they somehow found out about it after the sale on March 24th, bought it, then resold it within six days. This must have been planned. They must have known about the pending sale prior to March 24th.

The buyers on March 24th were an informal consortium of three men and their wives: John Bell Jr. and his wife Ann, Thomas Patterson and his wife Dorcas Bell Patterson (sister of John Bell Jr.), and Benjamin Ross with his wife. The fact that they were getting together for a \$40,000 purchase cannot have been a secret. This was likely the largest land transaction in the history of the county, and family living nearby would almost certainly have known about it.

John Bell Jr. and his sister Dorcas were nephew and niece of David Bell, husband of Catherine Kennedy Bell. Catherine would have spent the first two decades of her life around Nasa McCurdy, as her father David Kennedy Jr. owned Nasa, and her mother Rachel Frazier Kennedy freed Nasa from slavery. David and Catherine bought David Kennedy Jr.'s land from his estate and raised their children on it, less than a mile from Nasa's 29-acre farm. Her children were about the same age as Nasa's children. In Nasa's manumission, Catherine's mother mentioned the faithful service Nasa had provided the Kennedys during her husband's insanity. Catherine could not help but feel affectionate toward the nearby children of this man who had been so kind to her family as she grew up. And, six days after her niece and nephew are party to a huge land deal, one of those pieces of land is in the possession of two of those McCurdy children. Though there is no way to know the exact nature of that transaction, it is not unreasonable to suspect it was a gift.

By March of 1836, both Nasa Sr. and his wife Hannah had passed away. Of their nine children, two of the girls (Ann and Ruth) had already married. Four of the remaining seven were not yet of legal age. Nasa Sr.'s legacy consisted of a 29-acre farm – clearly not enough to provide a start to four boys. It seems that the Bells somehow brokered the sale of Logan to the McCurdy brothers. The two youngest brothers, George and William, were not of legal age in 1836 and a guardian was not appointed for them until 1837. There is no way they could have legally participated in a land transaction. It appears Anne Prather taking ownership was to ensure that the younger two brothers would get their share.

Keeping the Family Together

But beyond the transactional nature of this, Anne Prather seems, whether intentionally or not, to have kept the bulk of the family living near each other, and near her, for many years. For at least four years, she lived with Joseph McCurdy, and almost certainly lived with the Jones for the following six years until her death.

Five of the eight surviving children of Nasa all lived with ½ mile of each other. Ruth McCurdy Grinage lived with her husband Benjamin on the north end of Grinage Run. Joseph McCurdy lived on land adjoining that of Ben Grinage, possibly part of Logan. William H. McCurdy and Hannah McCurdy Jones each lived on 100 acres of Logan. George McCurdy at least had ownership of 100 acres of Logan starting in 1850, and likely lived there as early as 1840. He would not sell his 100 acres of Logan until 1857. If

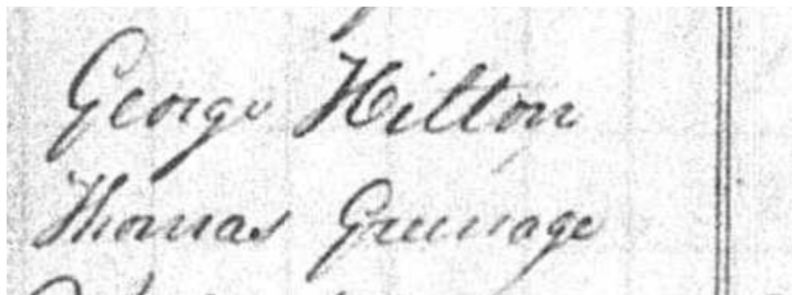
Joseph Jones built Anne Prather her cabin and kept it stocked with firewood and prepared food for her as promised in the deed, she also would have been living on Logan, or very close by. The children of Joseph McCurdy, William McCurdy, and their sister Ruth McCurdy Grinage attended an integrated school together at Holbrook, just a few miles away.

The McCurdy Diaspora

By 1855, as many as twenty-seven McCurdy, Jones, and Grinage cousins lived within ½ mile of each other, Alvin's family having already moved to Ohio. It's not hard to imagine some rather large Sunday afternoon meals together. But this closeness would not last. Ten years later the family of Ruth McCurdy Grinage would be the only one still living in Greene.

Anne McCurdy

The definitive list of Nasa and Hannah's living children is Nasa McCurdy Jr.'s 1837 Orphan's Court petition.²⁸ It very clearly includes "Anne, wife of Geo. Ketton." In his 1902 marriage license, Nasa McCurdy Hilton, born in Greene, states his parents were George Hilton and Anne McCurdy.²⁹ If you look at "Hilton" written in the 1840 census, it could easily be misread as "Ketton." Someone transcribing an Orphan's Court petition into the record books could easily make the same mistake. And note that the next man enumerated is the brother of Benjamin Grinage, who married Anne McCurdy's sister, Ruth.



Excerpt from 1840 U.S. Census, Greene County, Pennsylvania

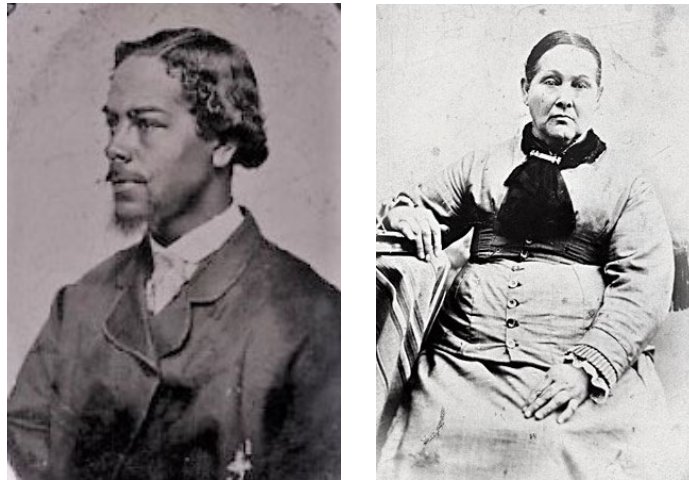
In an 1840 Orphan's Court petition, George Hilton, wife Ann McCurdy Hilton having just died, requested guardianship of his five children so they can receive a small inheritance from the estate of their grandfather, as Nasa McCurdy Jr. was then wrapping up his father's estate.³⁰ The marriage of Ann McCurdy to George Hilton is further supported by a letter from George McCurdy in Haiti to his niece Hannah Hilton, written in 1862.³¹

Ruth McCurdy Grinage

Ruth McCurdy married Benjamin Grinage. They remained on their farm on Grinage Run, near Logan, until their deaths. She died in 1868.

Nasa McCurdy Jr.

Though he was not amongst the siblings who lived clustered in and around Logan, Nasa McCurdy Jr. was the first to leave Greene, relocating one hundred miles west to Zanesville, Ohio, about 1848. He married a white woman named Permelia Bailey. As we will see shortly, he was almost certainly involved with the Underground Railroad, and Zanesville was an active hub of such activity. He later relocated to Amherstburg, Ontario, by the mid-1850s. Nasa Jr. died in Amherstburg in 1886, age 72.³²



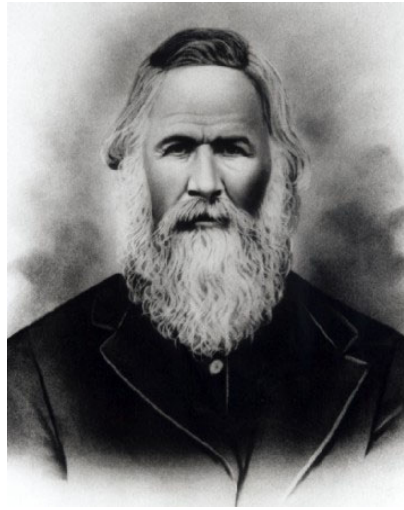
Nasa McCurdy Jr. and wife Permelia Bailey

Joseph McCurdy

Joseph McCurdy married a white woman from Ohio named Sidnah Martin. He may have ventured to Michigan as early as 1858, as there are land warrants possibly attributable to him there that year.³³ He bought an 80-acre farm in Gratiot County, Michigan, in 1862 and moved his entire family there in 1864.³⁴ He died in Gratiot four years later at the age of 51.³⁵

William Henry McCurdy

William married twice, first to Mary Pearl, then to Mary Ann Grinage, possibly a sister of Benjamin Grinage who married Ruth McCurdy. William sold his 288-acre farm in Greene for \$5,600 in 1857, relocating his family to Colchester, Ontario (not far from Amherstburg), by 1861.³⁶ He became a prosperous farmer again in Canada, dying in Amherstburg in 1888, age 69.³⁷



William H. McCurdy and wife Mary Ann Grinage

George McCurdy

George McCurdy was in Amherstburg, Ontario, prior to 1859, though left for Haiti in December of 1861. His son's obituary states that his son's parents were George N. and Rebecca A. McCurdy.³⁸ The son further states that his father died in Haiti. That George Sr. did go to Haiti is confirmed by a letter he wrote from there in 1862, but he did not die there. It appears that he likely never married Rebecca, and his son felt abandoned by his father leaving for Haiti, so claimed his father died there. George likely returned from Haiti at the same time as his friend James Foster, about 1867.

George McCurdy Sr. married Harriet (Gray) Woods in 1877 and they lived in Sandwich, Ontario, until George's death in 1895. George and Harriet had no children.



George N. McCurdy

Hannah McCurdy Jones

Joseph and Hannah McCurdy Jones relocated their family to a farm in Monroe County, Ohio, in 1865,³⁹ finally concluding the sale of their (by then) 180 acres of Logan in 1872.⁴⁰ Hannah died there seven years later, age 53.⁴¹



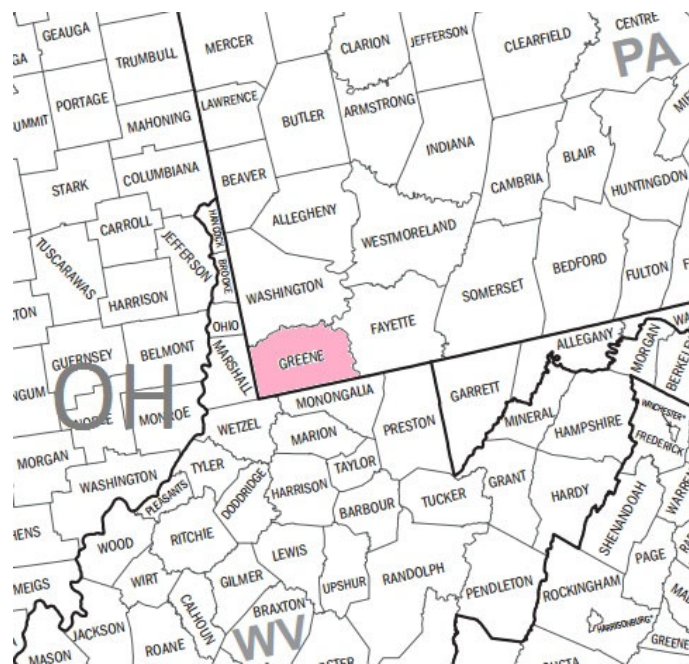
Joseph and Hannah McCurdy Jones

Rachel & Mary Jane McCurdy

Nothing is known of Rachel or Mary Jane. As they were not mentioned in Anne Prather's 1849 will, they were likely deceased by then.⁴²

The McCurdys and the Underground Railroad

By the 1840s, Pennsylvania's 1780 *Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery* had largely achieved its goal and the census shows only sixty-four slaves remaining in the Keystone State. Not so in Virginia, which retained slavery until the end of the Civil War in 1865. That Greene County had Virginia (now West Virginia) on its southern and western borders made it a natural, if not major, path for fugitive slaves. While Greene County played a relatively minor role in the Underground Railroad, there were numerous slaves over the course of decades who made their way to freedom through Greene.



Greene County, Pennsylvania

The definitive source for Greene County’s involvement in the underground railroad is Professor Thomas Mainwaring, of Washington and Jefferson College, whose work is borrowed from liberally here.⁴³

The Underground Railroad in Greene County, Pennsylvania

Contrary to popular belief, the Underground Railroad was not a formal network of active participants transporting large number of fugitive slaves through well-known stations. Better known locations like Zanesville, Ohio, likely saw a fair amount of activity but, sticking with the railroad analogy, Greene County was but a spur line.

Mainwaring writes that in Washington County (just north of Greene), one of the most active “conductors” was Matthew McKeever who estimated he had helped no more than forty fugitive slaves over forty years, including a party of eight.⁴⁴ Thus, even a highly active participant might go years without helping a single runaway.

And not all participation was necessarily active. Mainwaring relates a humorous, if telling, story of one family that took more passive measures. If a party pursuing fugitives would inquire at their home, they would invite the pursuers to join them for a meal. To ensure the runaways got the longest head start possible the father would read Psalm 19 before the meal.⁴⁵ The *Fugitive Slave Act* of 1850 made assisting runaway slaves punishable by six months in prison and a \$1,000 fine. Passive assistance, however, like reading a particularly long Psalm, would be extremely difficult to prosecute.

And it wasn't just the law that made assisting in the capture or runaway slaves appealing. Rewards, sometimes quite high, were often offered for turning in fugitives. One black Greene County barber was accosted by a slave owner pursuing his runaway slaves and offered \$300 each for nine slaves. Clearly freedom was more important to him than money, as evidenced by his answer: "No sir; if I knowed where your slaves are, all the money in the South wouldn't get me to tell."⁴⁶

McCurdy Involvement

Much anecdotal evidence states that the McCurdys were involved with the Underground Railroad. Such involvement is hard to document, owing to the secretive nature of the work. It is not hard to imagine, however, the free children of a former slave having sympathy for the plight of fugitive slaves.

Nasa McCurdy Jr. is the most named McCurdy to have been involved. Along with his brother William and neighbor Richard Chedister, he attended the State Convention of Colored Freemen of Pennsylvania, held in Pittsburgh in 1841. He was a vice president of the convention.⁴⁷

Nasa Jr. left Greene in 1848 for Zanesville, Ohio, a city closely associated with the Underground Railroad. Slaves were often told simply to go there and they would find assistance to freedom. After a few short years in Zanesville, Nasa Jr. then moved to Amherstburg, Ontario. Situated directly across the Detroit River from Detroit, and at the narrowest part of the river, it was a natural destination for slaves who would only find true freedom once in Canada. Nasa helped build the Nazrey AME Church in Amherstburg, which offered a place for newly escaped slaves to stay while looking for more permanent living conditions. Here they could find food, clothing, and safety.⁴⁸

The Clarksville Nine

One former fugitive, interviewed in Amherstburg forty years after his escape, gave a first-person account of assistance from the McCurdy's in his escape to freedom. Robert Thompson was born into slavery as his mother was a slave. Sold at age ten, then again in his twenties, in his late thirties he found himself the slave of a man named Cyrus "Sipe" Ross in Clarksville, Virginia, slightly south of Greene, Pennsylvania.⁴⁹

His job was as a supervisor of other slaves, but also ran a brandy still for his owner, selling brandy to passing customers. He was largely unsupervised. Speaking with customers one day they asked him why he didn't run away. They advised him to head north, following the North Star, and, once in Pennsylvania, he should inquire about getting to Zanesville, Ohio. There he would find plenty of "abolitioners" to assist him.

In mid-July, 1856, he and eight others (three adult men and six boys), fled on horseback. By dawn they were thirty miles north in Pennsylvania. His owner overtook them and a fight ensued, before they slipped away into the woods. According to his interview in 1895, the first helpful person they encountered was Joseph McCurdy who said "Come along with me." He spent one night with Joseph before moving on. He mentions that Joseph's brother William was "also a worker." Given the risks, Joseph would not simply have volunteered that his brother also helped runaway slaves. William likely housed some of the "Clarksville Nine" that night. Perhaps some of the runaways stayed at the nearby Jones and Grinage farms, as well.

In other interviews with Thompson, Joseph McCurdy was not the first person in Pennsylvania to help. They were helped by at least two others before staying with the McCurdys. This would indicate that the McCurdys were known to other local "conductors" on the Underground Railroad as among those who would help slaves.

Thompson states that all nine were eventually safely conducted to Cleveland where they caught a boat to Malden (now Amherstburg), Ontario. Once safely in Canada, they were beyond the reach of the Fugitive Slave Act.

Runaway Cate

One other interesting story rightfully belongs in the discussion of the McCurdys and the Underground Railroad, though there is no direct evidence any of the McCurdys were involved. Nasa was set free for all practical purposes by his first manumission in 1795. By 1798, tax lists show he was living in a rented house on the property of Alexander McClelland in Cumberland, Greene, Pennsylvania. It is reasonable to assume he had been living there for some time.

On January 5th, 1796, the following advertisement ran in Washington, Pennsylvania:⁵⁰

Tuesday, January 5, 1796, Washington

TWENTY DOLLARS REWARD.

Runaway from the house of James SEATON living on Little Whitely in Washington county on the night of Sunday the 6th of December last, a Negroe Wench about two or three and twenty years of age named Cate, very black, short, well made and very active. The Wench is the property of Jennet PRATHER. Whoever takes up the said wench and delivers her to Charles PRATHER at the mouth of Buffaloe shall receive the above reward.

The Seaton property on the Little Whitley is just about a mile from where Nasa was likely living on McClelland's land.



Land Patents by Andrew McClelland and George Seaton, Greene, Pennsylvania

Charles Prather, who ran the ad, was the son of Colonel Thomas Prather and Elizabeth Claggett. If we are right about one of Charles' older brothers being Nasa's grandfather, then Charles was Nasa's great uncle. The "mouth of the Buffaloe" is about 35 miles northwest at present day Wellsburg, West Virginia. Jennet Prather was the widow of Colonel Thomas Prather (father of Charles), having been his third wife. In 1796 Jennet was still living on the plantation on Prather's Neck, Maryland, where Nasa possibly was born, but where his mother, Mary Jane Prather, likely grew up.

While it's possible Cate was no relation to Nasa, it is also quite possible this slave was a close relative. She could be anything from a sister to maybe a cousin. And she ran away while visiting a farm a mile from where Nasa was likely living. Why Cate was at the Seaton farm, 130 miles from the home of her owner, we don't know, but the coincidence is rather interesting. Was this, maybe, the beginning of McCurdy family involvement with the Underground Railroad?

Freedom, But Not Paradise

One cannot doubt the elation and relief of fugitive slaves finally arriving in a place where they were legally free. If Amherstburg is any example, they were often welcomed by local black communities providing food, clothes, and shelter. Ontario was relatively fertile farmland. But this new freedom should not be romanticized.

As we have seen, George McCurdy left Ontario with two others in December, 1861, to seek his fortunes in Haiti. The following July he wrote his niece, Hannah Hilton, and described his new life near L' Aracahale. They were cutting cane and making syrup from it, likely to produce rum. He went on at some length about what they were growing: melons, cucumber, pumpkins, corn, sweet potatoes, beans and bananas. He apparently took corn seed from Canada with him, but found it grew poorly in Haiti. He mentioned the fevers they all suffered from, and the deaths in the colony, likely from malaria and typhoid.⁵¹

For three black men trying to eke out a living in Ontario to make a journey to Haiti with an interest in farming is rather telling. While freedom and relatively fertile land was available to Canada, it was not without a struggle that blacks prospered there. Those first few years were likely difficult, as indicated by forty-year-old George McCurdy, leaving a two-year-old son and possibly a wife behind, traveling to Haiti to seek better fortunes. Of the three men who went, George's nephew Nelson died of disease in the first two years. George and his friend James W. Foster returned to Canada by 1867.⁵² A few years in Haiti apparently made Ontario look better by comparison.

Lucinda McCurdy

A possible relative the Nasa McCurdy family shows up in the 1850 census in Greene, Pennsylvania. Living in the household of Hiram Burnfield (mulatto) and his wife Charlotte (white), is a mulatto girl of 12 named Lucinda McCurdy. She later married Michael Adams and raised a family in Coshocton, Ohio.

It is very curious in that Nasa McCurdy's family are the only non-white McCurdys in the whole county, save this 12-year-old girl. It seems likely she was related, possibly the daughter of one of Nasa's sons, though we do not know which.

Where Did "McCurdy" Come From?

Simply put, nobody knows. The first record of Nasa using the surname McCurdy was in his 1795 manumission from Rachel Frazier Kennedy in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. There were slave owning McCurdys in Cumberland and Franklin Counties where Nasa was a slave, but no proven connection to the Kennedys who owned Nasa. Y DNA shows that his direct paternal line does not include a McCurdy. Autosomal DNA has yet to show a compelling connection to a Pennsylvania McCurdy.

Race and Racial Identity

Nasa's exact racial makeup is impossible to know. He was twice documented as "mulatto." The 1780 Cumberland County Slave Register is rather specific about race. In some cases, multiple slaves of a single owner are registered on the same date, some marked as negro and some as mulatto. In other cases, another descriptor is used such as "mustee" or "mistoe." The latter are sometimes associated with "yellow" and are likely related to *mestizo*, indicating Indian blood.

While children born to one white and one black parent were not uncommon among slaves (usually a free white male and a slave black female), more commonly a female slave would conceive with a male slave. If we're right about Nasa and the Prathers, his mother was at least 50% white and a slave. The most likely scenario is that Nasa's father was a non-white slave. Edith Jones' notes vaguely indicate that Nasa's father may have been a free mulatto named Buster.

The census indicates Nasa's wife Hannah was white, though Edith Jones hinted Hannah may have been a very light-skinned mulatto. While most of Nasa's descendants would today consider themselves black, all his son Joseph's descendants are white (Joseph married a white woman, Sidnah Martin). They were enumerated in the census as mulatto when still in Greene where they were known as the descendants of a former slave, but as white after moving to Michigan. A modest minority of the descendants of Ruth McCurdy Grinage and those of Hannah McCurdy Jones are today considered white.

The Grinage Connection

One last DNA mystery involving Nasa: There appears to be a DNA connection between some of Nasa's descendants and Thomas Grinage, brother of Benjamin Grinage who married Nasa's daughter Ruth.⁵³ It appears as if Nasa and Benjamin Grinage share a common ancestor. This should not be surprising, as the black Grinages came originally from Maryland, as Nasa's ancestors likely did, where there was a fair amount of endogamy among slaves.

Notes on Sources

This work benefited from at least two sources found in unexpected collections or libraries. One wonders what else is out there in an obscure archive, waiting to be digitized.

The interview with Robert Thompson, the runaway slave helped by Joseph McCurdy, is part of the digitized Wilbur H. Siebert Underground Railroad Collection, at the State Library of Ohio. Siebert was a history professor at Ohio State and for decades collected material on the Underground Railroad, to include interviews with conductors as well as former fugitive slaves.

The Alvin McCurdy Fonds in the Archives of Ontario are a rich source. Alvin (1916-1989) was an avid collector on all things relating to blacks in early Ontario. His collection is now on at least a dozen microfilm roles, with family history being only a small part of it. Some of this material is simply notes collected in the mid-1900s on what family members knew about Nasa's family in Greene.

Some of the data in these notes can be verified with primary sources, some can be proven false with primary sources, and some seems purely fanciful. It is interesting to see how little the Canadian McCurdys knew about those descendants of Nasa who didn't move to Canada. There is nothing about the Grinages or Joseph McCurdy's family in this collection. There is a little about the family of Hannah McCurdy Jones, but not much.

In several letters from Dr. G.C. Haskell to Alvin McCurdy around 1980, he explained that Edith A. Jones told of a great grandmother Prather and Haskell begged Alvin to provide more information. In going through the correspondence, it becomes clear that Alvin simply didn't know anything more.

Some of the more fanciful tales passed down were that Nasa's mother was a "Chippewa-Cherokee" and that Nasa was friends with George Washington during the Revolution. Alvin also once suggested that Nasa's father was John McCurdy, an Irish immigrant. DNA proves that neither Nasa's father, nor his father's father, was a McCurdy.

The information from Edith Jones seems more reliable. None of it can be proven false, some of it is verifiable, and the rest is at least plausible given what we know from other sources. Unfortunately, these notes are in the handwriting of G.C. Haskell, so likely his notes from phone calls with Edith Jones who was at the time quite elderly.

Notes

- ¹ The original inventory of David Kennedy's estate is held at the Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA.
- ² David Kennedy in Cumberland County, PA, Slave and Slave Owners Register 1780-1841, p. 64, http://records.ccpa.net/weblink_public_print/DocView.aspx?id=761551&dbid=7
- ³ For a thorough treatment of slavery in Pennsylvania, see Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991).
- ⁴ Survey of Land Warranted to David Kennedy based on Warrant of 1739, Survey Docket 3, p. 235, Clerk of the Court Office, Franklin County Courthouse, Chambersburg, PA.
- ⁵ Surveys of Land Warranted to David Kennedy based on Warrants of 1740 and 1741, Survey Docket 3, p. 30, Clerk of the Court Office, Franklin County Courthouse, Chambersburg, PA.
- ⁶ James W. Houbt, Jr., *In His Words: The Diary of James McCullough, 1722-1781 – One Man's Chronicle of Colonial History* (Mercersburg, PA, The Conococheague Institute, 2013)
- ⁷ Calvin W. Bricker Jr. and Dr. Walter L. Powell, *Conflict on the Conococheague, 1755-1758: Terror in the backcountry of Pennsylvania and Maryland* (Mercersburg, PA, The Conococheague Institute, 2009).
- ⁸ William A. Hunter, "Victory at Kittanning," *Pennsylvania History* 23, no. 3 (1956): 379.
- ⁹ Calvin Bricker, "Studebaker Massacre Welsh Run, Pa March 3, 1756," Mercersburg Historical Society, <http://mhs.mercersburg.org/blog/6/>, accessed 24 Dec 2014.
- ¹⁰ Howard M. Wilson, *The Tinkling Spring Headwater of Freedom, A Study of the Church and Her People: 1732-1952* (Fisherville, VA, 1954), p. 477.
- ¹¹ John Crawford, *The William Crawford Memorial* (Brooklin, The Eagle Book Printing Company, 1904), p. 181.
- ¹² Howard L. Leckey, *The Tenmile Country and Its Pioneer Families* (Baltimore, Genealogical Publishing Company), p. 542.
- ¹³ "Ohio, County Death Records, 1840-2001," index and images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/F6FY-JT1> : accessed 4 January 2015), Hannah Jones, 07 Feb 1878; citing Death, Marion Township, Morgan, Ohio, United States, source ID v 1 p 98, County courthouses, Ohio; FHL microfilm 910,655.
- ¹⁴ Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series, vol. 8, p. 452, Godfrey Library, Middleton, CT.
- ¹⁵ Single page of handwritten notes in the writing of G.C. Haskel, apparently from a conversation with Edith A. Jones. Alvin McCurdy Fonds, Archives of Ontario.
- ¹⁶ Barry is Alvin McCurdy's cousin, and this tree likely came from Alvin, or perhaps Barry's father, George W.F. McCurdy.

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- ¹⁷ Deed of Sale from Oliver Crawford to Nasa McCurdy, 6 November 1816 (recorded 1 October 1817), Greene County, Pennsylvania Deed Book 3, page 611. County Recorder's Office, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
- ¹⁸ Deed of Sale from James Blaine to Nasa McCurdy, 6 May 1817 (recorded 14 September 1837), Greene County, Pennsylvania Deed Book 3, page 271. County Recorder's Office, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
- ¹⁹ Deed of Sale from Nasa McCurdy to Anne Prather, 25 March 1818, Greene County, Pennsylvania Deed Book 8, page 19. County Recorder's Office, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
- ²⁰ Deed of Sale from Anne Prather to John Flenniken, 31 March 1837, Greene County, Pennsylvania Deed Book 10, page 391. County Recorder's Office, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
- ²¹ Deed of Sale Joseph and Nasa McCurdy to Anne Prather, 30 March 1836 (recorded 16 September 1846), Greene County, Pennsylvania. County Recorder's Office, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
- ²² 1840 U.S. census, Greene County, Pennsylvania, Jackson township, population schedule, p. 3, Sidney McCurdy; NARA microfilm publication M704, roll 461.
- ²³ Deed of Sale from Anne Prather to Joseph Jones, 14 April 1844 (recorded 7 June 1853), Greene County, Pennsylvania Deed Book 13, page 344. County Recorder's Office, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
- ²⁴ Will of Anne Prather, written 31 May 1849, proved 27 December 1849, Greene County, Pennsylvania, Will Book 3, p. 68. County Recorder's Office, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
- ²⁵ Will of Thomas Leiper,
- ²⁶ Deed, George Leiper and Others, surviving executors to Samuel McKean Leiper, Deed Book 7, page 647, Greene County Pennsylvania Recorder's Office.
- ²⁷ Deed, Samuel McKean Leiper to John Bell Junr. and others, Deed Book 8, page 185, Greene County Pennsylvania Recorder's Office.
- ²⁸ Nasa McCurdy Jr., Petition for Letters of Administration, 1836, *op cit*.
- ²⁹ "Ohio, County Marriages, 1789-2013," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XDL3-K72> : 26 August 2019), N.M.C. Hilton and Hanna L. Fields, 27 Jun 1902; citing Marriage, Licking, Ohio, United States, vol. 8 pg 183, Franklin County Genealogical & Historical Society, Columbus; FHL microfilm.
- ³⁰ George Hilton petition for guardianship, December 1840, Greene County, Pennsylvania, Orphan's Court book 2, p. 188. County Recorder's Office, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
- ³¹ Letter, George McCurdy to Hannah Hilton, 27 March 1862, L' Arcahole, Haiti, from the Alvin McCurdy Fonds, Archives of Ontario.
- ³² "Ontario Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JNQB-RZV> : 27 April 2019), Nasa McCurdy, 18 Jul 1886; citing Amherstburg, Essex, Ontario, yr 1886 cn 5010, Registrar General. Archives of Ontario, Toronto; FHL microfilm 1,853,481.

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- ³³ "Patent of Joseph McCurdy, 1 May 1858," Ionia Michigan Land Office, Certificate #16496.
- ³⁴ Deed of Sale Luicen Sias to Joseph McCurdy, 1 April 1862 (recorded 7 April 1865), Gratiot County, Michigan, Liber 9, p. 631. County Recorder's Office, Ithica, Michigan.
- ³⁵ *Find A Grave*, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 12 November 2019), memorial page for Joseph McCurdy (15 Apr 1816–2 Feb 1868), Find A Grave Memorial no. 87756210, citing Oak Grove Cemetery, Saint Louis, Gratiot County, Michigan.
- ³⁶ "Ontario Census, 1861" Wm McCurdy, All Places (Agricultural), Essex, Ontario, Canada; citing p. 34, line 19; Library and Archives Canada film number C-1021, Public Archives, Toronto.
- ³⁷ "Ontario Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JNW4-42V> : 27 April 2019), William Mccurdy, 18 Jan 1888; citing Colchester North, Essex, Ontario, yr 1888 cn 4659, Registrar General. Archives of Ontario, Toronto; FHL microfilm 1,853,488.
- ³⁸ Handwritten notes in the Alvin McCurdy Fonds, Archives of Ontario.
- ³⁹ Robertson, Charles, "History of Morgan County, Ohio", (Chicago: L.H. Watkins & Co, 1886), 444.
- ⁴⁰ Deed of Sale Joseph and Hannah Jones to John Grove, 17 August 1872 (recorded 7 September 1882), Greene County, Pennsylvania. County Recorder's Office, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
- ⁴¹ *Find A Grave*, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 12 November 2019), memorial page for Hannah *McCurdy* Jones (16 Feb 1825–1879), Find A Grave Memorial no. 9511481, citing Chesterhill Cemetery, Chesterhill, Morgan County, Ohio, USA.
- ⁴² Will of Anne Prather, *op cit*.
- ⁴³ Mainwaring, W. Thomas, "Abandoned Tracks, The Underground Railroad in Washington County, Pennsylvania", (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).
- ⁴⁴ Mainwaring, p. 73.
- ⁴⁵ Mainwaring, p. 92.
- ⁴⁶ Crumrine, Boyd, "History of Washington County, Pennsylvania", (Philadelphia: L.H. Eberts & Co, 1882), p. 262.
- ⁴⁷ State Convention of the Colored Freemen of Pennsylvania (1841 : Pittsburgh, PA), "Proceedings of the State Convention of the Colored Freemen of Pennsylvania, Held in Pittsburgh, on the 23d, 24th and 25th of August, 1841, for the Purpose of Considering their Condition, and the Means of Its Improvement.," *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed January 30, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/240>.
- ⁴⁸ Amherstburg Freedom Museum, Amherstburg, Ontario, <https://amherstburgfreedom.org/>.

⁴⁹ Interview of David Thompson by Wilbur Siebert, ca 1895, Wilbur H. Siebert Collection, Ohio History Connection, <https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/17121>.

⁵⁰ Exactly which paper this was published in is unclear. It is a clipping found in a series of historical scrapbooks published by the Pennsylvania State Archives. While the clipping is dated, the scrapbook is not.

<https://archive.org/details/pennsylvaniacoun42unse/page/n11>.

⁵¹ Letter from George McCurdy to Hannah Hilton, 27 March 1862, L' Arcahale, Haiti, from the Alvin McCurdy Fonds, Archives of Ontario.

⁵² "Michigan Civil Marriages, 1834-1974," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FCZ4-XY2> : 10 March 2018), James W. Foster and Lizzie A. Butter, 20 Aug 1867; citing Marriage, Detroit, Wayne, Michigan, United States, v 3-4 p 65.