

REUBEN AND BETSEY MADISON

Interviewed, 1827, by Abigail Mott³ Age: forty-seven and sixty-four, respectively
 b. 1781 and 1763, respectively,
 Virginia
 Enslaved: Virginia, Kentucky,
 Mississippi, Louisiana

Reuben Madison, was born in Virginia, near Port Royal, about the year 1781. His parents, and all his connexions in this country were slaves. His father died when he was about seven years old. His mother is now living in Kentucky, enjoying freedom in her old age, through the filial regard of Reuben, who purchased her liberty for seventy dollars. She is seriously disposed, but not a professor of religion. He has now eight brothers and sisters living in Frankfort, Franklin county, Kentucky, all slaves, and all, excepting one, members of a Baptist church in that place.

About a year after his conversion, Reuben was married to a slave, who had been kidnapped in Maryland, and sold to a planter in his neighbourhood. She was also hopefully pious. While they lived together, she became the mother of two children; but about four years after their marriage, she and one of the children, aged eight months, were sold without his knowledge, and transported to a distant Spanish territory, and with so much secrecy, that he had no opportunity even to bid her a last farewell. 'This,' said he, 'was the severest trial of my life, a sense of sin only excepted. I mourned and cried, and would not be comforted.

'After several months, however, the hope of meeting her and my children again in the kingdom of God, when we should never be separated, together with a promise from my master that I should at some future time go and see her, in some measure allayed my grief, and permitted me to enjoy the consolations of religion.'—The other child is now a slave in Kentucky, though the father has often endeavoured in vain to purchase his freedom.

3. Abigail Mott (1766-1851) was a deeply religious New York abolitionist and women's rights advocate. A tireless interviewer and collector of biographical sketches, letters, and anecdotes of black people in Latin America and the United States, she compiled and edited the much reprinted *Biographical Sketches and Interesting Anecdotes of Persons of Color* (New York, 1826).

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About six years since, having hired his time of his master for five years previous, at 120 dollars a year, Reuben had succeeded, by trafficking in rags, and in other ways, in collecting a sum sufficient for the purchase of his own freedom, for which he paid 700 dollars, and not only so, but he was enabled, with his surplus earnings, to build him a brick house, and to provide it with convenient accommodations. By the dishonesty of his former master, however, all was taken from him.

Thus stripped of his property, he left Kentucky and went to New-Orleans, that he might learn something from his wife, and if possible, find and redeem her; but he only succeeded in gaining the painful intelligence that she was dead. He there formed an acquaintance with his present wife, whose former name was Betsey Bond, and they were soon married.—The circumstances of her life are briefly these:—

Betsey was born a slave, near Hobb's Hole, Essex County, Virginia, about 1763, was married to a slave at about the age of twenty years. By him she had three children, one of which, together with her husband, died a few years after their marriage. Soon after their death, she was led to reflect on her lost state as a sinner, and after about seven months of deep anxiety, was enabled, as she trusts, to resign herself into the hands of her Saviour, and experience those consolations which he deigns to grant to the broken-hearted penitent.

She gained the confidence and attachment of her mistress, who treated her with much kindness, and was married to a pious servant of the family, where she remained about nine years. At the close of this period, a planter from the vicinity of Natchez coming to Alexandria, in Virginia, where she then lived, for slaves, she was sold, and carried with eight others to his plantation, leaving her husband behind.

Her new master treated her with great severity, and she was compelled to labour almost incessantly every day of the week, Sabbath not excepted, to save herself from the lash. With this man she lived nineteen years, and he then died, and left his slaves by will, to another planter, who also dying soon after, she was again sold, and transported to New-Orleans, where she arrived about the year 1812.

At the end of two years this master also died, and when his slaves were about to be sold, Betsey succeeded with some difficulty in hiring her time, and in little more than a year, by washing and other labour, she acquired sufficient property to purchase her freedom, for which she paid

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250 dollars. Her youngest son, with his wife being also slaves in New-Orleans, she hoped by her industry and economy to obtain money sufficient to purchase them also; but their master refused to part with them.

About six years ago, a large number of slaves were brought to New-Orleans from Virginia, and were about to be offered for sale, and Fanny was among the number. Having become accidentally acquainted with her, previous to the sale, and finding her a sister in Christ, Betsey's feelings were deeply interested, and she resolved to purchase her, and to treat her not as a slave, but as a child and companion.

This determination she communicated to Fanny, and with the aid of a gentleman she succeeded in accomplishing her object. The price was 250 dollars. She paid 200, her all, and obtained a short credit for the remainder. Soon after this, her present husband coming to New-Orleans, as before stated, they were married, and the payment for Fanny was then completed.

By their united industry, they were soon able to build a comfortable house, in which they set apart a room for religious purposes. Here they assembled with others every Sabbath for the worship of God. But being constantly exposed to be disturbed in their worship, they felt a great desire to go to a free State, where they might enjoy religious privileges unmolested; where they could unite with Christian friends in social prayer and conversation, without a soldier with a drawn sword stationed at their door.

They fixed upon New-York as the desired asylum; and having arranged their concerns, rented their house, and collected their effects, they engaged and paid their passage, which was seventy dollars, and sailed from New-Orleans about the 12th of July, 1825, with pleasing anticipations for a land of freedom and religious privileges.

They suffered much on their voyage through the cruelty of the captain; being exposed without shelter during the whole of the passage, either on deck or in the long boat. In consequence of this exposure, both the women were taken sick, and in this condition they arrived at New-York, and were landed on the wharf in a land of strangers, their money almost expended, and none to commiserate their sufferings.

After a few days, however, Reuben succeeded in obtaining a miserable cellar in Chapel-street, at sixty dollars annual rent, where he remained

until quite recently, supporting the family in their sickness, by his labour as a shoemaker, and by the sale of some of his effects.

On his arrival at this port, his first act was to grant entire freedom to Fanny, giving her liberty to live with him, or to go where she pleased. She chose to remain with him, and now assists in the support of the family by washing and other labour, and nurses her mistress who is evidently declining with the consumption occasioned doubtless by the severity of her treatment on the passage from New-Orleans.

Not being able to pay their rent in advance, owing to their sickness and other expenses, their landlord not long since compelled them to quit their residence; and they have since been obliged to put up with still more miserable accommodations in a cellar in Elm-street, where they now reside.

They appear to put their trust and confidence in God, and express their entire belief that all their trials are designed for their good. They seem to be one in sentiment and feeling, and to manifest a spirituality of mind rarely to be found. Every little attention is most gratefully received, and the best of blessings are implored on him who bestows it.

With some assistance from the benevolent, and with what they may receive from New-Orleans for rents, it is believed they may be provided with a comfortable house, and be introduced to those privileges which they so ardently desire. No one of the family can read, though they are all desirous to learn, and from a little attention which friends have given them, it appears that they may be taught without difficulty.

We trust that the mere recital of these facts will be sufficient to awaken the sympathy of our Christian friends, and to induce immediate measures for the relief of the benevolent sufferers. A note from our correspondent informs us that within a few days the health of the sick woman has rapidly declined, owing doubtless to her miserable accommodations, and that she is now apparently in the last stages of the consumption.

In a few weeks at farthest, her spirit will ascend to that world where sorrow and sighing will cease, and all tears be forever wiped from her eyes. We hope that the little remnant of her days on earth will be made happy, and that when she appears at the bar of the Great Judge, she will not have to speak of white men only in the language of accusation.

It is an affecting thought that the wrongs of this poor woman, which commenced at her birth, and were inflicted without interruption during

the long years of freedom, and her hopes, her fanc (Tenth Month, 1

DAVID B.

Interviewed, 18

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4. Hiram W Oberlin College. slavery views, he next twenty-eigh preachers, and v community of D *Biographical His*

the long years of slavery, still followed her on the passage to the land of freedom, and have been finally consummated in this city, the city of her hopes, her fancied asylum from the oppressor. [*African Observer*, I (Tenth Month, 1827), 222-24.]

DAVID BARRETT

Interviewed, 1837, by Hiram Wilson⁴

Age: twenty-seven

b. 1800, Kentucky

Enslaved: Kentucky

Field hand

I was held in bondage in Fayette Co., Kentucky, near Lexington, by James Graves till I was eighteen years of age. My master was not so cruel as many others; I could not complain of harsh treatment but was determined not to be whipped.

In the fall of 1818, having been out on a frolic, when I came home Monday morning, my master threatened to flog me. I went into the field to ploughing without stopping to change my clothes. He came out in the forenoon and ordered me to take the horse to feed, evidently intending to whip me while the horse was eating. Thought I, if you flog me, old fellow, you will have to give me a chase first. I loosed my horse from the plough, but instead of obeying his orders, I mounted and rode in haste to the opposite side of the field, dismounted and sculked into the woods. This was the last my master ever saw of me. I travelled fifty miles with but little difficulty, to within four miles of Mays-Lick. Having fasted till the second evening of my journey, I became exceedingly hungry. In the dusk of evening I smelt meat that was drying in a house one quarter of a mile ahead of me. When I came up I looked through the fence into the kitchen, and saw a lady, who had been frying the meat and baking cakes, leaving the kitchen and going into the other part of the house, probably intending to return in a minute with a plate to take up her warm cakes. I saved her the trouble, for in a moment I entered, emptied her cakes into

4. Hiram Wilson (1803-1864) was born in New Hampshire and was graduated from Oberlin College. One of the students expelled from Lane Seminary because of their anti-slavery views, he went to Canada in 1836 as a missionary to fugitive slaves there. During the next twenty-eight years he established schools, raised money, recruited teachers and preachers, and worked with the former slave Josiah Henson in establishing the all-black community of Dawn Mills. Jane H. and William H. Pease, *Bound with Them in Chains: A Biographical History of the Antislavery Movement* (Westport, Conn., 1972), 115-39.