

Factoid - Slavery in the Sharp – Wilson Family

A thought that I had is that I would like to make some shorter posts that don't take up much time to write or read, and I will call them "Factoids", just little facts without a lot of in-depth details like some of my posts. So here is our first "Factoid"!

I think it's time that we explored some of the not-so-positive history of our family – in particular the issue of slavery. If you had asked me before I started into genealogy if our family had been wealthy enough to own slaves, I would have said "No way. Our family has been poor Southern crackers for centuries." And I was most definitely wrong. Our family has owned literally hundreds of African Americans, starting back in the 1700s (maybe earlier) all the way to the end of the Civil War. I have started what I call a "Compilation Document" that I will use to compile all the slave owners and the number of slaves each one owned. But that will take weeks to get that document brought up to just what I know now.

When did the slaves arrive in North America?

Over the entire span of the Slave Trade, about 12.5 million Africans were brought to the New World as slaves. Of that 12.5 million, about 389,000 came directly to North America and the rest went to the Caribbean colonies and to Central and South America. In addition, another 66,000 slaves came from the Caribbean colonies into the United States for a total of about 455,000 slaves being imported into the US (See Link #2 below).

A really surprising fact that I learned is when these slaves arrived in North America. Let's go back to the beginning of our country. During the Constitutional Convention in 1787, our Founding Fathers wrestled with the issue of slavery (See Link #1 below). In the end, they decided that as soon as possible, the importation of slaves into the United States should be banned. Not that slavery would be banned, just the importation of slaves. So in 1807, a law was passed that banned the import of slaves after 1808. There is an interesting story about a bet that two people made. In 1860, Tim Meaher (the Meaher family is extremely prominent in the Mobile, AL area even to this day) bet someone that he could import slaves from Africa. He sent a ship to the Kingdom of Dahomey (if you watched the movie "The Woman King", it's set in Dahomey), and brought back 110 slaves. The captain sailed the ship up the Mobile River, offloaded the slaves, and burned the ship. The ship may have recently been found (See Link #3 below). There is also a great documentary on Netflix called "Descendant" that is very interesting about searching for this ship.

But by and large, that law was followed. The importation of slaves dropped drastically. Of those 455,000 slaves that were imported into the US, about 4% of them were here by 1700. By 1750, 41% had arrived. By 1800, 80% of them had arrived, and by 1820, 99.7% of all the slaves imported into the US had arrived.

So if a Black person can trace their ancestors back to slaves at the end of the Civil War, it is almost 100% certain that their ancestors have been in the United States since the very beginnings of the country. So I

think that when Black Americans say that they have been a part of American history from the beginning, and helped to build this country – they have a pretty good argument!

Links:

1. “The Slave Trade”, National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/slave-trade.html#:~:text=The%20Act%20Prohibiting%20the%20Importation%20of%20Slaves%2C%201808,-Enlarge&text=Twenty%20years%20later%2C%20the%20Act,1808.%5D%22%20was%20passed.>
2. “In Search of Our Roots”, pp. 17-18, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. © 2009.
3. “The Clotilda, The Last Known Slave Ship to Arrive in the U. S., is Found”, Smithsonian Magazine, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/clotilda-last-known-slave-ship-arrive-us-found-180972177/>