

Return to Holme Hill Farm in the 1850s

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Frederick Douglass stated the plain facts of his birth in the opening sentence of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*: “I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot county, Maryland.” Missing from his statement of origins was mention of Holme Hill Farm, a tract of five hundred acres of marsh, woodland, and cultivated fields and orchards lying along the western shore of Tuckahoe Creek, which was named and surveyed in the early 1660s shortly after the establishment of Talbot County. It passed through a succession of hands before purchase by Edward Lloyd IV in 1794 and sale, in 1802, from Edward Lloyd V to the chief overseer of his dozen farms, Aaron Anthony. On that middle-sized, grain-growing farm passed down by three generations of Anthonys, in a small log cabin built with landlord’s consent by their Father/Grandfather Isaac Bailey, were born more than a dozen babies descended from Grandmother Betsey and Isaac Bailey during the first decades of the nineteenth century, including the future Frederick Douglass.

Once six-year-old Frederick Bailey moved first to the Lloyds’ Great House Farm (Wye House), then to Baltimore and from Baltimore to various points north, Holme Hill was out of sight, though never far out of mind. For nearly all the remaining descendants of Grandmother Betsey and Mother Harriet Bailey, Holme Hill remained home. It was not continuously so physically, though, once the successive deaths of Aaron Anthony (in 1826) and his children Lucretia (1827), Richard Lee (1828), and Andrew Skinner (1833) led repeatedly to divisions of the Anthony family’s personal and real estate, and consequent separations and dispersions of portions of the Bailey family. Not until the legal maturity of third-generation John Planner Anthony, in 1851, did Holme Hill become an Anthony family working farm on which the scattered members of the Bailey family bequeathed to him returned to their place of origin. From that date, it would remain their home until emancipation reached Maryland on 1 November 1864.

On 22 January 1851, John Planner Anthony (1830–71), son of Andrew Skinner Anthony and grandson of Aaron Anthony, marked a critical rite of passage. To commemorate his arrival at legal manhood and full inheritance as a property-owning White Southern male, he appropriated the ledger kept by his stepfather, White Barwick, and inscribed in his best, boldest calligraphy,

Log Book
January 22nd 1851 Wednesday
Twenty-One years old to day¹

¹ These details, and many that follow, come chiefly from the journal that Anthony kept from 1851–52, with a few stray entries also for 1853; MSA SC 564, Anthony Papers, Mary A. Dodge Collection, Msa.maryland.gov, scan 685, Maryland State Archives (MSA).

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Complying with legal obligation, he rode out several weeks later to Orphans’ Court in Easton to take formal custody of his estate, releasing caretaker Thomas O. Martin “of and from all debts, monies and demands due me as his said Ward . . . and for all negroes due me and in his hands as Guardian.”²

Young master Anthony had prepared carefully for the day; indeed, all his life had been a preparation. In the weeks before leaving St. Michaels to take possession of ancestral Holme Hill Farm on Tuckahoe Creek, he purchased a stock of basic household and farming necessities, including bed, chairs, desk, clock, plough, scythe, chickens, geese, and a horse with the good Eastern Shore name of Ivanhoe.³ Neighbors helped. One was Daniel Lloyd, a slave-rich relative of the master of Wye House, who prepared a housewarming present of a sow and four pigs.⁴ Tallied among his outlays, in addition, was eight dollars eighty-one cents toward “clothing per blacks.” Joining Anthony in the move were his mother Anne, his sister Lucy, and “the old man” (White Barwick). How long they remained with him is unclear, but in any event from January 1855 the house had an additional presence once he married sixteen-year-old Sarah Tharp Masten from Kent County, Delaware, a member of a prominent family. With the birth of daughter Harriet Lucretia nine months later, the Anthony family succession would be assured for another generation.

Just as fundamentally, he brought together on his farm the ingredient most essential, not to mention indispensable, for its profitable operation: his bequeathal of about a dozen slaves. On or about this gray, rainy January day, two generations of Baileys, including Frederick Bailey Douglass’s brother Perry, sister Kitty, and cousin Stephen, along with their spouses and children, assembled at the place of their birth and earliest years. What was a homecoming for Anthony was also one for the Baileys; it could hardly have been one without the other so intertwined were the two families. For the Baileys, however, the collective return to Holme Hill Farm also marked a reunion a long time coming after division, separation, redistribution, sale, and hiring out had dispersed them among various locales in Talbot County. Now, in 1851, with all of Aaron’s children deceased and grandson John P. come into his patrimony, a main branch of the Bailey family descended from Grandma Betsey had a common home.

They lacked, however, the figure who had presided as no other person, White or Black, owner or servant, ever had over the creeks, woods, and marshes of Holme Hill Farm: family matriarch Betsey Bailey. Betsey had died about a year earlier at age seventy-five on the home grounds of master Thomas Auld—she who had seen the dispersal of her dozens of children and grandchildren but not their reunion on common ground.⁵ Even before her passing she was launched on a vibrant afterlife thanks to grandson Frederick’s searing portrayal in his 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, which memorialized her for posterity as mother/grandmother Rachel bereft of her children:

The hearth is desolate. The children, the unconscious children, who once sang and danced in her presence, are gone. She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water. Instead of the voices of her children, she hears by day the moans of the dove, and

² Talbot County Register of Wills, Distributions, 1845–59, p. 115, MSA.

³ Anthony journal, MSA.

⁴ Entry for 25 January 1851, Anthony journal, p. 169.

⁵ Someone from the Anthony family added the update, “Bet died 1849,” to the well-known page of Aaron Anthony’s ledger he denoted, “My Black People ages”; Ledger A, Dodge Collection, Msa.maryland.gov, scan 373, MSA.

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by night the screams of the hideous owl. All is gloom. The grave is at the door . . . my poor old grandmother, the devoted mother of twelve children, is left all alone, in yonder little hut, before a few dim embers. She stands—she sits—she staggers—she falls—she groans—she dies—and there are none of her children or grandchildren present, to wipe from her wrinkled brow the cold sweat of death, or to place beneath the sod her fallen remains. Will not a righteous God visit for these things?

Douglass’s sentimentalized account of “my poor old grandmother” undoubtedly was meant to do dutiful service to the antislavery movement. It was, if anything, intended more for William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Edmund Quincy and their followers in the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, which had published the work, than for his own people. He performed this literary labor so magisterially that Betsey Bailey of Tuckahoe quickly took her place alongside Mother Harriet and Aunt Hester, also prominently characterized in its opening chapters, in the gallery of Bailey women adopted by the Anglo-American reading public as personifications of enslaved womanhood—of women, on the one hand, exploited, beaten, and raped; and on the other hand, of women life giving and sustaining. But for the living, breathing Douglass, committing his memories to paper at his table in frozen New Bedford, memory of Grandmother Betsey brought home to him associations grown remote as his life tracked further in time and place from his Eastern Shore childhood. Distanced from the site of his memories, he reclaimed his grounding in conjuring her spirit.

What she meant to Douglass was not necessarily what she meant in her final years to the dozens of Bailey grandchildren on the Eastern Shore. She had walked the road with them not just between Tuckahoe and Wye River but through all the ways and byways of their early years. Not just that; she had delivered some of them, as she had their mothers, into the world. To them she was more continuously a living, breathing presence as mother/grandmother, guardian, care giver, and teacher to three generation of Eastern Shore relatives whom she had midwived, nursed, raised and taught the arts of fishing, weaving, midwifery for a generation after Frederick’s childhood—not to mention, midwifery to the rising generation of Bailey women. The final resting place of her physical remains—most likely either in the vicinity of the Auld residence in St. Michaels or in the slave burial ground at Holme Hill—is indeterminate. Memory of its location died with her grandchildren.

John P. Anthony came well prepared to the task at hand as master of Holme Hill. Born and raised chiefly in rural Talbot and Caroline counties, he was thoroughly at home in the demands of country life. He had some formal schooling, principally at the hands of St. Michaels resident Nathan Wilson, a liberal Quaker well known to teenaged Frederick Bailey and older sister Eliza Bailey and mentioned in Douglass’s *Narrative* as a supporter of his short-lived effort to organize a Sunday school for local slaves.⁶ Whatever benefit organized schooling afforded him, John P.’s primary life training was in the fields and creeks; and with a sizable inheritance dangling before him as motivation, he learned the vocation of farming well. By the time he arrived at Holme Hill after a mobile youth divided between a family farm in Caroline County, Baltimore, and St. Michaels, he had a good working knowledge of Eastern Shore grain agriculture, pomology, animal husbandry, and fishing.

⁶ *Narrative of the Life*, p. 55.

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He also had a quite extensive network of fellow farmers and merchants stretching from Chesapeake-facing Easton, St. Michaels, and Wye River plantations westward across Talbot County to Tuckahoe Creek and over into the Hillsboro neighborhood of adjacent Caroline County. Some of the family names that appear in his ledger and juvenile guardian reports were also familiar enough to teenaged Frederick Bailey to appear in the memoirs and endure in the memory of Frederick Douglass: Lloyd, Skinner, Paca, Covey, Auld, Sears, Hambleton, Tilghman, names inscribed in the annals of early Talbot County. Anthony would also have been acquainted with other names even more intimately familiar to Frederick Bailey/Douglass, such as his just-across-the-creek Black neighbors, the Murrays and the Waymans (family of the future A. M. E. bishop Alexander Wayman, dear friend to both Anna and Frederick and the speaker at first cousin Stephen Bailey’s funeral in 1894). Anthony was also well acquainted with ship captains on the Choptank and Tuckahoe and in Easton, essential figures for transporting his produce to Baltimore and other markets. Closer to Holme Hill, he joined and took an active role in the local Hillsboro lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.⁷ In short, he made himself quickly at home, a fixture in the economic and social life of his neighborhood.

Like his cohort of property-owning male friends, he was an avid outdoorsman and took pleasure as well as earned profit from the surrounding bounty. He sauntered out frequently in his free time, which might fall at any hour of day, into the woods and creeks that surrounded his and neighbors’ lands to go “a gunning,” “a hunting,” “a ducking,” “a fishing.” When at pleasure, he went alone or with friends; when for profit, more often with “the boys” (his adult slaves). He was skillful with gun, rod, and seine alike. He shot partridge, squirrel, duck, fox (on special occasion), rabbit, and rail; fished shad (endless shad), herring, and mullet—and rarely returned home emptyhanded. His pleasure was often his profit.

What did he do with his catch? His distribution ran the gamut between gift and commercial exchange. Sometimes he brought his catch back home for domestic consumption. He rarely did his own cooking, relying on Kitty or one of the other Bailey sisters, but on one occasion he even tried his hand at making a “Philadelphia stew” of partridge and squirrel for a friend. Just as often, he sought profit, selling quantities to fish hucksters, local traders, even free Black neighbors. The county assessors had valued his property as having “the best fishery on Tuckahoe creek,” and he spent such considerable time there that fishing must have made up a substantial secondary source of his income.⁸ On rare occasion, he might give a small percentage of a day’s catch to either Stephen Bailey or Perry Bailey Downs, though never normatively as a reward for their labor.

Whatever his manner of distribution, he kept methodical count of quantity and payment of catch and output, no matter whether from field, creek, or woods. His language and numeration were typically enlisted in the capitalistic practice of profit-based exchange. Adept with sums, he followed the family custom of careful account keeping. For years his guardians had bought him copy books and spellers, whether for formal or domestic schooling, but in some more formative sense young John P. was effectively homeschooled, learning the habit and method of keeping good accounts from his forefathers. Some years after his grandfather Aaron’s death, John P. gained access to, and eventually possession of, his account ledgers and adorned them with doodles and sketches, as of the kinds of sailing vessels teenaged Frederick Bailey wistfully

⁷ His certificate of membership, dated 28 April 1851, passed through several generations of Anthonys before its donation to the Oxford Museum, Oxford, Md.

⁸ Talbot County Register of Wills, Guardian Bonds, C1866–7 and –8, Book for 1830–39, p. 285, MSA.

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described as skimming across the Chesapeake. This was not simply child’s play; in time he studied those account books and preserved them—and so, after him, would two descendant generations of Anthonys as possessors of what the post-Civil War family had come to regard as their heritage, up to their deposit in 1961 by John P.’s granddaughter to the state archives of Maryland.⁹

Whether mastering the form of numbers, letters, and accounts; or the practices of farming fishing, and hunting, Anthony internalized and enacted an overriding ethos of possessive individualism. Like his forbears, he exerted force on both the natural and the human world pronominally by wielding the first-person single possessive. On the corn, the wheat, the oats, the apples, the watermelons, the turnips—on all the produce that grew out of the ground or from the trees due to intensive human labor—and on his dog, horses, poultry, cows, pigs, sheep, and turkeys Anthony branded his distinctive marker: “my.” Even on an old survey map dating back to his grandfather’s possession of Holme Hill he inscribed his ownership: “These papers relate to my land on Tuckahoe creek J. P. Anthony.”¹⁰ Its usage so dominates the daily ledger he kept for 1851–52 one might call it his chief signifier.

To exemplify the pattern, here’s a sampling of a typical week of Holme Hill Farm activity as recorded in the ledger, rendered typographically in a manner that approximates its unpunctuated shorthand:

[20 December 1851] “commenced my Mediterranean wheat rather afraid of it too afraid it is heated seeded fifteen bushels of it”

[25 December 1851] “finished getting in my corn,” or nearly all. “went to the school house in the morning and voted for Exec[?] Trustees”

[27 December 1851] “finished getting in my corn in the field and commenced seeding again”

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of this shorthand writing style is its elimination of agency or personhood. One might ask not just of these but also of most other entries in the ledger: who “commenced,” who “finished,” who “seeded,” and more broadly who performed the labor that produced *my* harvest of Mediterranean wheat, *my* white corn, *my* oats? This erasure of human agency, separating subject from object, producer from product, pervades Anthony’s ledger from beginning to end. In its specific application on Holme Hill Farm, no matter how unintentionally or unconsciously adopted, it constructs an impassable hierarchical barrier between master and slave.

The fact of the matter is that Anthony performed far less of the farm labor than did either of the two figures most active in his fields, gardens, orchards, patches, barns, outbuildings, and roads: Stephen Bailey and Perry Bailey Downs. Their presence in the ledger is everywhere, their personhood virtually nowhere. Anthony relied on these two men, day in and day out, in part because the amount of labor needed to conduct Holme Hill’s multifaceted, decentralized, labor

⁹ In 1961, Mary A. Dodge, great great granddaughter of Aaron Anthony, donated her family’s papers, including grandfather John P. Anthony’s journal, to the state archives. Her correspondence with archive director Morris Radoff about the donation is in the Maryland State Archives. MSA S1275–1–564, Administrative file for Mary A. Dodge Collection, MSA.

¹⁰ 1812 resurvey prepared for Aaron Anthony, in Mary A. Dodge Collection, MSA SC 564, MSA.

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intensive mode of farming by far exceeded whatever he himself could perform; and in further part because for much of this recorded period Anthony was frequently too ill, probably with malaria, to put in a full day’s work, during especially bad spells even to leave the house. This logic governs the ledger’s typical phraseology of diurnal activity: Stephen, Perry, or the boys as “sent,” “lent,” “employed” to do whatever it was they were instructed on that specific day to do. Only rarely does Anthony, in his role as master account keeper, credit them with the fruit of their completed labor: Stephen accomplished this, Perry accomplished that. More generally, the fields to which the men were assigned got seeded, the fence posts they were sent to dig or fix got repaired, the goods they were dispatched to collect got delivered to or from the farm, the ditches (whether Anthony’s or those of someone to whom he lent or rented his slave) got dug. To switch the figure of speech, they were invariably positioned by their young master downstream from the motive engine of activity they paradoxically generated.

Another primary characteristic of Anthony’s ledger is that it was a masculine accounting that documented an adult male worker’s set of activities. Women were seldom present, rarely affective. There are, however, a few notable exceptions, as when Stephen’s wife Caroline is reported to be helping in the fields during harvest season, or when Perry’s wife Maria is reported to be in hysterics one evening due to daughter Isabella’s alarming illness. But the most striking exception to the rule is the seemingly incongruous reportage that Anthony gives of women’s labor par excellence: on two occasions, he reports Caroline Bailey in childbirth.

Here is the entry for the earlier birthing, followed seemingly incongruously by the next day’s entry:

[26 February 1851] “Negro woman Caroline [her name interlineated above “woman”] taken about 2 o’clock at night in child birth. Sent Stephen after old Jenny came before day.”

[27 February 1851] “Mr. Anthony Boothe came over to my house about 11 o’clock to see me about a negro boy we bargained after a while I am to let him have him for a term of three years provided he treats him well which time will be up on the 27th of February 1854 Caroline’s child born about 2 o’clock girl child Old Granny went home in the evening all right.”¹¹

One unnamed Negro child in, one unnamed Negro child out of the Anthony household, is a story line that in Anthony’s hands seems inadvertent, unconnected. The name of the “girl child” is lost to history; she seems not to have survived long enough to appear in federal census returns or other official records. The name of the latter child, Nathan, emerges only in a later entry, though detached there from any personal information about age or parentage. He was, however, the seven-year-old son of Frederick’s younger sister Kitty, and the instant transmissibility of so young a child would have shaken the whole enslaved population of the farm.

Nathan’s indenture to the farm of Mr. Boothe begs the question: what disposition of slave master was twenty-one-year-old John P. Anthony?¹² More to the point, how was he disposed to the Bailey family he had inherited from his own? One might respond with the usual distinction advanced by contemporaneous defenders and opponents of slavery alike that slavery conditions

¹¹ The midwife was Jenny Needles, who had attended in the 1840s to Caroline, Kitty, and Maria, sometimes on multiple births; Anthony journal, p. 161.

¹² The indenture might have terminated prematurely after Boothe died in early 1852; Talbot County Register of Wills, Minutes, 1852–55, p. 46, MSA.

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on the Middle Border were far less harsh than those down in the Cotton or Rice States. The most eloquent exponent of this view, curiously, was Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose just published *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was all the rage at all levels of citizenry nationwide in 1851–52 and which a family as well versed as the Anthonys would have been familiar with. Stowe plotted her homiletic tale of American slavery geographically and personally as a descent from the relatively mild conditions of the Shelby farm in Kentucky to the infernal depths of Deep Southern brutality of Simon Legree’s Red River plantation in Louisiana—although Uncle Tom’s descent is precipitated when the “benevolent” Shelby separates Tom from his family and sells him down the river in order to pay off debts. Although ferociously countered not just by Douglass but by such other Black sons of the Middle Border as Kentucky-born William Wells Brown and Henry Bibb and Maryland-born James W. C. Pennington in their polemical writings, not least their fugitive slave narratives, the distinction held fast in mainstream views of slavery for decades.

At first glance, Anthony may seem to conform loosely to this supposed pattern. His ledger documents no outright acts of cruelty—no whippings, no deprivations, no confinements, no displays even of anger or animosity. He states no frustration—he also states no gratitude—whatsoever with their conduct. Except for his assignment of Nathan to Mr. Boothe, he seems to have exercised a general commitment during this period to keeping together the rest of his human property. One might go further and argue, to the contrary, that in the several years documented in his ledger Anthony performed occasional acts of lenience or consideration to the Baileys. He lends Stephen his seine one day to go fishing (although he keeps for himself three-quarters of Stephen’s catch); he allows Perry, Caroline, and Caroline’s son George to go to town unaccompanied to see a show, while tasking Stephen to remain behind to store his corn; he authorizes Stephen to go unescorted to a camp meeting outside the nearby hamlet of Chapel and shows no worry that Stephen returns only the next morning; he allows Perry to go to town to witness a hanging; he sends for the doctor three times when Maria is seriously ill. Most significantly, for a decade he did something his father and grandfather most definitely did not: he kept the Bailey family intact—at least up to the Civil War.

How does one explain his behavior and motivation? Kindness, charity, and/or affection seem irrelevant to a relationship founded on a different principle. A more plausible answer is an all-embracing, presumptive expectation of subordination and dependency, the necessary consequence of possession-based racial distinction. Anthony counted and relied on the Baileys’ labor, which was available at all hours, responsive to all conditions and circumstances, convenient to whatever his needs, and readily affordable. Rationalized superiority, however, might spill over into something quite else. One instance is an event that broke through the quiet stillness of a winter’s night on this outlying farm; here is the full entry:

[21 January 1852] “Boys hauling and cutting wood with Pilot and Ivanhoe some time in the night a stray cat fell down the well consequently she took a severe cold and died and steven took her out in the morning felt rather sheepish about drinking the water next day morning had to drink it though taken with another chill about a hour before day almost dead”¹³

Anthony’s internal monologue, recorded in this clipped shorthand, leaves gaps in narrative logic and human agency that require uninvited outsiders to supply continuity via interpretation. A plausible rendering of the key portion of the passage might be this: A cat fell

¹³ Anthony journal, p. 132.

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into the well and drowned; Anthony, apprised, summoned Stephen to remove it but, though queasy about drinking from a possibly contaminated water source, nevertheless did, and shortly afterward fell violently ill, attributing his distress to the water. Whether he gave mind to the effects of contaminated water on his slave population goes unmentioned. What did he care?

The answer to that question is the likely answer to another question: Why did Anthony address—and address twice—Caroline’s childbirths in a journal that all but ignores the presence of women?¹⁴ Anthony provides no explanation, leaving even less context for interpretation than in the cat episode. But at the innermost core of the logic by which he lived his life as master of Holme Hill Farm, twenty-one-year-old John P. Anthony, still a bachelor, conducted his and his people’s affairs according to the operating presumption that Caroline’s babies were *his* future workers. This was a compelling logic for an agricultural entrepreneur who had the labor of only two able-bodied men in the early 1850s but who could count, *sub specie aeternitatis*, on a substantial increase once *his* preadolescent, prepubescent Baileys developed into productive/reproductive adults. The births of these children followed the line of their mothers’ births, carefully set down in family ledgers by Aaron Anthony and his descendants in ruled, vertical columns designated for dollar amounts. On that naturally recurring basis, John P. Anthony had entered his manly estate.

Now, to turn to the Baileys of Holme Hill Farm during the decade preceding the Civil War. We have unfortunately no portal allowing direct access to the lives of the large African American majority that populated the “single” family farm. We do, however, catch occasional views of their persons and shadows, some via refraction from Anthony’s journal and account books, some from county records, and some via extrapolation from the general situation of Maryland’s enslaved population in the closing years of its foundational institution.

Maternal first cousins Perry (1813–80) and Stephen (1819–94) served as Anthony’s mainstays. Operating the farm with no overseer, brothers, cousins, or hired men to share the burden of labor, Anthony relied heavily on these two indispensable workers. Each man performed a multitude of tasks, including days when Anthony himself was too sick to work or was engaged in activities, including recreation, off the farm. Each man was necessarily a jack of all trades. By and large the cousins worked independently at the hundred-and-one jobs assigned them on and near the farm, but occasionally, when the job required, they worked side by side. Whereas in the previous fifteen years they had been hired out annually in exchange for the cash return, from 1851 on they were indispensable to the Anthony home operation. Their young master generally paired them categorically, even grammatically, far more often than he worked them in tandem: Stephen doing this, Perry doing that. But occasionally, likely subliminally, he found an internal rhyme for their joint, separate labor: “Stephen mauling, Perry hauling,” or vice versa. The specifics hardly mattered.

They did of course to Stephen and Perry. They labored six days a week, and sometimes, during busiest bursts of seasonal activity, days stretched into evenings. Anthony occasionally allowed them “holiday” late on Saturday, and Sunday was sabbath for all residents of the farm. On sabbath and special occasions, the Anthonys attended their church or their camp meetings, the Baileys theirs. Whether Anthony preached some version of White evangelical Christianity to them, as Thomas Auld did to Douglass’s disgust, is unknown, but it likely would have made

¹⁴ The second birth, on 20 August 1853, comes as a stray, solitary entry that postdates the daily record by more than a year; Anthony journal, p. 113.

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little difference to their core belief. Stephen’s religious devotion long preceded the coming into his life of this latest generation of Anthony, and it long outlived his passing; after the Civil War he would be a founder of the Bethel A. M. E. Church in Denton, Caroline County, and serve as one of its chief figures for the duration of his life as a free man, as in turn would oldest son George. Caroline’s devotion was itself an article of faith in the minds of her children and grandchildren, whose own religiosity would become well known communally in postwar decades. Less is known about the religious practices of Perry and Maria and their descendants, and Kitty and hers, but a reasonable surmise would be that they too became active members of Black church and community wherever their post-enslavement lives took them.

Caroline, Maria, and Kitty had no lack of domestic responsibilities. Foremost was mothering. The cycle of birthing and mothering begun in the 1840s continued throughout the 1850s, which is why the most effective way of reconstructing their lives, in the absence of most other means of personal evidence or historical documentation, is again through their reproductive histories. Caroline, who would give birth approximately every twenty-four months over a thirty-year span, bore at least five children before the move to Holme Hill, two more in the three-year period of Anthony’s journal, at least three more before the Civil War, and at least two more in the years after her husband returned home in 1867 following his three-year enlistment in the Union Army.¹⁵ Maria pretty much matched her cousin’s childbearing rate up to the war. She had given birth to no fewer than six children before 1851, at least three of whom had died before the move to Holme Hill, and she bore at least two more before the Civil War, at which time outside events interrupted her marital relations. Less is knowable about Kitty, who was likely married to a possibly free man named Perry Wilson, who arrived with two children, the aforementioned Nathan (b. 1844) and Henry (b. 1847)—Henry, who in one of the rainbow arcs of reunification that characterize countless post-Civil War African American family histories, would eventually come to live with his mother in 1877 on Uncle Frederick’s Cedar Hill estate overlooking the national capital.¹⁶

All three mothers had lost children at birth or shortly afterward, but Kitty suffered an especially great abundance of sorrows, no fewer than three children even before the return to Holme Hill. One was her first born, in 1839 (no known name); another a son named Sam born in December 1844 who died in 1846; and another, a year or two later. Little though we know about Sam personally, one prominent fact does survive: he was born into a Bailey cohort, since his aunts Caroline and Maria were also close to delivery—Caroline to daughter Laura in February 1845, and Maria to a baby (name unknown) months afterward. Missing from this close-knit sorority of Bailey women was Arianna, the next born sister after Kitty, who had died in childbirth sometime during her year of service in 1848. Her passing seems to have received no more formal notice than the guardianship report filed with Orphan’s Court the following year for the “orphan” (meaning the fatherless) John P. Anthony: “Money paid to John Mason for making coffin for servant Arianna, belonging to orphan in 1848, as per account and receipt April 14, 1849.”¹⁷ One of the most tragic of the cohort of children descended from Harriet Bailey, Arianna

¹⁵ Statistics are based on the slave lists kept by the Anthony family in account ledgers and the 1870 federal census; the latter details only the children who survived to that date; Anthony ledger A, scan 376.

¹⁶ Perry Wilson’s name joins Kitty’s in the court filing against John P. Anthony’s attempted apprenticeship of their son; Talbot County Register of Wills, Orphans Court Proceedings, 1862–67, p. 212, MSA.

¹⁷ Talbot County Register of Wills, Guardian Accounts, 1849–51, JP 15, p. 182, MSA.

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left a legacy of infant mortality; none of her four or more pregnancies yielded a child known to have survived its mother. The identity of the father(s) is blank.

The three Bailey women came to Holme Hill after spending nearly all their teenage years hired out to families either on nearby farms or in town. They therefore came well prepared to perform whatever tasks, indoors and out, to which the Anthony household put them. A busy farm with multiple operations and a home with no other housekeeper would have kept them and their daughters busy, in addition to the responsibility of feeding, cleaning, and watching out for their youngest children—and in due course, after 1855, also for those of their master and mistress. The servant sisters’ responsibilities broadened as Anthony children came approximately with the frequency of Baileys: Harriet Lucretia (1855), Mark (1857) Richard (1861)—and, after emancipation—Ruth Ann (1865), Mary Masten (1867), and John Planner Jr. (1871).

Firstborn daughter Harriet Lucretia (1855–1930), the fourth generation Anthony most devoted to her family’s history and legacy, retained vividly happy memories of growing up on her family farm alongside companionable Bailey children and adults. On scraps of paper serving as a first draft of a brief memoir of Holme Hill, she jotted down childhood memories of life on the farm, including vignettes of the Black children with whom she played and snippets of commentary about their parents. Particularly vivid in her sepia memories of days of yore was the figure of “Aunt Kittie,” whom she remembered as “head house servant” in the big farmhouse. “We loved her devotedly,” she remarked at a half-century distance, although even then she showed little awareness that her family’s devotion to Aunt Kittie might not have correlated to Aunt Kittie’s sense of devotion to the Anthony household. “Uncle Perry” too she remembered fondly as a devoted servant. She left no reference to “Uncle Stephen” or “Aunt Caroline” or “Aunt Maria,” no doubt chance omissions of exceptionally personable, dependable individuals.

Her childhood played out during the last years of institutional slavery, which she remembered as a generally happy time in which the children, Black and White, on her father’s family farm oftentimes mixed indiscriminately. Together they would wander the fields and creeks of the farm much as young Frederick had roamed the grounds of Great House Farm with young master Daniel Lloyd, or they would share the excitement of watching several of the adult Baileys home manufacture lemon-flavored ice cream in ice-covered pails. Engrained in her memory was the juvenile abandon with which she and her playmates chased down ghosts haunting the neighboring woods and abandoned buildings. One decrepit structure loomed over her memory as a haunted house: “We could see plainly from our home whether the doors and windows of the old house were open or shut, and many a morning my brother Mark and I, with some of the colored children, used to look across the fields to see if the witches or ghosts had been holding revel during the night.” It was in that house the girl Lu saw her first corpse: “a colored woman, a ‘free nigger,’ as those who were not owned by a white person were contemptuously known. Even now I see that black face with the eyelids held down over the sightless eyes by two silver dollars.”¹⁸

There were, of course, strict limits to their joint activities. The Anthonys occupied the masters’ sphere, the Baileys the slaves’, as to residence, meals, clothing, furnishings, travel, schooling—all such arrangements kept strictly separate and unequal. On Sundays, the Anthonys went off to their place of worship, the Baileys to theirs. Other differences were cultural. Remote from the antebellum theaters where White Americans delighted in the stylized appearance of

¹⁸ Harriet Lucretia Anthony, autobiographical notes, 2 November 1919; Dodge Collection, Msa.maryland.gov, scan 0255, MSA.

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Black song and dance by White minstrels on an emergent national stage, she watched fascinatedly the unadulterated “performance” of “our negroes ‘pat Juba’ while others danced to the rhythm of the beats.”¹⁹ Likewise, she witnessed and absorbed their language and customs. But raised as proud Anthonys, she and her siblings were children of a different stamp; through her grandmother’s gentrified family and Pilgrim heritage, they were “the social equal of the Lloyds” of Wye House.²⁰

Perhaps the most revealing measure of Anthony/Bailey differentiation was the looming presence, more substantial than any ghost, of the Bailey she had never met in person but to whom she felt so connected she sent an unsolicited letter several years before his death informing him of his birthdate, which she extracted from great grandfather Aaron Anthony’s ledger listing “My Black people.” Affinity and family pride notwithstanding, she had a bone or two to pick with “Fred,” whose persona lived on not only in local lore but in her cherished copy of *My Bondage and My Freedom*. This family legacy she read carefully, critically, and defensively sometime in the early twentieth century. From that safe distance, for once, a Bailey spoke unvarnished truth to an Anthony, and Harriet Lucretia found herself called to safeguard her family name by superimposing on his claims her counterclaims in her extensive marginalia. His account of the distant past she found informative but occasionally unreliable: “As I understand it now, I am as much opposed to slavery as Fred ever was. I know, however, that he exaggerates the story of the many cruelties he suffered as a slave in my great grandfathers, Aaron Anthony, family.” And in Thomas Auld’s too, whose family she knew well in her youth and whose female members especially she esteemed. The only authority figure, in her estimation, who fully deserved the biting critique Douglass called out for scarring his youth was Edward Covey.²¹

Harriet Lucretia’s companions were primarily younger Baileys of comparable age not yet assigned to labor for the family. By contrast, Stephen and Perry’s oldest sons George and William were already called to work in the fields at seed and harvest time as early as 1851 at ages eleven and ten, respectively. As they filled out their frames, they presumably became too useful to be hired out for long stretches and gradually shouldered much of the work done by their fathers and their grandfathers before them. Mature adults by decade’s end, they had the quality that Anthony most needed for his growing agricultural enterprise: young, hardy bodies. Transported to an alternative reality, as was equally true for their comparable-aged Douglass cousins in Rochester, those bodies would have been fully capable of performing active military service, as some would.

The Bailey girls too labored on a sliding scale by age and physical capacity. As they reached their teens, they would have been available to generate a small income stream by being hired out, as their mothers before them. On the last day of the decade, Anthony contracted with neighboring farmer John H. Rhodes for the one-year hire of sixteen-year-old Mary Bailey, the second oldest (after George) of Caroline and Stephen’s still growing family. Anthony followed the logic and language of the day in stipulating the terms of her hire: in return for her services and thirty dollars payment at the end of the year, Rhodes was “to provide for said negro girl good

¹⁹ Marginal notation on p. 252 of her copy of *My Bondage and My Freedom*; Dodge Collection, MSA.

²⁰ Marginal notation on p. 63 of *My Bondage and My Freedom*; Dodge Collection, MSA.

²¹ Marginal notations on front flyleaf and pp. 264–65, 203, 232 of *My Bondage and My Freedom*; Dodge Collection, MSA.

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and sufficient wearing apparel, bedding and board [and] to treat the said girl with humanity.”²² The proximity of the farms would have allowed Mary to return home on some Sundays, Rhodes permitting. Once her twelve-month service was completed by Christmas, she returned to her family on Holme Hill, though not necessarily for long. If that year had gone well and Anthony’s income-to-labor calculations remained unchanged, she might well have returned to the Rhodes family or been hired out for 1861 to another family in need of labor.

But such work was hardly the limit of Mary’s expected service to the Anthonys. Within a few years she married a local man named William Matthews and, on 24 February 1864, gave birth to Jeremiah, Caroline and Stephen Bailey’s first grandchild and the first member of his generational cohort to be born on Holme Hill Farm. Jeremiah would also be the last person to be brought into chattel slavery by John P. Anthony and his family, as well as the one most briefly held, his condition terminated when emancipation reached Maryland on 1 November. Measured in retrospect, the Bailey family’s gain was the Anthony family’s loss: Mary and her husband would have fourteen additional children, all born free. Likewise, much younger sister Catherine (Kate), born in 1859, would eventually bear fifteen children and earn a community-wide reputation in Talbot and Caroline counties as a nurse reminiscent of the legacy of great grandmother Betsey Bailey. And so on and so on as the families, and the families within families, burgeoned and went their separate ways.

We have no direct answer to the corresponding critical question: how did the Baileys view the Anthonys during these late years of their enslavement? But one rare moment of possible intimacy may expose the tender underside, too delicate to be uttered out loud by the Baileys, of relations between slave and master on Holme Hill. Anthony was ill on and off throughout 1851–52 with intermittent aches, fevers, chills, and general lassitude, exactly the malaise that Douglass associated—and Harriet Lucretia denied existed—with the brackish, marshy environs of Tuckahoe.²³ Local doctors were frequently summoned to the farmhouse to attend to him and administered the standard remedies of the day: bleeding, pills of various kinds of the sort dispensed at his St. Michaels store by Uncle Thomas Auld, occasionally even opium. On one frigid winter night when Anthony was severely feverish, Perry stayed up alongside him and placed hot bricks around his person to keep him warm. What motivated Perry? Was it concern or was it a command performance? Or was it possibly fear, fear not just for his but for his entire family’s future? He knew too well that if his bachelor master died, as he nearly did at least once that year, the breakup of the Bailey family would likely soon ensue, as had happened during his childhood and youth following the deaths of Aaron Anthony and Andrew Skinner Anthony. Whatever his sentiment and motivation, next day he was back to work, beating hominy for the Anthony family dinner table.²⁴

No family ledger survives detailing Anthony’s thoughts and activities after 1852, but, with no reported problems on the farm, it seems reasonable to conclude that the general course of Holme Hill life tracked along established grooves to decade’s end. Having more slaves than tasks to assign, he followed the common Maryland slaveholding practice of hiring out his superfluous hands, including the odd child, for all or part of the calendar year. But his primary need was farm labor, and there were enough tasks on the farm to keep Stephen and Perry busy

²² Dodge Collection, Msa.maryland.gov, scans 0245–46, MSA.

²³ *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), p. 33.

²⁴ Entry for 18 January 1852, Anthony journal, scan 663, MSA.

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year-round. They performed a variety of seasonal tasks: they worked in the fields, logged timber, helped with slaughtering of livestock and preservation of meat, repaired fences, did construction on the farm’s various outbuildings, and ran errands outside the farm for the Anthony family. In addition, they worked with other slaves in the construction and repair of the miserable state of roads in lightly populated Hillsboro. Increasingly as the decade progressed, their eldest sons joined them.

Anthony was one of the more energetic citizens of the Chapel/Tuckahoe district during the last years of slavery. A father since 1855, he joined with two other men in announcing they would be taking bids in late 1857 for the construction of a new schoolhouse in their district, the building to be ready by 1 February. To help finance the initiative, they sent out notices they would be selling the old schoolhouse lot, the structure, and its furniture to the highest bidder on 5 February for cash—the proceeds to be divided between Talbot and Caroline counties.²⁵

Public schooling for (White) children was not then mandatory in Maryland or, for that matter, other states south of the Mason Dixon, but Anthony and his wife, both literate and better educated than most of their neighbors, supported public schooling in their community. What they advocated for their neighbors they practiced at home. Alternately home and district-schooled, their children grew up well prepared to master the basic skills of reading, writing, and accounting—skills, it would turn out, essential for productive lives in the postbellum free labor, literacy-intensive economy. Anthony home schooling and local public schooling stopped strictly, however, at the color line. However “devoted” they might have believed themselves to the welfare of their “servants,” they made no comparable provision for the servant children. Not even oldest child Harriet Lucretia, who passed familiarly as “Miss Lu” to decades of families in the nearby port of Oxford as a revered schoolteacher and administrator, apparently made any effort to teach the Bailey children she grew up alongside, by contrast with her distant cousin Sophia Auld’s instruction of bright, inquisitive Frederick Bailey in Baltimore.

More community-minded than his father or grandfather, Anthony also prodded county officials to redress the dilapidated state of its public infrastructure. Whereas he could assign road work within the bounds of his farm to Perry, Stephen, and their oldest sons, for external work he needed to cooperate with neighbors in a joint appeal to the county commissioners. Several times in the late 1850s, they petitioned the county to undertake projects to improve adjacent or nearby roads and bridges, particularly those along east-west roads crossing the county between the communities of Hillsboro and Easton.²⁶ The county consented to some of these requests, and it is not unlikely that Anthony rented out one or more of the adult Baileys to pitch in with the manual labor, as Grandfather Isaac Bailey, Betsey’s husband, occasionally had done in the early years of the century.

Anthony was also expanding his farming operation during these last years of cheap, abundant labor suitable for pre-mechanized agriculture. In April 1859, he and Sarah acquired a thirteen-acre parcel of land along Tuckahoe Creek on the cross-county public road between Hillsboro and Easton (possibly the fateful path along which six-year-old Frederick and his Bailey cohort had walked in the years Aaron Anthony oversaw the Lloyd holdings). The seller was Daniel Cowgill, a member of a prominent Quaker family well known throughout the county as outspoken opponents of slavery (his father Ezekiel would be one of only two Talbot men who

²⁵ *Easton Star* (17 November 1857): 3.

²⁶ Talbot County Board of Commissioners, Road Record, 1854–1910, C1910–1, pp. 136–46, 159–69, MSA; *Easton Star* (25 May 1858): 3.

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cast their ballots for Lincoln in 1860).²⁷ Commercial exchange between Anthony and Cowgill required no corresponding ideological or political agreement about slavery, yet, as both men knew once the showdown election of 1860 loomed, the future of land, labor, and slavery was less settled than it had been in decades. Anthony, it turned out, was making an optimist’s gamble. With a growing cohort of enslaved laborers at his disposal numbering not fewer than twenty-three men, women, and children according to the 1860 federal census (more than two-thirds of whom were Baileys), expanding his operation would have seemed a reasonable investment.²⁸

The lives of Anthonys and Baileys on Holme Hill Farm continued uninterruptedly over the course of the 1850s, the Bailey family intact except for the comings and goings of young adults hired out for one period or another. Season followed season, year after year, tasks revolving with the cycle of the seasons. Babies were born, boys and girls leapfrogged adolescence into adulthood and went out to service, and Anthony’s workforce increased; but conditions on the farm remained generally stable within the vagaries of meteorological and market conditions. Seen from above, the farm’s boundaries were hardly more spacious than a thumbprint on the 1858 map of Talbot County produced by cartographer William Dilworth. But even that meticulously detailed map, demarcating the public domain by units of White (generally male) landowners, provided only a two-dimensional representation of a county encompassed within a larger unit of definition, as the whole of Maryland, Eastern and Western Shores both, shifted and swayed in entering a period of dangerously destabilizing conditions. By decade’s end, a new era loomed in which, sooner rather than later, Holme Hill would be home to neither Anthonys nor Baileys.

²⁷ Details of Anthony’s 1859 purchase of the land are contained in an 1866 transaction he made with a Caroline County neighbor; Talbot County Land Records, Book 72, pp. 549–50, Talbot County Courthouse.

²⁸ 1860 U.S. Census, Slave Schedule, Talbot County, Maryland.

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Dilworth 1858 Map of Talbot County, Maryland State Archives