

Name: Stephen Pembroke

Date: July 18, 1854

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Location: Sharpsburg; Washington County

Type: Testimony

Subject: African American

“Stephen Pembroke was enslaved on the farm of Jacob Grove on the west side of Sharpsburg, Maryland. This is Pembroke’s testimony “at the Tabernacle,” as quoted by the *New York Tribune*, July 18, 1854.”

“I set out to escape from slavery on the 1<sup>st</sup> May last, with my two sons. We walked all night, and went fifty odd miles without stopping. We got as far as New-York City, where we were violently arrested, secured, and taken back to the South. I was treated in a bad manner here. I had no counsel, and did not know what the law was. I remained fifteen days in the South under chains, locked up by night. I ate and slept chained. I was kept so till my arms swelled and my appetite gone. I was so until bought through the benevolence of the public and the exertions of my brother, whom I had not seen for 30 years. Some suppose slavery not to be what it is said to be, but I am right down upon it. I was fifty years in it, and it has many degrees. I have been in three of them. In thirty years I was sold three times. I served one man for twenty years. He was a rigid and wicked man. I have seen men tied up, whipped, shot, and starved. Then there was a moderate degree; and then I got into that, which I left, after being twenty years in it. It has left life in me, that is all. I served a man twenty years for 400 dollars, and then he wanted 1000 dollars for me, after starving me and depriving me of all the comforts of life and the worship of God.

“The slave never knows when he is to be seized and scourged. My father was sold five times. The last time he was knocked down and seized by three men. I have seen men working all day, day in and day out, with iron collars on their necks, and so locked up at nights, getting a pound of corn bread and half a pound of meat. I would rather die the death of the righteous than be a slave, always under dread and never getting a good word. I used to say to my master, ‘I am getting old, and ought to have some rest;’ but he would answer, ‘No, sire, if you speak about freedom, I will sell you further South.’

“For the last twenty years I had a free wife, and but for her labor I believe without the mercy of God, I would be this night in my grave. My pursuers were, I believe, in the same train by which I arrived here at 5 in the evening, and I was arrested at 7-3/4 o’clock next morning. My pursuer told me there was a watch round the house all night. I had no counsel and did not know the law, nor what I should say, so I thought it better to let the law have its course. My first wife was a slave, so my five children are slaves too. Since my sons were arrested here, they were twice sold before my face. I saw them with their arms chained together, and my arms were chained, and my master’s son lay in the room where I lay with a brace of pistols under his head; and when I turned over he would start up and lay his hand on one.

I know one man who gave his slave one hundred and fifty lashes in two days, and on the third he died. He crept into the field; and his master supposing he was sleeping, went up and cowhided him, but he was cowhiding a corpse, thinking he was asleep! Such is the condition of

Slavery: it is a hard substance; you cannot break it nor pull it apart; and the only way is to escape from it. I think it is the North that keeps up Slavery. Such is my opinion. I am thankful to the community that has been so kind and charitable to help me out of the scrape, and no I would like to have my sons out.”