

Name: Rev. Thomas Henry

Date: 1847-1853

Location: Frederick County

Document Origin: Rev. Thomas W. Henry, *From Slavery to Salvation, The Autobiography of Rev. Thomas W. Henry*, Jean Libby, ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 28-32

Type: Memoir

Subject: African American

I went from Antietam to Middletown Valley, in Frederick county, where I took charge of a white church, given to us by the United Brethren. The white friends were very kind to us in this part of the country. Dr. Horatio Clagett, who lived close by the white church, and who had several servants, gave orders to them that they should take every care of me and my horse as long as I should remain with them.

On one occasion---I think it was Whit-Sunday---I was holding a quarterly meeting, when a mischievous old constable, named Barnes, followed me some three miles out of his way to arrest me, as he stated, for holding negro meetings contrary to the law. When he came to the church, I had a local preacher in the pulpit by the name of Samuel Thorrin. I had a white gentleman in the church, named Mr. Grimm, who had volunteered his services to protect us from any imposition that would likely befall us. When we opened the meeting Mr. Grimm had not got in. As we were singing, a strange voice wanted to know who was at the head of the meeting. I saw that Brother Thorrin was somewhat surprised, and I rose to my feet and informed Mr. Barnes that I was at the head of the meeting. He then asked me who I was, and I told him my name. He asked me if I did not know that I was holding my meetings contrary to law. I told him I did not know that. He said that I must go with him to Squire Crampton, not very far from the church. I requested that the meeting proceed no further, until Mr. Grimm arrived.

I went with the constable to the squire's, and he presented me as holding negro meetings contrary to law. The squire then asked me if I was cognizant of that fact. I told him that I was holding the meeting exactly according to law; that the law was, that no free negro or mulatto should be allowed to hold religious or tumultuous gathering, unless there was an ordained white man as a protector; but there was a proviso in the law, that, where there was a citizen who gave permission to hold meetings on his or her premises, there was no violation of the law. I further told him I believed that I had studied every point of the law, and he said that I knew it sufficiently to proceed.

Mr. Barnes, the constable, not being satisfied with the way things went, followed me back to the church, and by the time we reached the church, Mr. Grimm was there, and the meeting was progressing finely. Just as Mr. Barnes attempted to step into the church behind me, Mr. Grimm caught him by the collar and thrust him back. What happened between these two, outside, I cannot tell, as I was seated behind the speaker.

The meeting went on glorious all that day; but at night it was an uncommon meeting. The people from far and near were there, and both white and colored seemed to be after the one thing---their soul's salvation.

I had an old, tried friend in Hagerstown, named Joseph J Merrick, and I had worked for him about thirteen years before I had traveled in the ministry. He had often invited me to come and see him, as he only lived a little way out of town, and I went to see him. He asked me how I made out with old Barnes. It was from Mr. Merrick I learned that Messrs. Grimm and Barnes had sharp words---or blows, for all that I know---and that Mr. Grimm had sued Mr. Barnes, and would have made him pay several hundred dollars had he not begged off.

From this place I crossed the mountains to a place called Burketsville. I had a faithful local preacher there, named Resin Oltron, who was well known in that part of the country. He went to a man named Shafer, and asked the privilege of holding meetings in a large school-house that stood on his place. The trustees of the school-house made no objection to our holding meetings in that place, and we continued to hold our meetings about eighteen months.

Brother Resin Oltron heard of another church, which stood down in a valley, between Middletown and Burketsville, on the farm of a Mr. Buyers. We were granted permission to hold meetings in this church, with the consent of the trustees. These meetings we held for two years, more or less, with very good results, as there a great many converts at this church. I have often felt myself under many obligations to Mr. Buyers for his generosity in granting the privilege of using this church.

From Burketsville, I rambled in the valleys until I came to place called Burline, about three miles below Knoxville, in Washington county, Md. Here we secured the dwelling of a Mr. Jacob Black, whose wife was a member of the A.M.E Church, who made everything as agreeable as possible to accommodate us. I held meetings at this place for about two years, and I must say that we had as good a time as could be expected in that day. A great many souls were converted to God there. I then took a tramp to a place called Knoxville, at the foot of Payne's Hill, or the old bunt mill. There was an old colored man and his family, who lived on a farm owned by a man named Casper Weaver. This colored family had belonged to Mr. Weaver, and he put them on his farm to make a living for themselves. This Mr. Weaver was at this time the president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, I think. The colored family consisted of the husband and wife, five daughters and three sons. With the permission of this old man, I opened meeting at his house. I think that the old man was about sixty-five years of age, and his wife about sixty. I am happy to say that the old man and his wife were truly converted about six months after I opened meeting at his house, and all of his children confessed to be truly converted to God in less than two years, except the youngest son, who was about twelve years of age.

I was still visited by my old friend Barnes, the constable, who had interfered with me at the white church in Pleasant Valley. At one time I loaned him my Discipline, and also my constitution of the A.M.E. incorporation; but this would not satisfy him. The gentlemen in that part of the country told me that I need not mind him, but just to proceed with my regular legitimate business; and they told the old man to hold his meetings, and they would protect him. Mr. Weaver had left word that Mr. Barnes had better keep off his farm.

The Lord blessed me on this occasion, and it seems that He blessed nearly everybody that came there. The people met together from every direction. They came from the lower part of the Maryland tract and up the Potomac on the Maryland side, from Harper's Ferry, and a great many from a considerable distance in Virginia, to our Christmas and Easter meetings, which were more like camp-meetings. I often thought to myself, and it looked just that way to me, that

a heaven on earth had begun. We went on there with these meetings for about five years, with these good blessings attending us during that time; and I am thankful to say, God was with us.