

## THE BUSTILL FAMILY<sup>1</sup>

BY C. G. WOODSON

THE Bustill Family has a continuous record from 1732 to the present time. Cyrus Bustill, the most prominent of this family, was born in Burlington, New Jersey, February 2, 1732. A Quaker, Thomas Prior, taught him the art of bread making. He then established a business of his own, specializing in bread and cakes, and prospered in it. One of the streets running to the fast flowing Delaware was named Bustill probably because his bake shop was located upon it.

When the American Revolution broke out he had the distinction of supplying the troops of the patriots frequenting this area. Thomas Falconer, the contractor for supplying the troops at Burlington, said on May 1, 1782, "I hereby certify that Cyrus Bustill has been employed in the baking of all the flour used at the port of Burlington and that he has behaved himself as a faithful, honest man and has given satisfaction such as should recommend him to every good inhabitant." Bustill served in this capacity not merely as a business man but as a patriot trying to render the most efficient service possible as his contribution to the struggle of the continental forces for independence. He received a silver piece as a souvenir, from General George Washington.

Cyrus Bustill moved later to Philadelphia, and established his baking business at 56 Arch Street. His daughter Grace, who lived next door, was likewise enterprising and conducted a Quaker millinery store, which had for customers some of the best families of that city.

Cyrus early became impressed with Friends' principles and conformed to their mode of "garb and speech." He and his family at-

tended the Fourth and Arch Meeting. The Quakers found that "his deportment was solid and edifying and that the inner man was transformed by the renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Persons interested in the Negro sought Bustill's advice in matters pertaining to the uplift of the Negroes of Philadelphia. He was an active member of several benevolent societies of Philadelphia, especially the Free African Society founded April 12, 1787, which was most influential and helpful in the affairs of people of color of that day. In the *Annals of the first African Church in the United States, the Protestant Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, 1862*, it is said: "Cyrus Bustil was generally respected for his uprightness, and much relied upon by his brethren for his sound judgment. He was the first to relinquish his claim in the old Society in behalf of the church. This noble act appears to good advantage in view of his religious sentiments, which accorded with those of the Friends."

Bustill reached a turning point in his career near the end of the century. He became a teacher. For many years he had observed the serious need of his people for enlightenment. Besides the efforts of a few sympathetic Quakers not much was done to educate the Negro. Bustill was doing well with his school as early as 1797. He retired from business and built a house on Third and Green Streets, where he opened a school and taught. He was noted as a clear thinker and excellent writer, as sketches, a diary, and accounts still attest. He was an admirable speaker.

Says his great granddaughter, "He always championed the cause of freedom and gave of his means to promote it." He "would not perpetuate a race of slaves"; so he did not marry early in life. Finally

he married Elizabeth Morey, daughter of Satterthwait, an Indian maiden of the Delawares, who lived on the banks of the river bearing their name, and with whom William Penn made his famous treaty for 'Penn's Woods.' She was as free as Bustill himself, and both were familiar with the manners and customs of the Friends. They reared a family of eight children, Rachel, Mary, Ruth, Leah, Grace, Charles, Cyrus and David.

"What has come through association, hearsay, and tradition is all to his credit in the way of general cleverness. He became one of the most substantial of the citizens of color and owned considerable property, more than a hundred years ago—some of it still in the possession of his descendants—a family burial plot on his Edgehill farm, in what is now called Bustilltown," says W. Carl Bolivar in his *Pencil Pusher's Notes*. Cyrus Bustill died in 1806, lamented by all who knew him. His death was recorded in local dailies and he was accorded burial ceremony by Friends.

David Bustill, the youngest child of Cyrus Bustill, was born in 1787. He grew to manhood in the faith of his father and early became interested in the abolition of slavery, which he declared would come, if only the Negroes would work and pray for this reform. He embraced every opportunity to be helpful in all matters tending to promote their uplift. Following the teachings of the Quakers, he distinguished himself among the many Negro mechanics and artisans of Philadelphia who set the fine example of making themselves useful to the community. He became a capable plasterer, and taught all his sons and sons-in-law the trade. His sons and grandsons continued it. Taking a lively interest in matters concerning Negroes, too, he lost no opportunity to impress upon the

<sup>1</sup>The quotations in this article are from a sketch of the Bustill Family by Anna Bustill Smith, the great granddaughter of Cyrus Bustill. This article was published in *The Journal of Negro History* in October 1925, vol. x, pp. 638-647.

youth the importance of holy living in connection with intellectual culture.

In his own diary of February 1, 1856, he recorded, "This day the Lord sent me to the Court House, under the steeple at the center building, to warn the court not to do anything more against us, they having a man claimed to be a fugitive slave."

His great granddaughter said that she had heard several times how remarkable was the unannounced appearance of the small man of color, wearing his broad-brimmed hat, which he did not remove, standing before the Judge's desk, and his stern denunciation of the injustice to the slave. Instead of being ejected or at least silenced, the court seemed spellbound and listened till he departed. The judge then released the man.

David Bustill married his cousin, Elizabeth Hicks of Swedesboro, New Jersey, in 1803. They had nine children. Elizabeth Douglass Bustill, the oldest daughter, was a pupil in Prudence Crandal's school in Canterbury, Connecticut when it was closed by mob-violence in 1833. David Bustill died in 1866 in his seventy-ninth year. Prominent citizens of both races paid high tribute to his memory.

A local newspaper publishing the obituary notice said of him, "A good man and a useful citizen has entered into eternal life, leaving behind him an honored name and example to prompt others, not only to industry and benevolence, but to unwavering faith in God and to holiness of heart and life."

David Bustill's youngest son was Joseph Cassey Bustill, the father of Anna Bustill Smith, who married and settled in Chicago. He was born in Philadelphia in 1822. He was educated in the best schools of his day and became a teacher. He developed into a polished writer and convincing speaker. He devoted his time and talent to every good cause projected to help his people. He was the youngest member of the remarkable "Underground Railroad" station in Phil-

adelphia, being only seventeen; and did yeoman's service in this cause. He helped over a thousand fugitives to safety in the free States and Canada while he was teaching school at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Fugitives from various places found their way there or were sent to him. "A kindly Justice of the Peace," he said, "used to keep me informed as to the hunted ones; and private homes, churches, lodge rooms, halls, and the like, were at my disposal for use of the fugitives. Many were the hairbreadth escapes and hazardous trips in those days that tried men's souls."

When abolition finally became a reality the Negro problem was only partly solved. Negroes had to fight for civil rights and they combined to form State Equal Rights Leagues. Joseph Cassey Bustill, ever in the front line battling for his people, served as secretary for Pennsylvania and worked unceasingly for the right of franchise. He urged the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, and lived to rejoice over the passage of this and the Fifteenth Amendment. Under the sponsorship of the Philadelphia Union League, a triumphant celebration was staged in that city. He was the chairman of the committee on arrangements and was complimented on the fine demonstration. During these years he faithfully served the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows and functioned in various capacities locally and nationally.

Joseph Cassey Bustill was a man deeply interested in civic affairs. He was not one who worked only for his own people. He urged upon the city the establishment of a park at Third and Beach Streets to preserve the Penn Treaty tree spot, where William Penn made his famous treaty with the Indians; and he recommended recreation piers on the Delaware-River and a park at League Island. From the municipal authorities he received a handsome copy of *The City of Philadelphia* and a letter of thanks.

All these recommendations have been followed and are a credit and help to the city he so loved. "Like Paul," says his great granddaughter, "he was a citizen of no mean city—a Philadelphian of the Philadelphians—and was able to add to its honor and glory." Near the end of his career he built a home at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, where he died at the age of seventy-three.

Two children of Cyrus Bustill's daughter, Grace, who married Robert Douglass, a highly respected, scholarly, Christian man, were Robert, Jr., and Sarah Mapps Douglass. Robert Jr. was educated at the Academy of Fine Arts of Philadelphia, the National Gallery of Fine Arts, and the British Museum in London, England. He became a portrait painter with a studio on Seventh Street near the First Presbyterian Church. He produced portraits of many noted people, and some of his pictures are still preserved. He had a studio later at 54 Arch Street. He taught shorthand, painting, French and Spanish. Often he and Miss Fannie Jackson conversed in French when they met, as it gave them practice.

His sister, Sarah Mapps Douglass, was much better known inasmuch as she taught school for 60 years. With the peculiar bent of her early training, she followed her mother and her maternal grandfather as a Friend. She attended the Ninth and Spruce Meeting third day mornings. It was attended at the same time by Lucretia Mott and her brother. They were all well acquainted.

Sara M. Douglass joined the Anti-Slavery Women of the United States, who assembled in the convention at New York in 1837 to do their part in exterminating slavery. In 1854, she took charge of the preparatory department of the Institute for Colored Youth, established by a fund left by a Quaker, Richard Humphreys, in 1839. For this position she was well prepared. She came from a family of means and had been pri-

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Coppin Teachers College Players, with Mrs. Flossie Dedmond as director, went on the air Thursday morning; and in the evening followed another broadcast by Dr. Rayford W. Logan, head of the department of history of Howard University, supported by the Douglass High School Assembly Chorus, Mrs. Landres Chilton, director, and Mr. Chuck Richards, assistant. On Saturday, the 14th, the Greenwich Players appeared in "The Life of George Washington Carver," with the same director and assistant.

These were the activities mainly of the general public in Baltimore, aroused to action by an energetic committee who conceived the observance of Negro History as an obligation incumbent on all intelligent citizens. Space is not given here to the activities in the school-rooms sponsored by the hundreds of teachers who have had the vision of the truth and nothing but the whole truth. This year and other years they have taught their children to dramatize, declaim and recite both prose and poetry of the best thinkers of the Negro race and have thus lodged in their plastic minds thoughts which will clarify their vision as to what the future holds for them and will serve as an inspiration to walk in the footsteps of their forerunners and give a good account of themselves in the battles which lie ahead. This is realistic teaching, and no efficient school system will neglect this great opportunity.

The main thought running throughout the celebration in Baltimore was that in all the teaching of the youth the instructor must teach him first about himself and next about others in relation to himself. This is in conformity with the great principle that the best index to one's activity is through his environment. Let the youth learn something about his own possibilities and about those whom he knows. He cannot be inspired by dilating on those of whom he has never heard or dreamed. He has sufficient in his own life to serve as the basis of his education.

## The Bustill Family

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vately tutored. She was highly capable as a lecturer in Physiology and Hygiene. Considering this period of intellectual barrenness among the colored people in this country, one must concede it is creditable that she achieved so much. Dr. Alexander Crummell, the distinguished scholar and clergyman of Washington, D. C., said of her:

"Sara M. Douglass has spent a lifetime in the intellectual training of two generations of Philadelphia's men and women. Her pupils may be found in scores, if not hundreds, of the mature and settled men and women of her native city. The very first people thereof and their children in turn, save sat at the feet of this refined and cultivated woman and received from her the ripe instructions of her well-cultivated mind."

## Prophecy Fulfilled

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share; and his wife, a full-blooded white woman, says that she is standing by her husband despite the "shocking" revelation.

These letters addressed to R. E. Park and to Booker T. Washington give information about the estate of John McKee:

Estate of

John McKee,

Deceased.

Hon. Booker T. Washington,  
Tuskegee Institute,  
Alabama,

Dear Sir:

Your favor has been received and in reply thereto I would state that the State Appraiser fixed the valuation in Estate of the late Colonel John McKee as follows:

Gross Valuation of	
Personal estate .....	\$ 71,644.29
Gross valuation of real estate in Pennsylvania .....	271,188.33
Making together .....	<u>342,832.62</u>
Net valuation of the above .....	\$212,831.86

Of this, \$46,500 is in unimproved real estate from which, at this time, no income is derived.

In addition to the above the Estate owns the following from

which no income (or but a nominal income) is derived:—a lot in Gloucester County, New Jersey, valued at One hundred Dollars (\$100)—a large area of land in Atlantic County, New Jersey, know as McKee City, assessed for taxation at twenty-thousand six hundred and fifty dollars (\$20,650) and a tract of coal and mineral lands in Kentucky, which Colonel McKee always considered would turn out to be valuable and would eventually realize a considerable sum. It is assessed for taxation for 1909 at Seventy thousand Dollars (\$70,000)—

In brief the testamentary directions of Colonel McKee are to accumulate the rents and income of his estate until the decease of all his children and grand-children, meanwhile improving (under certain conditions) his unimproved real estate. Upon the death of all his children and grandchildren, the estate is to be made use of in the establishment and maintenance of a college for the education of colored and white fatherless boys.

Very truly yours,  
JOSEPH P. McCULLEN  
February 23, 1909.

Mr. Robert E. Park,  
Tuskegee Institute, Alabama.

Dear Sir:

Yours of the 13th inst., post marked the 16th inst., has been received. You state you would be glad to have any information I can give you about Mr. McKee, particularly in regard to the amount of the estate he left at the time of his death.

The value of Mr. McKee's estate has been variously estimated from \$1,000,000 to \$4,000,000. I am not able to give a more exact estimate, as I have not seen any inventory made by his executors. He owned more than 300 houses in this city, all unencumbered. He also owned oil and coal lands in Kentucky and West Virginia, and lands in Bath and Steuben Counties, New York. As to his personal characteristics, I would suggest that you see the Philadelphia Press of April 20, 1902. If you desire a more exact estimate of the value of his estate, I would suggest that you write Joseph P. McCullen, Jr., No. 1008 Land Title Building, this city.

Yours truly,  
T. J. MINTON