

THE FAMILY OF AGRIPPA HULL

By Emilie S. Piper

The legendary Agrippa Hull, a free Black of Stockbridge, MA is best known for his service during the Revolutionary War, first as a private and orderly to Gen. John Patterson, and then to the Polish patriot Gen. Thaddeus Kosciuszko. Many accounts of Hull's wit and wisdom, and descriptions of his well-known presence among the townspeople of Stockbridge have been handed down from one generation of writers to the next.

But there is much more to his story: the fate, fortunes and misfortunes of his family, which spans more than 150 years. Some of his relatives are mentioned occasionally, but with little detail. Some of the circumstances surrounding their stories are extraordinary.

The parents of Agrippa Hull were Amos and Bathsheba Hull of Northampton, MA, who lived on Mill River near the "South Street Bridge." They were members of the Rev. Jonathan Edwards' church there, before he came to the Congregational Church in Stockbridge. So was Joab Binney/Benny who played an important role when Agrippa was a boy.

Amos and Bathsheba had five children baptized in the Northampton Church: Amos, Sept. 15, 1754; Asaph, Nov. 23, 1755; Margaret, Aug. 14, 1757; Agrippa, May 13, 1759; and Margaret, Feb. 8, 1761. It is safe to assume that the first *Margaret* died in infancy; Amos, the eldest son died Dec. 11, 1757. No further record of Asaph has been found, and since Agrippa Hull names one of his sons Asaph, perhaps it was in memory of an early death of this brother too. Amos, Agrippa's father, died on June 12, 1761. The untimely loss of family members would be a shadow trailing Agrippa Hull almost all his life.

For a Black woman, Bathsheba, to have been free in the 1750's seems exceptional, but the fact that she held title by deed to her own land seems even more remarkable. But after Amos died, the situation of the widow worsened irrevocably. In addition to the deaths in her family, she lost her land on Mill River. She was disenfranchised by the town through court action between 1765 and 1768. She had purchased her parcel from John McClane, whom the town considered a "squatter." For three years she steadfastly refused to sell, but the town claimed an earlier deed made hers void. Consequently, she was forced to move, and the town sold her land for a cider mill.

Meanwhile, Bathsheba had sent her seven year old son, Agrippa, to Stockbridge with Joab Benny. It is said that Joab had been a bondsman of Ebenezer Hunt, a deacon in Edwards' church in Northampton, who gave him to Edwards, who freed him. Hunt was a wealthy landowner, whose homestead was behind the meeting house, and who also owned properties elsewhere in Massachusetts and Connecticut. In Northampton he had a pottery enterprise, and a furs and hat business. Joab called himself a tanner, and perhaps he learned his trade there.

As a freeman, Joab had bought 50 acres in Stockbridge from an Indian, John Skushawmn, in 1755 and later, in 1768 another 30 acres. He prospered. In the *Massachusetts Tax List* of 1771, he owns 2 horses, 2 oxen, 3 cattle, 2 swine, and other assets in grain and tillage. Bathsheba no doubt knew Joab at the church in Northampton where they were both members, and might have felt, with her own future uncertain, that Agrippa would be in safe hands with Joab Benny, perhaps with opportunities she could not provide.

Bathsheba was remarried to Philemon Lee in April of 1767. However, by May of 1768, Bathsheba, her daughter Margaret now age 7, and her new husband Philemon appear at the Hampshire County Court - homeless. It was ruled that they were "transients" and they were warned out of Springfield. "It was determined by the Court that these free individuals came last from Northampton." Agrippa was not with them.

By 1771 Philemon also appears in the Tax List, in Stockbridge, "one poll ratable," but with no assets. The Lees and Hulls lived in a community of free Blacks in the southeast corner of Stockbridge, along with the families of Joab Benny, Enoch Humphrey, and Primus. Another free Negro, Hannibal, who married an Indian woman, Hannah Mhuttawampe, was granted 50 acres in 1765, and lived on the western edge of the town near Johannis Mhuttawampe, his father-in-law.

It is notable that Stockbridge was the only town in Berkshire County where there were free Blacks in the 1771 tax list, and a settled Indian tribe besides.

Philemon bought 1½ acres "more or less" in Stockbridge in 1773 for 6 pounds, and on the same day he sold 3 acres to John Sergeant for 15 pounds - a somewhat puzzling transaction. No further record of him has been found. Later we learn that Bathsheba had been supported by her son, Agrippa, for quite some time.

Agrippa served in the Revolution from May of 1777 to July 1783, traveling as far as South Carolina, and finally to West Point on the Hudson, where he was discharged. He returned to Stockbridge and worked as a "laborer" and "yeoman"; later as a butler and caterer. He and Margaret, his second wife, boarded a number of individuals over the years, for which they were paid by the town.

In July of 1785 he bought his first piece of land; half an acre for 9 pounds on the old County Road, now Goodrich Street, south of Konk Brook, also known as Konkapot Brook, after Captain John Konkapot, a well known Stockbridge Indian said to have lived nearby. For a time it was called "Peggy's Brook," in reference to Agrippa's wife Margaret. The half acre was Hull's home lot. For the next 38 years he invested in land, a few acres at a time, until 1807 when he bought as much as 70 acres. As time went on he sold some, mortgaged and repaid some, and purchased again. It appears that he very clearly understood the value of land at a time when it was very much in demand by the increasing white population of Stockbridge.

Agrippa married, maybe about 1795, Jane Darby, who had fled her master in Lenox and had gone to Stockbridge. She was freed with the help of Judge Theodore Sedgwick. They had two sons: James who died at age 27 on Nov. 27, 1827, and Asaph who died Sept. 5, 1836 age 34 years and 9 months. But a daughter, Charlotte, survived and married. Little additional information about Jane Darby has been found, except that she too died, date unknown.

Margaret Hull, Agrippa's younger sister, married Caesar Freeman on March 24, 1783, in Great Barrington. Perhaps he is the same Caesar, the "servant child" of Nathaniel Ball, who was baptized in the Stockbridge Church in June of 1772.

In September of 1791 Agrippa petitioned the Court of Common Pleas for help from his sister and brother-in-law in supporting Bathsheba. He reports that she is "a poor impotent person, blind and altogether unable to provide" for herself; that he and Margaret are her only children; that Caesar is able to contribute to her comfort and support, but refuses; and that the "said Agrippa hath alone for many years supported and maintained his said mother to his great injury." For the determined and independent Bathsheba to have become blind and helpless seems an ignoble irony indeed.

The case was apparently resolved "locally." In April 1793, Agrippa was exempted from all taxes "so long as his mother shall remain a charge to him," and later, in May of 1797 he received \$23.30 from the town for boarding Bathsheba Lee.

Margaret Timbrook would become Agrippa Hull's second wife. She was born in Great Barrington about 1782, and was abandoned as a bundled baby to an elderly couple by a man who was said to have been told to drown her. "The town" found a care giver for her, but there is no record as to where this took place. She came to Stockbridge at age 18, joined the Stockbridge Church in May of 1804, and married Agrippa on Feb. 14, 1813.

When the author Francis Parkman visited Stockbridge in July of 1844, Agrippa told him that he had "four children in the churchyard." Two of them would have been James and Asaph (also called Asa); perhaps the other two died as infants with names undecided, as no records have yet been found for them.

Parkman was only one of many notable persons who visited with Hull in Stockbridge, especially to hear accounts of Agrippa's experiences in the Revolution. He appears to have been a born story teller. He and "Peggey" became the premier caterers and managers of celebrations for the Stockbridge elite. Their talents were widely recognized, and perhaps this was one of the happier periods of their lives, despite the loss of children.

Agrippa had joined the church in 1827, become the sexton, and may have found solace in his genuine faith. He was a model citizen. A letter was published in a Stockbridge newspaper on March 25, 1841, as follows:

"A Good Example - Mr. Agrippa Hull, a colored man of this town is now 80 years old; was a soldier in the Revolutionary War; has enjoyed good health; is now smart and active; is free from debt - does not owe a penny; strictly honest in all his dealings with his fellow men; a devoted servant to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, what is more remarkable, he never tasted a drop of ardent spirits. Reader, if thou art young, imitate this man's example, and you will live many years upon the earth and rejoice in them all. If thou art addicted to the use of strong drink, will you not cease to do evil, and learn, from this man's example, to do well."

On Nov. 11, 1843 Agrippa Hull wrote his will, leaving his estate to Margaret during her life, or until remarriage. In that case he cites "Charlotte Potter, my daughter and only remaining child, wife of Morris Potter." He died about five years later, on May 21, 1848, age 89.

It is not generally recognized that Agrippa and Jane had a daughter. The Potters were a prominent family in the western part of Pittsfield. William, Morris' father, was a "blood relative of the Mohawk Indians," but in the custom of the time the family was called "colored" or "Negro." Morris, born about 1800, was a "strong and stalwart husbandman" in "Spunky Hollow." He and Charlotte were married in Stockbridge on Feb. 3, 1822. In 1846 Morris led a committee to build the Second Congregational Church in Pittsfield, where the Rev. Samuel Harrison would become pastor in 1850. There were no children, or any others in the household of the Potters in the censuses of 1830 and 1840, but Charlotte wrote a will naming two nephews of her husband, should she inherit from her father. However, Morris, "his wife Deliah," as she calls herself in this case, and Margaret Hull sell four acres in Stockbridge in Nov. 1849, and another four acres in August of 1851; this time only Margaret and Morris sign the deed.

Charlotte died less than a year after her father on Jan. 7, 1849, age 52 years and 6 months, of "palsy." She was buried in the little cemetery on outer West Street, Pittsfield, known as the West Part Cemetery.

After Agrippa died, Margaret continued to live in their Stockbridge home. In the 1850 census, she is listed as age 67, mulatto, value of real estate - \$1,000, place of birth - Great Barrington. Boarding with her is Joab Kellis, age 47, Black, physician, born in Stockbridge. He was with her at least ten years, but died in Lee, April 12, 1866, age 63, "a respectable colored physician," and was buried in Stockbridge.

The family circle "comes 'round." Joab Kellis was the grandson of Joab Benny, who had taken Agrippa Hull to Stockbridge as a child.

When Margaret Hull was 83, Mary Gunn took care of her. Mary Gunn was born in New Lebanon, New York in 1821 and was adopted by Margaret and Agrippa about 1827. In 1865 she lived with Margaret, along with her own three sons and two other children. Mary Gunn's story is as remarkable as all the rest - for another time. She lived to be 85.

Margaret Hull died May 15, 1870, age 87. A eulogy in the form of a letter was sent to the Lee Newspaper, the *Gleaner and Advocate*.

"Dear Gleaner, - Yesterday we buried one of our oldest dwellers in our quiet town, Mrs. Peggy Hull, relict of Agrippa Hull of Revolutionary fame, and, I think, the last pensioner of the War of Independence who resided among us. Mrs. Hull was always a quiet, useful, exemplary character, whose strong native common sense as well as Christian deportment secured her a warm place in the hearts of all who knew her. Since the death of her husband, more than twenty years ago, the widow has dwelt in his former home, made comfortable by a competency left by him for her few wants, cared for by devoted kindred of her own color, and respected by everyone, until the flickering lamp of protracted age went out...last Friday morning. Not far from 90 years had left their infirmities on her wasted frame, but had seemingly ripened her for the better land, where all souls are white in the same garments of imputed righteousness."

The ethnic diversity of 18th century Stockbridge was represented by the dominant English, a few Dutch, free and bonded Blacks, mulattos, and the Stockbridge Indian Tribe. We don't know what the attitudes of minority groups were toward each other, or toward their

differing standing in the town. But one thing is surely clear. Agrippa Hull and his family, who endured with dignity their personal misfortunes, were highly respected and admired members of this unusual community in Western Massachusetts.

[The documentation for this article is voluminous. Readers who wish to delve deeper into the information presented may write B.F.H.A. for a bibliography.]

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BERKSHIRE MEDICAL COLLEGE GRADUATES - 1859

From Ballard Scrapbook, pages 40-41, Berkshire Athenaeum
(vault) 974.451 B24

To the Faculty of the Berkshire Medical College:-

You will find herewith my report of the examination in Chemistry of the gentlemen who have given notice of applying for graduation at the close of the term for 1859.

The three grades very good, good and poor indicate the result. On the question of admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine, those gentlemen whose names appear in the first two receive my hearty yes and the third the same vote if their other examinations are satisfactory.

Pittsfield, Mass.

Very Respectfully,

Sept. 30, 1859

Henry C. Seely

J. R. Andrews	Very good	R. DeL. Evans	Very good
F. O. Bennett	Very good	T. C. Lawton	Very good
C. Blodgett	Very good	W. C. Lyman	Very good
C. L. Blake	Good	E. F. Raymond	Very good
J. F. Bates	Poor	C. B. Smith	Very good
G. A. Doran	Very good	F. H. Young	Good

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A LITERAL RIPOFF - LIBRARY SNEAK THIEVES

It's happened to all of us, folks. You go to the library to search for those long elusive origins of your ancestor and on the shelf you find an old rare book and, in its index, a tantalizing clue to be found on page 660. You scan that page with great anticipation and there, starting near the very bottom, you see *Henry Hackleberry, b 1783, son of (next page) the monument on Main Street*. What?? Sure enough, pages 661 and 662 are gone, only a stub remaining, the victim of some insensitive clod who surreptitiously and with malice aforethought removed that prized leaf. But rest assured, friends, if there is justice in this universe and punishment in the nether world, a special place has been reserved for the perpetrators of such unspeakable deeds where they are condemned to spend all eternity copying the purloined pages.

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