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Abstract

This article explores Gettysburg's 19th century black history through the exciting experiences of the Devan family. Originally from Frederick County, Maryland, they came to Gettysburg as free people of color. In town, one member of the family was suspected of assisting slave catchers by handing over escaped slaves for a profit. Four members of the family served during the Civil War in the United States Colored Troops, three of whom died in the service. This complex story proves the fact that black history is extremely complex and should not be painted by historians with a single brush stroke.

Keywords

Battle of Gettysburg, Devan Family, Black History, United States Colored Troops, Eden Devan, Abolition, Adams County History, Genealogy, African American History, Slavery, Colored Cemeteries, Underground Railroad, Runaway Slaves, Black Property Owners, USCT

“FOR SAFETY AND FOR LIBERTY”: THE DEVAN FAMILY OF GETTYSBURG

Andrew Dalton

Researching Gettysburg’s 19th century black history is like a jigsaw puzzle. Most people of color died in complete obscurity without leaving behind a significant paper trail. Because many did not own property, their names are missing from tax records and estate papers. Pennsylvania newspapers rarely published obituaries or even death notices for black citizens until after 1900. Blacks were typically placed in shallow graves in local “colored” cemeteries, too often with a temporary wooden headstone or no marker at all; most black families could not afford a permanent stone memorial. Because of the lack of documentation, it is necessary to consult records that are less commonly used: court papers, poorhouse records, estate sale lists, and locally kept census records. By piecing these sources together and making connections between individual families, it is easier to determine where these people came from, why they settled in Gettysburg, and what their lives were like during the antebellum period. Through careful research, historians may better understand the complex lives of these forgotten people.

Pennsylvania, though in the process of a gradual abolition of slavery, was not really a “free state” until the last slaves died in the 1850s. The black population of Gettysburg was, during the first half of the 1800s, a mixture of several distinct groups: slaves, former slaves, and runaways from Maryland and Virginia. It is important to consider these differences in status when viewing the relationships between certain groups of citizens in the town. Another difference among families was skin color. In 1850, Gettysburg’s

African-American population was about half mulatto (mixed) and half black (presumably of full African descent). It appears that the census-taker that year made a concerted effort to distinguish between these two skin types.¹

Although examining population trends and analyzing statistics from census records are useful methods for historians to use, they lack human interest. To gain this more intimate perspective it is essential to look at the lives of the individuals who made up the community. The subject of this study is the Devan family, a name that has not received much attention from authors, historians, or students of the Civil War. The purpose of this study is to provide a more complex and detailed understanding of the black population in antebellum Gettysburg through the examination of one family's fascinating story.

Many authors and historians attempt to paint local black history with a single stroke. This may be due to a lack of careful primary source research or a need to "fit" the black experience into a broader, preconceived hypothesis. For example, many assume that all blacks in Adams County were escaped slaves who cowered in their cellars or fled in fear upon the approach of Confederate soldiers in 1863. Others have assumed that every prominent individual of African descent in Gettysburg was involved with the protection of escaped slaves in the Underground Railroad system or that crossing the Mason-Dixon Line guaranteed the safety of runaway blacks from slave catchers. These bold and sweeping generalizations are simply not accurate. Much like the white population of the area, local blacks came from different backgrounds, held different beliefs, and dealt with

¹ This was the first federal census record to list each individual's name, age, and birthplace. It is an invaluable source for local black history. 1850 United States Federal Census, Gettysburg.

the cruel racial strife of the era in different ways. The Devan family is an excellent example of this racial complexity.

William Devan, probably born in the late 1760s, was a slave in Frederick County, Maryland until he was granted his freedom papers in 1817. Records indicate that he was mulatto, “born of a white woman in the family of Richard Simpson.” That same year, a mulatto woman by the name of Lydia Devan attained her freedom. Although Lydia was considerably younger than William, it is reasonable to suggest that they were husband and wife. The Devans who eventually moved to Gettysburg were likely children of this union, as there is only one Devan family listed on early census records in Frederick County.²

There are no Devans listed on the 1840 Census records of Frederick County, Maryland. Evidently, at least two of William’s sons (Nelson and Eden) had brought their young families to Adams County in 1837 or 1838. William had probably died by this point, and a newspaper reference suggests that his wife Lydia came to Gettysburg and died soon after the move.³ In January of 1839, Nelson Devan purchased the freedom of his enslaved wife Sophia and their two oldest children, Phoebe and Elizabeth. They had been owned by George Francis and his wife Anna of Frederick County. For \$200 he was able to “discharge the said Sophia and her two children from all manners of service which they

² This source suggests that Lydia may have been William’s daughter. This seems unlikely given their age difference. As slaves, their exact ages were probably not known or recorded. Also, Eden Devan (presumably the son of William), named his children according to the well-established European naming pattern—his first son named after his father and his second daughter named after his mother. Death certificates indicate that the Devan family of Gettysburg came from Frederick County. Paul Heinegg, *Free African Americans of Maryland and Delaware: From the Colonial Period to 1810*, p. 101.

³ “List of Letters,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, October 29, 1839.

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or either of them owes, or ever did owe.”⁴ In 1842, tax records indicate that Nelson Devan purchased four acres of land at the intersection of the Emmitsburg and Taneytown Roads just outside of Gettysburg.⁵ It is possible that he had already been renting this land since the time of his arrival in the area a few years earlier. At some point, he built a small one and one-half story house on the lot.⁶ In 1840, Nelson appeared on a list of “the board of officers” for the Colored Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church in Gettysburg.⁷ After raising the appropriate funds, the congregation built a church on Long Lane in the 1840s that was occupied for many years.

Tax records indicate that in 1843, both Eden Devan and Amy Devan (who may have been his sister-in-law) purchased property in the Borough of Gettysburg. Eden’s lot was on South Washington Street next to the brick home of Jacob Stock, a German immigrant. At the time, this area of the borough was inhabited by a mixture of lower class families, primarily blacks and newly-arrived immigrants who could not afford more expensive homes closer to the center of town. Over the next two decades, Eden Devan

⁴ The 1840 Census lists George Frances [sic] as a resident of Frederick, Maryland. 1840 United States Federal Census; Adams County Deed Book O, p. 39, Adams County Historical Society (hereafter referred to as ACHS).

⁵ This tract was in Cumberland Township until the limits of Gettysburg Borough were expanded in the mid-1800s and it became part of the borough. Nelson and Eden Devan are shown on the 1840 Census living in close proximity to each other. 1840 United States Federal Census; Gettysburg Borough and Cumberland Township Tax Records, ACHS.

⁶ Pension Record of Fleming Devan, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter referred to as NARA), copy at ACHS.

⁷*Star and Banner* (Gettysburg), May 19, 1840.

purchased several other properties in the borough and rented them to black families.⁸

Eden Devan’s residence was a house that he built on the Washington Street property. On the 1850 Census he was listed as a hostler. This was a common, low-paying occupation that many blacks undertook in the town of Gettysburg. Surprisingly, Eden’s real estate value in 1850 was higher than any other person of color in the borough; ten years later, the census indicates that his combined real and personal estate value was, once again, the highest among all blacks in Gettysburg. This data, combined with the following testimony, calls into question Eden Devan’s character and may offer an explanation for his financial success. In a 1904 letter to local historian J. Howard Wert, Samuel R. McAllister (whose family was active in assisting runaway slaves in Adams County) stated that “there was a yellow kidnapper in town who was very busy and got away with several. His name was Ede Devan. He made considerable money at it.”⁹ Wert added a few more details about Devan in his own article about the Underground Railroad: “By a strange sarcasm, the most efficient ally of the slave catchers in the town of Gettysburg was a man of gigantic size, himself of African blood. He made considerable money by his nefarious business.”¹⁰ Wert even went so far as to write a poem about Devan entitled “Pious

⁸ Estate file of Eden Devan, ACHS; Gettysburg Borough Tax Records, ACHS; Adams County Deed Book Q, p. 255.

⁹ This is a private letter written by someone who was intimately involved with the Underground Railroad in Adams County. There can be no doubt that he was extremely sympathetic to the cause of abolition, and would have no reason to slander a member of the black community without ample evidence to do so. Letter of S. R. McAllister, December 2, 1904, in G. Craig Caba, *Episodes of Gettysburg and the Underground Railroad*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰ *Harrisburg Telegraph*, December 9, 1904.

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Uncle Eden,” mocking the fact that he was involved with the church while at the same time engaged in immoral behaviors. The poem begins as follows:

There was a fat old colored man,
With most prodigious nose.
Who weighed more than three hundred pounds,
Dress'd in his Summer clothes:
Chuck full of loud religion he,
From eye-brows down to toes;
He shouted each campmeeting, from
The first day to the close.¹¹

Eden Devan's membership with the colored church in town appears to have been quite complex. In 1854, Devan was designated as “a collector” for the church “to go through the county and receive whatever the benevolent will contribute to help a needy people, whose thanks and prayers they shall ever have.”¹² His next appearance in local newspapers relating to the church states that he and several other church leaders were “excluded” from the congregation for plotting against a church elder and for “dissension and envying our doctrines and discipline, and improper conduct.”¹³ Perhaps Devan's reputation in Gettysburg had

¹¹ Although Devan (the surname) is not mentioned, there is no doubt that Eden Devan is the subject. There are no other blacks on Gettysburg records with the given name Eden. Also, Wert refers to Devan as “a man of gigantic size” in a different article. “Thoughts and Things,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, August 29, 1906.

¹² *Adams Sentinel*, August 21, 1854.

¹³ The other church members excluded were Rev. James Cameron, Lewis Jones, and Samuel Bowen. The Elder in Charge was J. P. Hamer. *Adams Sentinel*, July 20, 1857.

caught up with him and contributed to his exclusion from the church.

One notable incident occurred at the home of Eden Devan in 1848, years before his troubles with the church. An article in Gettysburg’s *Star and Banner* detailed the scene:

Considerable stir was occasioned in this place, on Saturday evening last, among the colored people, in consequence of the capture of a fugitive slave, belonging to a Mr. Thomas, of Frederick county, Md. The slave had made his escape from his master some days previous, but reached this place on Saturday evening, and concealed himself in the house occupied by Eden Devan—a colored man. By some means, the master discovered his whereabouts, and, about 3 o’clock . . . suddenly pounced upon him in his snug quarters, and rushed him in hot haste through our streets with the view of securing him before an alarm could be given. A large crowd soon assembled in the public square—the colored population evincing considerable feeling; but the fugitive admitting himself to be a slave, and expressing a willingness to return with his master, the latter, after liberally feeing his assistants, left with his property.¹⁴

This account, in addition to the McAllister letter and Devan’s financial prosperity, seems to indicate that Devan was involved in the “nefarious business” of handing over

¹⁴ *Star and Banner* (Gettysburg), September 15, 1848.

runaway slaves to their masters for a profit. Perhaps he was one of liberally paid “assistants” in the case shown above. After all, J. Howard Wert’s poem about Eden Devan includes the line: “there’s sartin [sic] to be fire, where there’s such sights of smoke.”¹⁵

Nelson Devan’s family fared better in the public sphere, at least until after the Civil War. During the 1850s, Nelson worked for Gettysburgian John L. Tate and later as a laborer at Haldeman’s furnace in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In 1856, while hauling ore near Marietta, “the horses, taking fright, started to run, and in the effort to arrest them, he was caught between the wheel and a post.” Devan’s injuries were extremely serious, causing his death “eight or nine” days later. His body was brought back to Gettysburg to be interred in the black cemetery on York Street.¹⁶ After her husband’s death, Sophia Devan’s sole source of income was through her sons, especially Flemming, who worked for a white family as “a waiter and servant” for only two dollars per month. He also tempered clay at a local brickyard and worked on a farm to supplement the family income. All pay went to his mother, who was described as “very poor and often in bad health.” One of Flemming’s employers remembered that he was an “industrious, reliable boy.”¹⁷

¹⁵ “Thoughts and Things,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, August 29, 1906;

“Pious Uncle Eden,” *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, August 14, 1906.

¹⁶ This was the only place where people of color could be buried in the Gettysburg area at the time. The cemetery was abandoned in 1906 and a house (311 York Street) stands on the site today. Devan probably never had a headstone. If he did it was lost before 1906 when some cemetery stones were moved to Lincoln Cemetery (then the Goodwill Cemetery) on Long Lane. For more information relating to local black cemeteries, see Betty Dorsey Myers, *Segregation in Death: Gettysburg’s Lincoln Cemetery*. “Fatal Accident,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, January 28, 1856.

¹⁷ Pension Record of Fleming Devan, NARA (copy at ACHS).

As the Civil War approached, Gettysburg’s black population decreased slightly from about 200 in 1850 to 188 in 1860. This is probably due in part to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which made it far more difficult for runaway slaves to escape and remain undetected in Pennsylvania. As former slaves, Sophia Devan and her two oldest children must have felt great anxiety living so close to the Mason-Dixon line. When the Civil War began in 1861, Gettysburg’s people of color lived in fear of an invasion by the Southern army. They dreaded the sight of the Confederates, who regarded their race as inferior and made no distinction between free people and runaway slaves.¹⁸

On June 26, 1863, Confederates under General Jubal Early entered Gettysburg and demanded supplies from the town leaders. The approach of the Confederates caused widespread panic throughout the local black population. Many families took to the hills surrounding town or sought out back roads and farm paths that led to safer areas. Sophia Devan and her children were among those who were “obliged to flee for safety and for liberty from the invading Rebels.”¹⁹ It is not clear if Eden Devan and his family left town, but it seems likely that they did given the fact that Confederates, just a few days later, would occupy many of the abandoned dwellings on South Washington Street near their home. Unlike his sister-in-law Sophia, Eden Devan did not file a claim for damage done to his property during the summer of 1863.

¹⁸ For more information about local black citizens during the Gettysburg Campaign, see Margaret Creighton, *The Colors of Courage: Gettysburg’s Forgotten History*. 1850 and 1860 United States Federal Censuses, accessed on Ancestry.com.

¹⁹ Damage Claim of Sophia Devan, Gettysburg National Military Park (hereafter referred to as GNMP).

Jubal Early's force left town after ransacking most of Gettysburg's businesses and stealing much-needed supplies. The Confederate army returned to Gettysburg five days later in force during the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg. By evening they occupied the streets of town, and skirmishers advanced to Breckenridge Street and the southern end of Washington Street. Union soldiers of the Eleventh Corps occupied a position near Sophia Devan's house at the corner of the Emmitsburg and Taneytown Roads. Both Devan houses were caught between the lines during heavy skirmishing and sharpshooting on July 2nd and 3rd. The brick residence and boarding house of Jacob Stock, next door to Eden Devan, was targeted by Union artillery and riflemen to drive Confederate sharpshooters away.²⁰

When the smoke cleared on July 4, 1863, Sophia Devan's house was all but destroyed. Shells had crashed through the building, destroying the roof as well as household contents like beds, a table, and the cooking stove. Damaged plates, dishes, silverware, and clothing lay scattered around the house and surrounding property. Fence lines, as well as the doors of the house, were destroyed or taken away to be burned, and the nearby garden had been trampled down by hundreds of soldiers. Crude breastworks created by German soldiers of the Eleventh Corps lined the Emmitsburg Road just west of the house. In short, the property was "entirely unfit to be occupied." Sophia and her

²⁰ Battle damage is still visible on the southern wall of the Stock house. Eden Devan's frame structure no longer stands, but part of it can be seen in early images of the Stock house, including an 1863 view of the building that has just recently come to light through an eBay auction. For more on the sharpshooting action in this area of town, see Timothy H. Smith's *In the Eye of the Storm: The Farnsworth House and the Battle of Gettysburg*, as well as Dr. Walter L. Powell's *The Alexander Dobbin House In Gettysburg: A Short History*.

family were forced to live elsewhere for “the greater part of a year” while Charles Tawney, a local mason, repaired the walls, chimney, roof, and doors of the dwelling. For all of these damages, Sophia Devan was awarded less than \$300 by the government.²¹

While repairs continued on the Devan property, the Gettysburg community began a long recovery from the effects of the battle. The dead and wounded greatly outnumbered the population of the town and surrounding townships. Nearly every church, public building, and private residence became a makeshift hospital. Gettysburg would become the final resting place for thousands of Union soldiers who died during or after the three days of fighting. On November 19, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln dedicated a portion of the “hallowed ground” as a National Cemetery. The following day, Sophia Devan’s 18-year-old son, Flemming Devan, enlisted as a private in the 8th United States Colored Troops. He was 5 feet 3 inches tall with black hair, black eyes, and a “yellow” complexion.²² Eden Devan’s son William, age 23, had joined this unit in September, probably after being drafted. He was a musician, and records indicate that he played the fife and bugle. Another of Sophia’s sons, Solomon Jeremiah, enlisted in the 22nd USCT in December of 1864. He was 19 years old at the time and, like his brother, was 5 feet 3 inches tall.²³

Sophia Devan’s teenage sons spent time in Philadelphia during the organization and training of their respective units. Solomon’s regiment left in January of 1864

²¹ Damage Claim of Sophia Devan, GNMP; S. G. Elliot Burial Map of Gettysburg, 1864, Library of Congress.

²² Yellow is a term used on many period records to signify those of a mixed race, also known as mulatto. Service Record of Flemming Devan, NARA.

²³ Service Records of Solomon Devan and William H. Devan, NARA.

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for Yorktown, Virginia where it would remain until May of 1864 without seeing any combat. Flemming's unit was not so lucky. In February, the 8th Infantry was sent to Hilton Head, South Carolina and then on to Jacksonville, Florida. It first saw action at the Battle of Olustee on February 20, 1864.²⁴ Lieutenant Oliver W. Norton, a veteran of the Battle of Gettysburg, served as an officer in Flemming's company. He detailed the bloody struggle at Olustee in a letter to his sister written shortly after the battle:

Military men say it takes veteran troops to maneuver under fire, but our regiment with knapsacks on and unloaded pieces, after a run of half a mile, formed a line under the most destructive fire I ever knew. We were not more than two hundred yards from the enemy, concealed in pits and behind trees, and what did the regiment do? At first they were stunned, bewildered, and knew not what to do. They curled to the ground, and as men fell around them they seemed terribly scared, but gradually they recovered their senses and commenced firing. And here was the great trouble—they could not use their arms to advantage. We have had very little practice in firing, and, though they could stand and be killed, they could not kill a concealed enemy fast enough to satisfy my feelings. After seeing his men murdered as long as flesh and blood could endure it, Colonel Fribley ordered the regiment to fall back slowly, firing as they went. As the men fell back they

²⁴ Service Record of Flemming Devan, NARA.

gathered in groups like frightened sheep, and it was almost impossible to keep them from doing so. Into these groups the rebels poured the deadliest fire, almost every bullet hitting some one.²⁵

At least one of these bullets struck and killed young Flemming Devan. In a letter home to Devan’s mother, Sophia, Lieutenant Norton wrote: “It becomes my painful duty to inform you of the death of your son in the battle of Olustee Fla. Feb. 20, 1864. Fleming was a pvt. of mine and though from his extreme youth and small stature he seemed poorly fitted for a soldier’s life yet he met the enemy like a man and fell bravely fighting.” Devan’s body was left on the field during the hasty Union retreat. His personal effects were all lost, and his body was probably never recovered or identified.²⁶

The following month a fourth Devan enlisted in the Union Army. His name was Robert Wesley Devan, a 44 year old barber from Adams County. He may have been Eden and Nelson’s brother.²⁷ Robert was present with his unit, the 43rd USCT, in the thick of the fighting at the Battle of the Crater on July 30, 1864. Surprisingly, he came out of this engagement unscathed but was badly wounded in the left

²⁵ Oliver Wilcox Norton, *Army Letters, 1861-1865*, pp. 198-199.

²⁶ Pension Record of Flemming Devan, 8th USCT, NARA (copy at ACHS).

²⁷ Robert Devan was too old to be the child of either Eden or Nelson Devan. If he was not their brother, he was surely a cousin, as records indicate that he was born in Frederick County, Maryland. Robert was the husband of Margaret Craig, a well-known fortune-teller in the area known to many as “Black Mag.” Flemming Devan’s full name was William Flemming Devan. He appears to have gone by Flemming, and this name will be used henceforth. Service Record of Robert Devan, NARA.

thigh while on fatigue duty near Petersburg, Virginia on August 14, 1864. Devan was sent to a hospital in Philadelphia to recover and returned in late September. By January he had become very sick and was placed at hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia where he died of heart disease on February 24, 1865. He wrote a letter home to his wife on the day that he died, stating, "My feet and legs swell very much and I have about given up the hopes of ever geting [sic] well. . . . if we should not meet again on earth I hope that we shall meet in a fare [sic] better land." He forwarded along his military papers and pay so that his wife and young children could prove to the government that he had died while in the service of the United States.²⁸

Eden Devan's son William had a very different experience in the military but with a similarly unfortunate outcome. According to his service records, he deserted two months after joining his unit. Evidently, he had returned to Gettysburg on a pass but did not rejoin his regiment at the proper time. Military authorities arrested him in Gettysburg on January 16, 1864, and he returned to duty without a trial. William fought at Olustee, Florida where his cousin Flemming was killed. He survived and engaged in several more battles in Virginia leading up to the final surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House. After Lee's surrender, Devan's unit was sent to Texas, and he became very sick during the hot summer march with an affliction listed on his records as "Texas Blindness." He arrived "with his head tied up" at a hospital in Brownsville, Texas and died there on August 28, 1865. He left behind a widow and young daughter. William had been married at his father's home in a double wedding on December 27, 1860. He shared the day with his sister Lydia and her groom, John

²⁸ Pension Record of Robert W. Devan, NARA (copy at ACHS).

W. Watts. Watts served during the Civil War and died in 1866 from illnesses contracted while in the service. Thus, the extended Devan family suffered four deaths as a result of the war.²⁹

Solomon Devan, Sophia’s other son, survived the war but was badly wounded on June 15, 1864 when a bullet struck him in the upper thigh near Petersburg, Virginia “whilst in a charge on a fort of the enemy.” The wound fractured his thigh bone, causing the shortening of his right leg by several inches. He walked with a limp for the rest of his life and was unable to work the way that he had before the war.³⁰

Sophia Devan eventually moved back to her house that had been nearly destroyed during the Battle of Gettysburg. To pay for the repairs she had used money sent home by her sons during their service in the United States Colored Troops. She faced the loss of her son Flemming, upon whom she had depended for income. Her other son was incapacitated by a horrible wound, and her two youngest sons were under the age of ten. Her husband had been dead for years and her brother’s family was similarly torn apart by the war. Surely, there were few families affected by the Civil War as heavily as the Devans. Coming events would only make matters worse.

When Solomon Devan returned to Gettysburg from a New Jersey hospital he began attending classes at the colored school in town. The wounded veteran, still a teenager, sat among the other children in the classroom under the direction of their teacher, David McMillan. On December 5, 1864, just two weeks after Devan was

²⁹ Pension Records of William H. Devan and John W. Watts, NARA (copies at ACHS). Watts was the brother of Lloyd Francis Asbury Watts, a well-known member of Gettysburg’s black community.

³⁰ Pension Record of Solomon Devan, NARA (copy at ACHS).

discharged from the army, he was approached by Mr. McMillan with a rod. McMillan attempted to strike young Devan, and the frightened youth pulled out his revolver and “fired two shots at the teacher, neither of which . . . took effect.” Local newspapers covered this story and made no mention of the fact that Devan was a wounded veteran or that his brother had been killed and his corpse left on a Florida battlefield. Instead, the *Gettysburg Compiler*, known to have a conservative bias, ended the article with the statement: “Abolitionism is costing more than it will come to.”³¹ This conveys a powerful message about the racial tensions in Gettysburg during the final months of the Civil War. Devan was immediately arrested and sent to jail “to await such punishment as his conduct deserves.” In April of 1865 he was sentenced to “a term of one year and one month” at the Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia.³²

Solomon Devan served his time in prison and eventually left Gettysburg for Lancaster County where he married Susan Green on March 18, 1875. He died on November 18, 1903 and was laid to rest in the Philadelphia National Cemetery. Sophia Devan died in 1876 and was probably buried in the Goodwill Cemetery (now Lincoln Cemetery), although no headstone exists. This is unfortunate because Sophia had made special mention in her will of having “a pair of gravestones . . . for me, and also for my deceased husband Nelson Devan and my deceased daughter Phoebe Ann Devan (Reed) in the grave yard of the coloured people in Gettysburg.” She also stipulated that these stones “shall be paid out of the first monies coming into the hands

³¹ “Another Shooting Affair,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, December 12, 1864; “Another Shooting Affair,” *Adams Sentinel*, December 13, 1864.

³² *Adams Sentinel*, April 25, 1865.

of my executor.” Perhaps she died in so much debt that this wish for a memorial could not be fulfilled.³³

After their mother’s death, the Devan children all left Gettysburg for different cities in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Martha Jane Devan married Joseph H. Timbers, a Civil War Veteran, and moved to Burlington, New Jersey where she died on April 15, 1921. Her descendants still live in that part of New Jersey and have preserved many Devan family photographs.³⁴

Eden Devan lived out the rest of his life in Gettysburg and died on August 1, 1880. He and his wife divorced at some point after the Civil War, and he remarried a woman by the name of Rebecca.³⁵ J. Howard Wert’s poem about Devan includes two interesting passages that hint at his relationships with women:

Il pulpit and at altar, too,
Old Eden work’d his knees:
The sisters dearly lov’d this man—
Fat dames of all degrees,
For he could drown the preacher’s voice
With most accomplish’d ease. . . .

One sinner unregenerate,
Way down Ramshackle street,
Thought Uncle Eden to his wife

³³ Very few wills include such careful instructions for a properly marked burial. Perhaps this says something about Sophia’s desire to be remembered as a person, not as someone’s property. She had been born a slave and died as a free woman. Estate file of Sophia Devan, ACHS.

³⁴ Death Certificate of Martha Jane Timbers, (ancestry.com).

³⁵ 1880 United States Federal Census; “Deaths,” *Star and Sentinel*, August 5, 1880.

Was most uncommon sweet.³⁶

The story of the Devan family in Gettysburg is a mixture of liberty, tragedy, business, and survival. There can be no doubt that heroes like Flemming Devan laid down their lives in the service of their country. But, by a strange contrast, Flemming's uncle Eden, at least by some accounts, did not act in the best interests of innocent runaways who sought the freedom that he and his family enjoyed.

On the other hand, Sophia Devan's life and legacy are characteristic of the great struggle endured by former slaves. She first lost her husband—the man who had purchased her freedom and brought her to Pennsylvania. She then lost her home during the deadliest battle of the Civil War. Just months later two of her sons left for the army. One was killed and the other badly wounded and then sent to prison for over a year. Her family was forever changed by the war, both on the home front and on the battlefields of Virginia and Florida. Sophia's final wish was for a properly marked grave--something that she did not receive. Her struggle is just one of many stories from Gettysburg's black community that have been overshadowed and replaced by the stories of white citizens and white soldiers. For too long history books have been filled with the same canned stories about the white experience, printed and reprinted over and over again with great regularity. Without digging deeper into the unpublished, the unknown, the forgotten, we lose a part of our past that is just as important. Historians must work harder to bring untold stories to light.

³⁶ "Thoughts and Things," *Compiler*, August 29, 1906; "Pious Uncle Eden," *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, August 14, 1906.

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