



Delaware
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



dehistory.org

Today's Presentation

The Delaware Historical Society is a nonprofit, non-government agency.

Founded in 1864, its mission is to preserve, promote, and share Delaware's history in a welcoming environment to educate, inspire, and empower people and communities.

Our vision is to make Delaware history impossible to ignore—in its contradictions and paradoxes, even the history that does not reflect well upon us.

Why Juneteenth? What is it?

- Historical overview, national and local
- A way to bear witness, rooted in actual events

What does it mean in Delaware?

- Delaware's uniqueness and its implications today

How to make this history useful

- Effective Public History
 - Experience: dialogue, place-specific, cognitive effect
- The Unequal Justice Initiative
 - 19th century—the era immediately after the first Juneteenth
 - Spectacle punishment, removal/nullification of rights
- Delaware Historical Society initiatives

Questions and Discussion

Juneteenth: Then and Now

- **Juneteenth** celebrates the day in June 1865 when Gordon Granger, a Union general, informed enslaved African Americans in Galveston, Texas, that the Civil War had ended and that they were free.
- It has become a day to celebrate emancipation of African Americans and the tenuous first steps to become American citizens with full rights—a struggle that continues.
- Has been in the news since 2020 after unrest following the deaths of Brionna Taylor, George Floyd (and many others) prompting public discussion of police brutality and systemic inequity in American education, voting, criminal justice and many areas.
- Logical outcome of “monument wars” over Confederate statues, 1619 Project, and “patriotic education.”

***This summer, the United States established Juneteenth as a federal holiday.

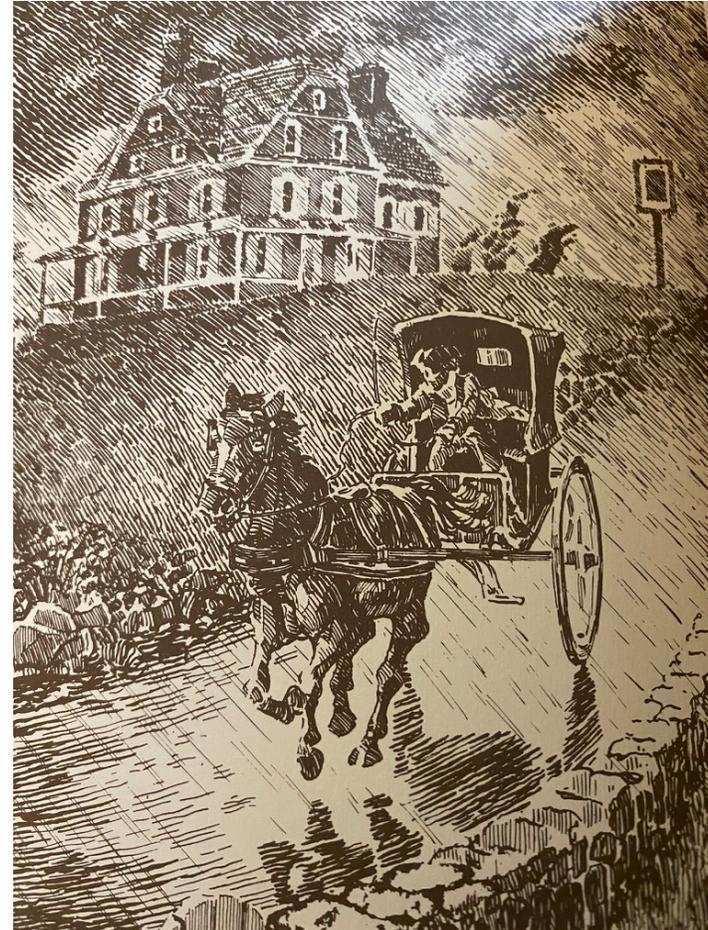
NYTimes: Most Americans Know Little or Nothing About Juneteenth, Poll Finds

	A lot	Some	A little bit	Nothing at all
	%	%	%	%
National adults	12	25	34	28
Black adults	37	32	27	4
Hispanic adults	13	27	31	29
White adults	7	24	36	32
Democrats	18	29	36	16
Independents	10	27	35	27
Republicans	5	18	32	45
18-34	13	29	36	21
35-54	12	26	34	27
55+	10	22	33	34

GALLUP PANEL, MAY 18-23, 2021

Context to Consider: Enslavement in the United States

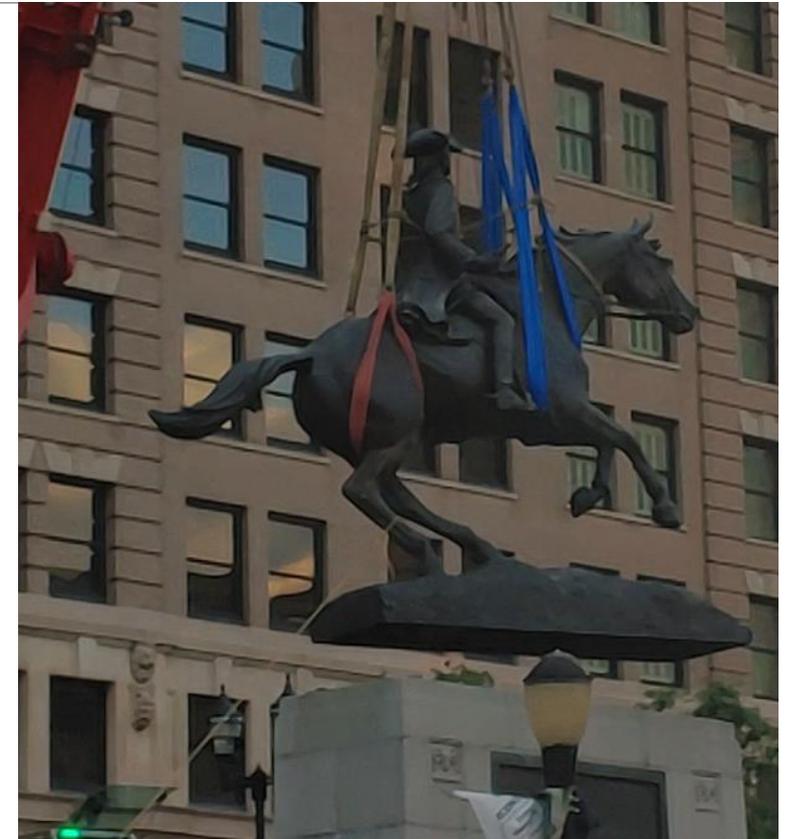
- Delaware hero Caesar Rodney was one of 56 Signers, and one of the 41 who owned enslaved Africans.
- 12 American presidents owned slaves.
- **North American chattel slavery is unique in world history: race-based, hereditary, permanent, and monetize-able.** (People were depreciated, amortized, and treated as cash.)
- In 1860, the value of the 4 million enslaved persons in the United States was \$3 billion 1860 dollars, an amount greater than all American assets combined (except for the land of the U.S.).



A.N. Wyeth's
Rodney's Ride
in Bill Frank's
book
*Caesar Rodney,
Patriot:
Delaware's
Hero for All
Times and All
Seasons (1975)*

Delaware Context: Juneteenth did not apply to Delaware

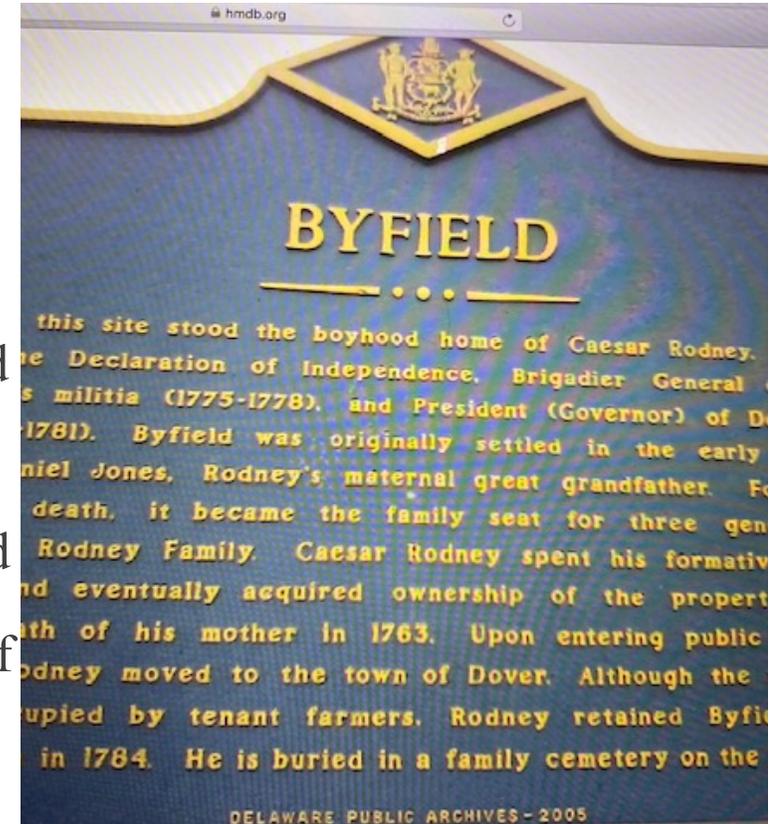
- The powers slave owners had left legacies in all aspects of the body politic: voting, juries, government structure, education, public accommodations.
- These were not changed nationally until the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the U.S. Constitution that ended the Civil War, passed in December 1865.
- **BUT not ratified in Delaware until 1901, after Blacks were allowed to vote.**
- Other rights like Blacks serving on juries, one person-one vote, only allowed in early 20th century.
- School system segregated until late 20th century. People were lynched in 1861, 1867, 1903. People flogged at whipping post until 1945.



Removal of the statue from Rodney Square,
June 2020

The Rodney Family and Slavery

- **Byfield Plantation state marker—what’s missing?**
- Rodney family close with numerous slaveowning elite families: Chew, Ridgely, Luff, Dickinson and many others.
- Rodney in 1769 proposed law to ban importation of enslaved Africans to Delaware. Abolitionist? Actually meant to keep economic value of Delaware slaves high relative to Maryland and Virginia. Part of legacy of keeping local control that became “states rights.” Voted down 9-7.
- Brother Thomas Rodney was an outspoken racist: “Nature found the Negro’s for Slavery, that She Stamped them With the irrational colour of black to distinguish them from the Children of light, [and] that their creative Ignorance & dispositions dispose them to be ‘Hugers of wood & drawers of Water[.]’” (1787)



Byfield Marker, St. Jones Neck, 2005

Other Contemporary Delawareans

- Warner Mifflin personally manumitted enslaved people by the hundreds beginning in 1774—even welcoming escapees to his farm in Kent County from Maryland and Virginia.
- Rodney’s nephew Caesar Augustus Rodney president of the Delaware Abolition Society in 1820.
- FYI, Marquis de Lafayette a founder of the 1780 Pennsylvania Abolition Society.
- **Compare with Thomas Rodney about manumission advocates: “Free your mind from the vain folly of attempting to Free those whom Nature has made Slaves.”**



Chew Plantation Marker at
Whitehall, Bombay Hook,
2017

Caesar Rodney's Will—*Gradual* Emancipation

After all the listing of furniture, tools, horses, pot and other assets, in his will, Caesar also directed:

“I do give and bequeath to old Negro Charles and old Negro Peg and Negro Jude their liberty forever, free and clear of me my executors and administrator liberate **all the rest of my Negro Slaves in manner and form following that is to say, all those that are 21 years of age or upwards at the time of my death shall have their full freedom and liberty at the expiration of four years of service** after my decease, and all those that are not 21 years of age at the time of my death shall have their full freedom and liberty when they attain the age of 25 years, **and all that are born after my death shall be free the instant they are born and it is my express order that none of those who are to be sold till they attain the respective ages afore said be disposed of to Persons who will oblige themselves to keep them in this state during their respective Terms of servitude....”**

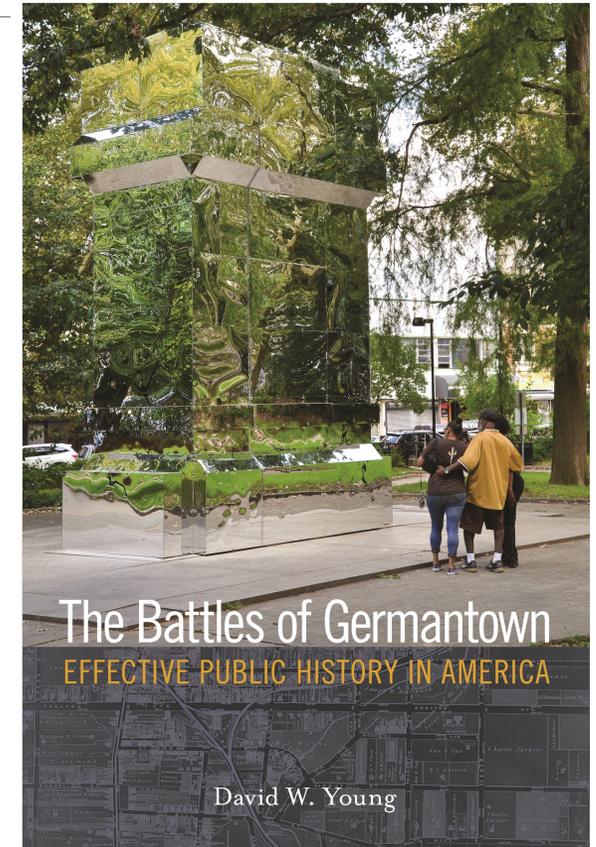
They, and their values were listed thus:

Shadrack, 4 years to serve	£40
Charles, 4 years	£40
Ezekel 5 years	£50
Hannah, 4 years a breeding woman	£10
Cyrus, 3 years to serve till 25	£25
Ezekiel, 3 months old, to serve till 25	£ 5
Kate, 5 years to serve a breeding woman	£10
Maria, 3 years serve till 25	£15
Charlotte 1 year serve till 25	£ 7
Bosman, 4 years to serve	£40
Pegg, 13 years old, to serve till 25	£40
Harry 10 years to serve	£50
John, 17 years to serve	£25
Sal, 12 years to serve	£15
Beth, at Fields, 4 years to serve	£20

Rodney Collection, Box 6, Folder 22, DHS

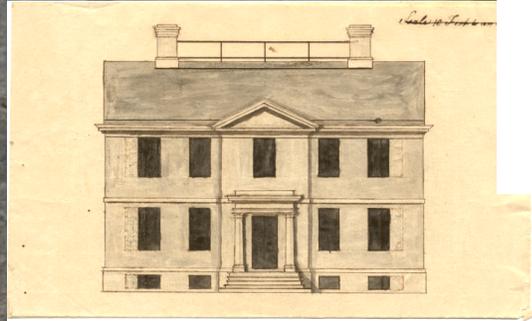
“Effective Public History”

- Practice good history, include more than one narrative, engage in dialogue, seek partnerships.
- Statues are not history. They express community values at a point in time. The more we understand history, we see an evolving sense of history and rewrite it, hopefully and together.
- “Effective Public History”, such as Germantown examples—*people* the stories with active verbs, approach with a “bet you didn’t know,” and share discoveries, try to connect through dialogues like this, to engage our shared humanity.
- **We cannot relativize. If we honor slaveowners, explain why and how we bear witness to the truth of what we represent—not the myth or the icon or the single version.**



2020 Philip S. Klein Book Prize, Pennsylvania Historical Association

Cliveden: Summer home of the Chew family



Have granted Bargained and sold to my most beloved
Daughter Barbara and her heirs the said Benjamin
Chew his late wife's share for ever my Negro Girl
called and known by the name of Sarah and all my
right title to the said Negro Property Cassin and
over of me and to the said Negro Girl
and the said Negro Girl to her
heirs Daughters & Assigns to her and
hers for ever to her heirs Assigns
never. Witness my hand & Seal
of June Ninth 1754

J. Lancaster son



The Chew Family Papers



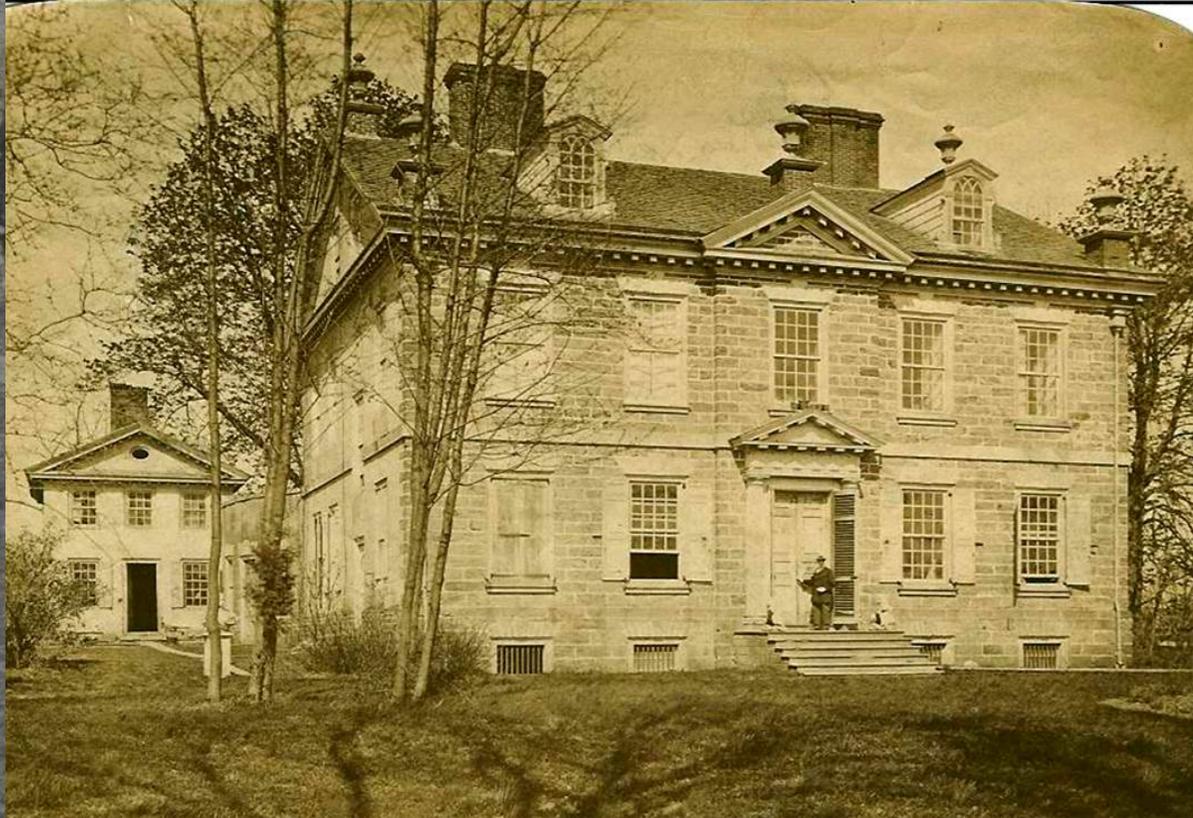
What is a Founding Father?



THE RT. REV. RICHARD ALLEN



History Depends on Where You Are Standing



James Smith, 1789-1870. Born enslaved in Maryland, lived at Cliveden from 1813 until his death.

Liberty to Go to See



A dramatic event based on Chew papers



Cliveden
Know it. Feel it. Share it.



PHILADELPHIA
YOUNG PLAYWRIGHTS



Delaware History Museum and Old Town Hall



Making Delaware History Impossible to Ignore



Secret Service snipers atop the roof of the Delaware History Museum, November 2020

Education at the DHS engaging multiple audiences



Smart savers financial literacy program



National History Day

The Mitchell Center of African American Heritage

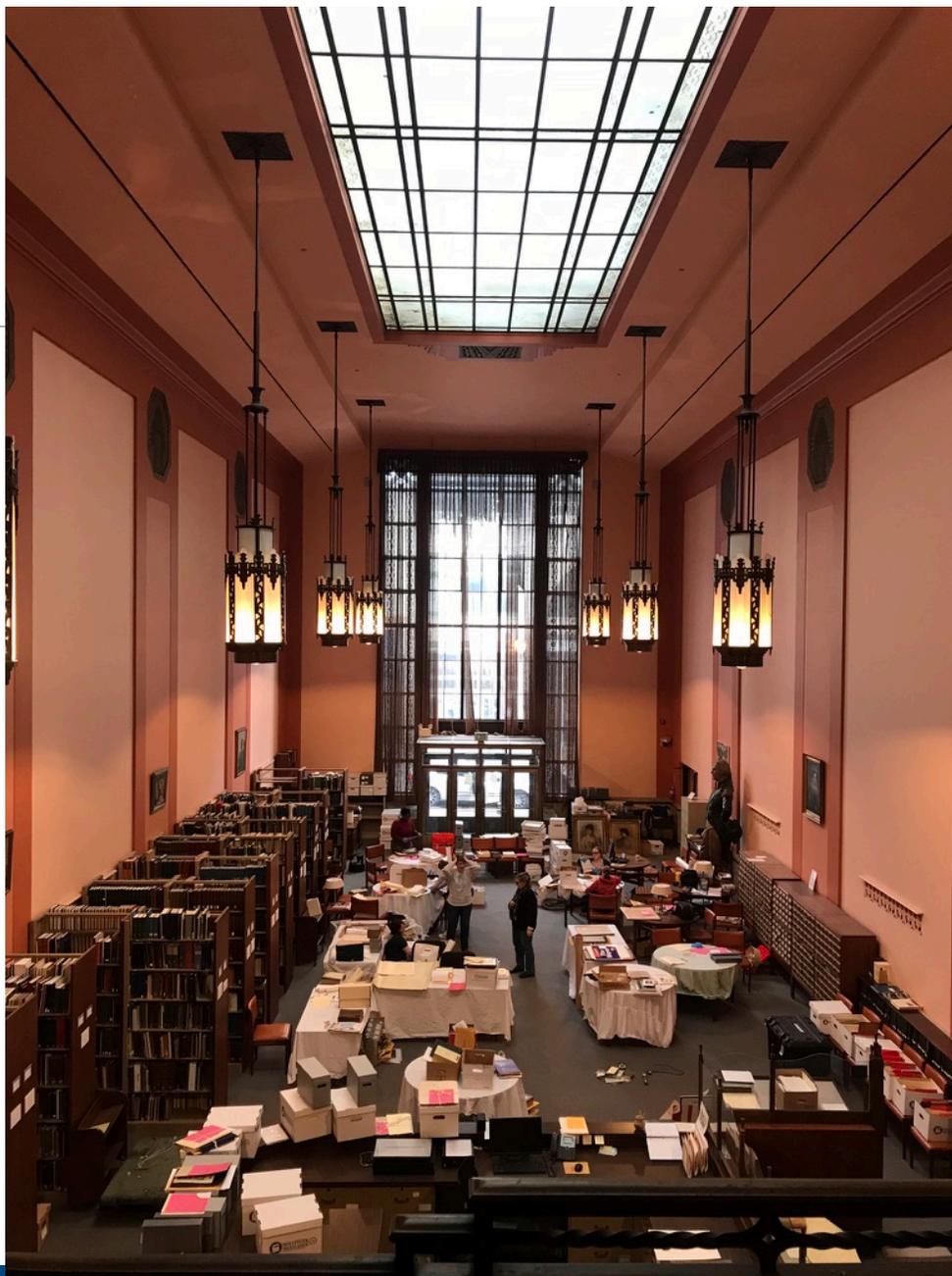
Key themes: resistance, freedom-seeking, civil rights, arts and culture.

Community and institution building, social life, political participation, civic protest.

Now an exhibit—how to make it an idea?

Unequal Justice in Delaware: Rewriting the Narrative of Racial Violence—partnership project to document lynchings in Delaware, with UD, DSU and Social Justice Remembrance Commission





Library and Archives—6
buildings total.

A 1930 Art Deco bank as
well as 18th- and 19th-
century buildings.

3,000,000 items in
collections.

Recent work on buildings: DHS library



Medallions revealed. Brick Annex building (left) in need of stabilization.

Activating Historic Buildings



Reactivate 1801 Coxe House as home of the Delaware Center for Jewish History. (Newly opened, 2021)

Stabilize 1816 Annex building for renovation as state of the art archival storage. (2020-2022)

Continued use of the square for mission related uses.



National Historic Landmark Read House & Gardens

“The Gem of Old New Castle.” Constructed 1797-1804 and given to the DHS in 1975 by Philip and Lydia Laird.

(2021 environmental systems upgrade complete!)



LIT for the Holidays
diverse artists take over
the site this **December 11,**
2021





Unequal Justice in the “First State”:
Changing the Narrative of Racial Violence in
Delaware

National Memorial for Peace and Justice



Montgomery AL, founded by Delaware native, Bryan Stevenson.
The initiative had NO research of racial violence in Delaware...

██████████

*“Mercy Master, Mercy”: Racial
Politics and the Lynching of
George White*

DENNIS B. DOWNEY*

“MERCY MASTER, MERCY”

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FIGURE 34. Likeness of George White published on the front page of the *Wilmington Morning News*, June 21, 1903. (Collections of the Historical Society of Delaware.)

Dennis B. Downey, “‘Mercy, Master, Mercy’ ”: Racial Politics and the Lynching of George White,” *Delaware History Journal*, Vol. 30: No. 3 (2003): 189-210.

*“Revenged in the Most Terrible
Manner”: The Lynching of
African American Civil War
Veteran William “Obie” Evans*

YOHURU WILLIAMS*

TWO events capture the journey of William Evans from soldier to murder victim in his quest for freedom. The first took place on July 30, 1864, at the Battle of the Crater outside Petersburg, Virginia. Around 8:30 a.m. the smoke in a gigantic hole blown into Rebel lines by a Union mine was so thick that the Northern Army troops, led by the 30th division of U.S. Colored Troops (USCT), could hardly tell friend from foe as they rushed the hastily re-forming Confederate line. The 30th managed to seize the crest of a Rebel position before being forced back during vicious hand-to-hand fighting. Angered by the Union charges, enraged Confederates slaughtered rival officers and enlisted men, even after they surrendered. They concentrated their murderous wrath on black soldiers in particular. One Virginian recalled, “The whole floor of the trench was strewn with the dead bodies of Negroes.” Union Lieutenant Freeman Bowley described the gauntlet faced by the 30th as it retreated: “They had [to] run up a slope in full view of the enemy that now surrounded us on three sides; nearly every man who attempted to fall riddled with bullets.” Colonel Delevan Bates took a face wound and was recorded as dead (he survived, winning the Medal of Honor). The 30th suffered 214 casualties in less than

DELAWARE HISTORY

LEIPSIC, DEL., July 25, 1867.
This morning, at an early hour, the body of a negro man was found by neighbors passing along the public road, suspended from the limb of a willow tree, on the south east corner of the farm of John Slaughter, about a mile from Leipsic, at the junction of the road leading from the direction of Martin's Bridge and Moorton. He was hung with a common plow line, his feet about 18 or 20 inches from the ground. There were wagon tracks under the body, which showed that he was hung from a wagon or carriage of some kind. He was identified as a Wm. Evans, alias Obie, and had been living with Mr. Wm. T. Collins, at Martin's Bridge. Last night, in the absence of Mr. Collins and his wife, who were visiting his father, some persons in disguise called the boy out of the house on the pretence of engaging him to cut oats for them. He was roughly seized, tied and placed in a kind of a peach wagon, and drawn off in the direction of Leipsic. This took place about 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening. He was seen hanging last night, about 10 o'clock, by some neighbors.

Yohuru Williams, “Revenged in the Most Terrible Manner”: The Lynching of African American Civil War Veteran William “Obie” Evans,” *Delaware History Journal*, Vol 34: 1 (2014) 33-60.

Original marker, June 2019



Original marker, June 2019



NUMBER OF PERSONS LYNCHED IN SOUTHERN STATES,
1882-1903

	WHITES	NEGROES	OTHERS	TOTAL
Mississippi	39	294	I	334
Texas	114	199	11	324
Louisiana	34	232	19	285
Georgia	28	241	..	269
Alabama	46	198	..	244
Arkansas	60	139	I	200
Tennessee	49	150	..	199
Kentucky	64	103	..	167
Florida	19	115	..	134
South Carolina	8	109	..	117
Missouri	49	42	..	91
Virginia	21	70	..	91
North Carolina	15	48	I	64
West Virginia	19	27	..	46
Maryland	2	18	..	20
Total	567	1985	33	2585

¹ See p. 164.

Total

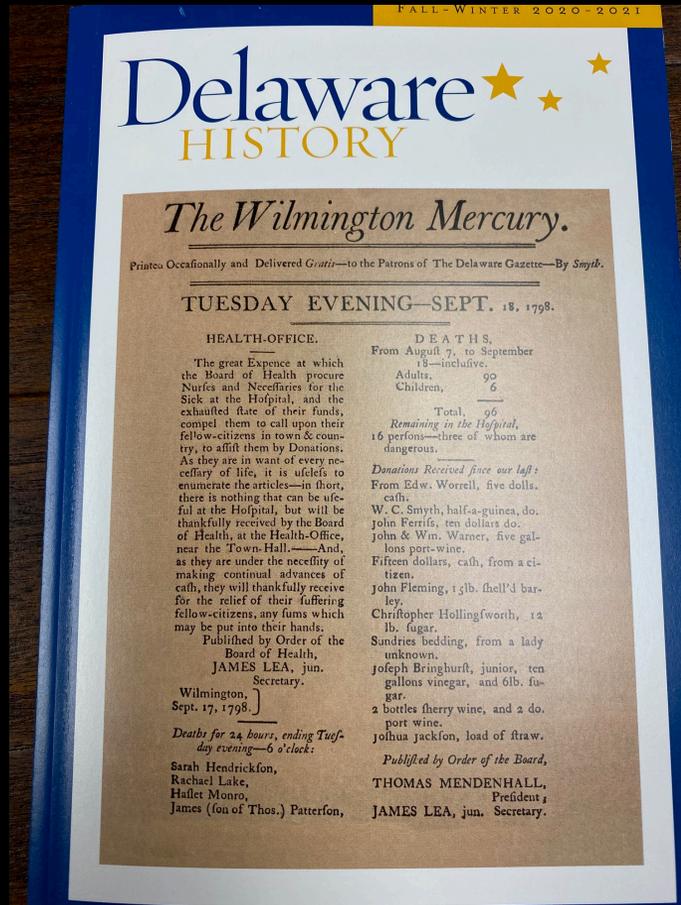
NUMBER OF PERSONS LYNCHED IN EASTERN STATES,
1882-1903

	WHITES	NEGROES	OTHERS	TOTAL
Indiana	41	11	..	52
Ohio	10	11	..	21
Illinois	11	10	..	21
Michigan	7	1	..	8
Pennsylvania	2	5	..	7
Wisconsin	6	..	..	6
New York	1	1	..	2
New Jersey .....	..	1	..	1
Connecticut	1	..	..	1
Delaware .....	..	1	..	1
Total	79	41	..	120

The replacement marker, Nov. 2019



Newest findings, 2021



“No Sympathy, No Mercy’: The 1861 Lynching of Jacob Hamilton”

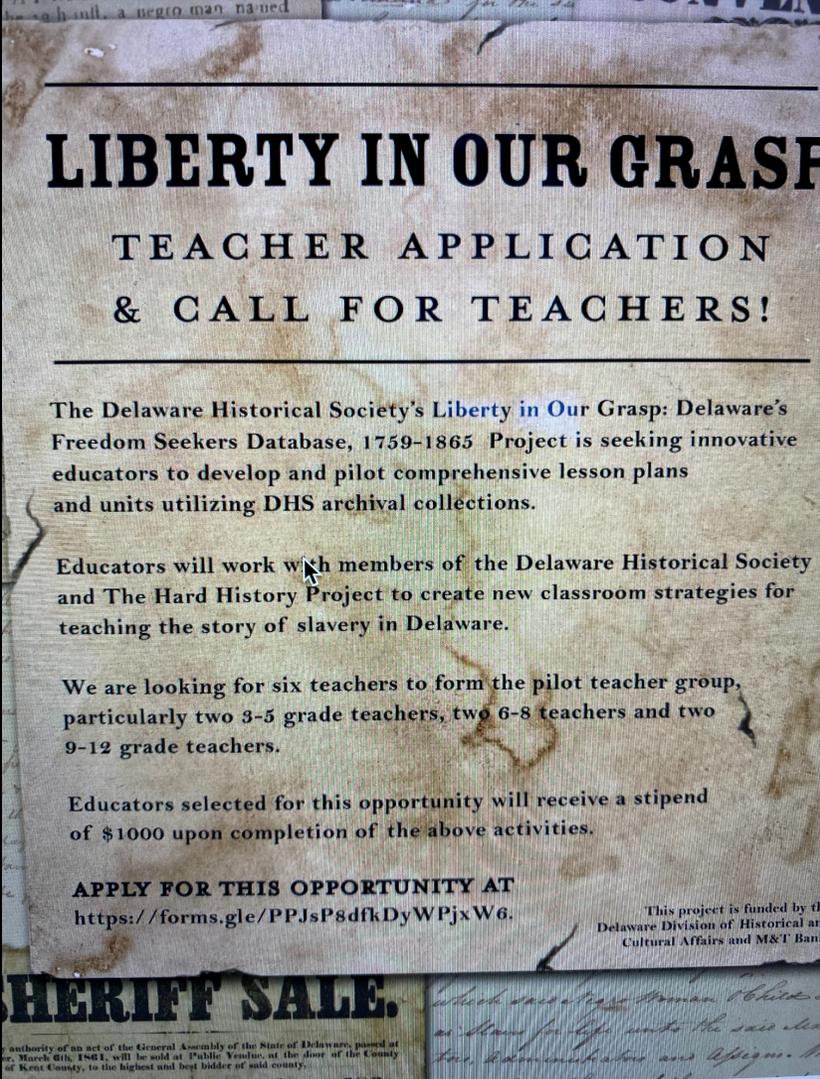
YOHURU WILLIAMS

AS traditionally told, the story of prominent Delaware socialite Caroline Elizabeth Cloak Peterson Speakman and her ancestral mansion Belmont Hall usually contains a glaring omission: the lynching of Jacob Hamilton. The celebratory story of early American founders and worthy ancestors neglects to mention the mob violence that ended the life of a free Black laborer in the first year of the Civil War. Hamilton’s murder foreshadows postwar violence against freed people, the false narratives used to justify such behavior, and the historical amnesia that often accompanies and obscures oppression. We have to come to terms with this history. We need to say his name: Jacob Hamilton. When Caroline Speakman passed away in October of 1922, she was still widely regarded as one of Smyrna, Delaware’s, most respected citizens. A fixture in local social circles, she could trace her lineage all the way back to the American Revolution. At the time of her death, she still resided in the family’s home, Belmont Hall, a local landmark near the town of Smyrna. “Perhaps no other building its size in the United States is more chock-full of historic lore, legends and antiques than Belmont Hall,” observed journalist D. Herbert Syfrit in 1955, adding that “the estate has been the home of three prominent families (all related) at different stages down through the years Cook, Collins, and Cloak-Speakman”¹ The home was located on a tract of land originally granted to Henry Pearman by William Penn in 1684 shortly after the latter acquired the Three Counties that became the state of Delaware. Built in 1773 by Thomas Collins, the sixth and last “President” to govern Delaware before the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, the 13-room, three-story structure, assembled with bricks imported from England, reportedly played a significant role during the Revolutionary War.

¹ “Belmont Hall at Smyrna Holds a Storied Past,” *Morning News* (Wilmington, DE), January 21, 1955, 3.

“Liberty in Our Grasp”

- Archival documents about Delaware slavery and agency from 1750s to 1865 at DHS.
- Developed with teachers in partnership with “Teaching Hard History” of the Southern Poverty Law Center.
- To bring educational resources to all teachers.



LIBERTY IN OUR GRASP

**TEACHER APPLICATION
& CALL FOR TEACHERS!**

The Delaware Historical Society's *Liberty in Our Grasp: Delaware's Freedom Seekers Database, 1759-1865* Project is seeking innovative educators to develop and pilot comprehensive lesson plans and units utilizing DHS archival collections.

Educators will work with members of the Delaware Historical Society and The Hard History Project to create new classroom strategies for teaching the story of slavery in Delaware.

We are looking for six teachers to form the pilot teacher group, particularly two 3-5 grade teachers, two 6-8 teachers and two 9-12 grade teachers.

Educators selected for this opportunity will receive a stipend of \$1000 upon completion of the above activities.

APPLY FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY AT
<https://forms.gle/PPJsP8dfkDyWPjxW6>.

This project is funded by the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs and M&T Bank.

SHERIFF SALE.

Authority of an act of the General Assembly of the State of Delaware, passed at ... March 8th 1861, will be sold at Public Vendue, at the door of the County of Kent County, to the highest and best bidder of said county.

which said ...
as shown for ...
has ...

Questions and Discussion

What Surprises You?

How should places like DHS and history museums tell it?

What are you willing to do to help?



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