

Rachel Stafford

- The first African American person to live in Greenfield
- She was born circa 1782 in Maryland
- She died May 21, 1858
- Rachel was an emancipated slave; owner was Samuel Gibson, KY

In “*All in the Same Spaceship*”, (Wayne L. Snider), the author writes this about Rachel:

2. RACHEL STAFFORD, OF GREENFIELD

THE first Negro person to live in Greenfield was one named Rachel as reported by Frank Raymond Harris in *A Greene Countrie Towne*.¹² The scarcity of information about her is supplemented by indirect sources that tell a revealing story. Her last name was not used by people who knew her, but it was discovered in the record of the United States Census of 1850, with her age reported as seventy years, and her birthplace as the State of Maryland.

Frank Harris reports an old ledger of the Douglas tannery which recorded the purchase of a pair of shoes for Rachel in 1848 by Dr. Samuel Crothers, pastor of the Greenfield Presbyterian Church. It was assumed that this was an act of charity.¹³ The U.S. Census record of 1850 again came to the rescue and reveals Rachel as a housekeeper in the Crothers home, and earlier Census records confirm the presence of a female colored person with the Crothers family.

There is a record in the Highland County Recorder's Office of the emancipation of a Negro slave named Rachel. A record was made in Bourbon County, Kentucky, in 1800, by Samuel Gibson, indicating his purpose to emancipate the eighteen year old Rachel when she became twenty-five years of age in 1807. A copy of this court record certified in February, 1806, was recorded in the Highland County Recorder's Office.¹⁴ The Daniel Scott *History of the Early Settlement of Highland County* tells of a Samuel Gibson who came from Kentucky to the Rocky Fork region of Highland County in 1803. The age given in the court record would make Rachel 68 years in 1850 corresponding to the 70 years reported in the U. S. Census.¹⁵

It may be only a coincidence but an interesting one that among the early Quaker settlers of Highland County were William and Rachel Stafford, who left North Carolina in 1804 and settled in the Fall Creek region¹⁶ near enough to have been friends of Samuel Gibson. Could it be that Rachel received the name of Stafford from them or other Staffords of the area and later went with the Crothers family?

Dr. Samuel Crothers came to Highland County from Kentucky and preached as an occasional supply for the Associate Reform Presbyterians on Fall Creek¹⁷ and then in Greenfield from 1810 to 1818. After returning to Kentucky he came back to Greenfield in 1820 and founded the First Presbyterian Church, continuing as its beloved pastor until his death in 1856.

Dr. Crothers gained a wide reputation as an abolitionist, especially by his writings. Historian Harris wrote of Dr. Crothers, "He had heard much in Kentucky to the effect slavery was just a patriarchal institution based on the authority of the Old Testament. He wrote several volumes and pamphlets disproving the contention that slavery has the full sanction of the Scripture."¹⁸

Rachel would take pride in the efforts of Dr. Crothers in behalf of the Negro people. She must have also had a special thrill in the coming of Frederick Douglass to Greenfield one of her own race working for the anti-slavery movement. It would add to the depth of her experience that Douglass was a runaway slave from her own native state of Maryland.¹⁹

Frederick Douglass had been taught as a slave by his mistress.^{19a} His treatment by his masters, including his father, was as cruel and unjust as that of his mistress was kind and generous, which caused him to escape to Massachusetts. He gained recognition in the anti-slavery movement in a convention in Massachusetts in 1841. As reported by John Hope Franklin in *From Slavery to Freedom* he "rapidly became one of the best known orators in the United States, lecturing in the North and East, and even in England."²⁰

Frank Raymond Harris tells that Douglass was on a speaking tour for the anti-slavery movement in 1844 when he was attacked by a mob in Pendleton, Indiana, and left unconscious. Quaker people nursed him back to health and helped him secretly out of town. He came to Greenfield where he stayed for a week with Dr. Milton Dunlap, a leading abolitionist. While in Greenfield he gave several addresses in the local churches promoting the cause of the abolitionists. Rachel would take further pride in both Frederick Douglass and the people of Greenfield as they gave him a farewell gift of a good riding horse and saddle.²¹

The coming of Douglass to Greenfield must have had a double influence in stimulating the anti-slavery movement and increasing the opposition. A year later the Greenfield Anti-slavery Society ceased to keep minutes due to southern sympathizers in the county, and the Underground Railroad became very active in Greenfield about this time.²²

If Rachel could have lived long enough she would have continued the thrill of the coming of Douglass to Greenfield by news of his effective speaking in England, where he had gone to escape capture; his prominence as editor of the *North Star* after his return; his recognition as a frequent advisor to President Lincoln; and his service as Minister to Haiti and other important positions.²³

12 Frank Raymond Harris, *A Greene Countrie Towne, 1799-1870* (Greenfield, Ohio: Greenfield Printing & Publishing Company, 1954), p. 137.

13 Ibid.

14 Highland County Recorder's Office, *Transcribed Deed Book 2*, p. 296. (See Chapter 17, "Slaves in Ohio." for a copy of the record.)

15 Scott, *A History of Highland County*, pp. 85-86.

16 Elsie Johnson Ayres, *Highland Pioneer Sketches and Family Geneologies* (Springfield, Ohio: H. K. Skinner and Sons, 1971), pp.318, 705.

17 Scott, *A History of Highland County*, p. 133.

18 Harris, *A Greene Countrie Towne*, pp. 135-6. *History of Ross and Highland Counties, Ohio*, pp.422-3.

19 Harris, *A Greene Countrie Towne*, pp. 135-6.

19a Saunders Redding, *They Came in Chains* (Philadelphia, New York: J.B. Lippincott, Copyright 1950 by Redding), p. 105.

20 Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, pp. 252-3.

21 Harris, *A Greene Countrie Towne*, pp. 135-6. Elsie Johnson Ayres, *Hills of Highland* (Springfield, Ohio: H. K. Skinner & Sons, 1971), pp. 472-3.

22 Harris, *A Greene Countrie Towne*, pp. 136-7. Ayres, *Hills of Highland* p. 469.

23 *The American Negro Reference Book*, edited by John P. Davis (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., copyright 1966), p. 427.

Gibson freed Rachel in 1807 when she became 25 years of age. Below is what was found in the Bourbon County, KY, court record filed in 1800. His purpose was to emancipate the 18-year old Rachel when she became 25-years of age in 1807.

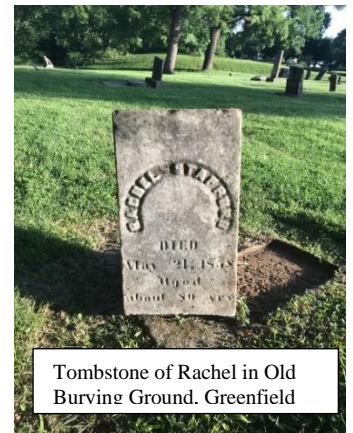
Owner	Freed Person	Book	Page	Slave A Page	Date Filed	Date Effective	Description/Remarks
Gibson, Saml	Rachel	C	136, 137		09/15/1800	1807	Age 18; To be freed at age 25 in the year of 1807

Female slave emancipated

Bourbon County, September Court, 1800
 ... Know all men by these presents, that I, Samuel Gibson of Bourbon County, and state of Kentucky, do hereby emancipate and set at liberty, a negro woman named Rachel, aged 18-years-old, at the age of 25, do liberate the said Rachel from her bound of slavery, as freely as if she had never been bound, in the year 1806, from that time henceforth...

Samuel Gibson
 Transcribed July 9, 1887
 H.S. Vance Rec Hi Co O

Article in Hillsborough Press Gazette, (from 175th Anniversary Edition of the newspaper, 1993.)



Tombstone of Rachel in Old Burving Ground. Greenfield

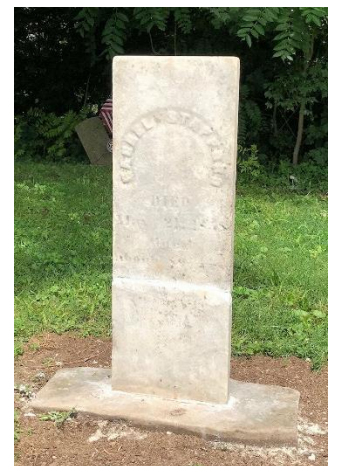
Rachel later became a housekeeper in the Dr. Samuel Crothers home and appears in the 1850 Census records (below) as a member of the Crothers household.

1760	Samuel Crothers	66 m	Glazierman O.A. Paul	2702	Pa
	Amanda D	48 F			Chur
	James G	19 m	Student		"
	Mary D	16 F			"
	Mrs Beaufe	8 m			"
	Nancy A Foster	24 F			"
	Rachel Stafford	70 F m			Mid

William Wright married a Rachel Stafford June 27, 1805; married by Sam'l Evans, J.P. (Not sure that this is the same Rachel but probably not.)

A reference has been found in Cemetery Inscriptions of Highland County (McBride) to a Stafford buried in Greenfield's Old Buring Ground:

STAFFORD
 Rachel d. May 21, 1858, a. about 80yrs.



making this person born circa 1778. That is the only Stafford listed for that cemetery.

A copy of the hand-written entry from the Hillsboro, OH, courthouse - Book A, page 187, of Samuel Gibson's Manumission of Slave is shown below:

187 Bourbon County September Court 1800 An instrument of writing under the hand and seal of Samuel Gibson nominating and setting at liberty a certain Negro Slave in his possession was produced in Court and acknowledged by the said Samuel Gibson and ordered to be recorded to wit

Know All men by these presents that I Samuel Gibson of Bourbon County and State of Kentucky do hereby emancipate and set free liberty a Negro woman named Rachel aged eighteen years old at the age of liberty five do liberate the said Rachel from her bond of Slavery as fully as if she had never been bound in the year eighteen hundred and seven from that time henceforth Given under my hand and seal this fifteenth day of September one thousand eight hundred

Samuel Gibson

Whereupon it is ordered that the said negro slave be set at liberty when she shall arrive at the age before mentioned.

State of Kentucky Sec.

I William Garrard Junr. Clerk of the County Court of Bourbon County in the State of aforesaid do certify the foregoing deed of emancipation from Samuel Gibson to Rachel a negro woman is a true Copy taken from the records in my office. In Testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal and affixed the seal of my office this 17th day of February in the year of our Lord 1806

Will. Garrard Junr.

State of Kentucky Sec.

I William Mitchell presiding Justice of the County Court for the County of Bourbon in the State of aforesaid do certify that William Garrard Junr. whose certificate is herewith annexed is clerk of the County Court for the County of aforesaid and that certificate of aforesaid is in due form. Given under my hand and seal this 17th day of February 1806

Will. Mitchell Seal

More information about Samuel Gibson at:

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/147255922/samuel-gibson>