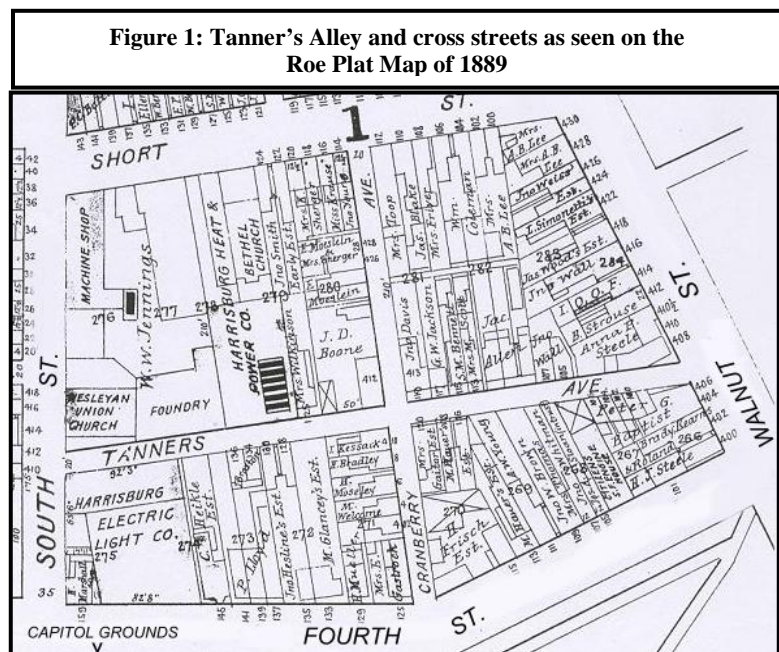


Residents of Tanners Alley in Harrisburg's Old Eighth Ward, 1839-1866

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Tanners Alley, also referred to as Tanners Avenue, was a historically African-American neighborhood that developed in the early 1800s before the district later known as the Old Eighth Ward was incorporated into the city of Harrisburg.¹ Harrisburg city directories reveal a dynamic cross section of Americans living on Tanners Alley between the years of 1839 and 1866.² Each year's directory included residents' names, occupations, and domiciles, and church and business locations. The early directories were made before houses were numbered, and locations were denoted by referencing cross streets or the cardinal points of the compass. Business advertisements, census information, religious institutions, and fraternal societies were also included in some volumes.

The overall length of Tanners Alley was one block of approximately 514 feet. Cranberry Avenue, another short alley, was the single dividing crossroad. Tanners was bordered by South Street to the north and Walnut Street to the south. Although



Tanners Alley was primarily residential, a variety of shops were located near its intersection with

¹ This paper has been edited and expanded by Stephanie Patterson Gilbert, webmaster of *Harrisburg's Old Eighth Ward* website, found at <http://www.old8thward.com>.

² Harrisburg city directories were accessed at the Historical Society of Dauphin County in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This study began with the first directory available, 1839, and continued until shortly after the Old Eighth Ward was incorporated into the city of Harrisburg. See Appendix A for a complete listing of Tanners Alley residents as listed in the Harrisburg city directories between 1839 and 1866.

Walnut Street. The 1889 Roe Plat Map of Harrisburg shows nineteen residences on Tanners Alley, and the Wesley Union AME Zion Church is shown on the corner of Tanners Alley and South Street (Figure 1).³ There were additional rear residences and unmarked structures visible on the map, and the Cooper Foundry, the Harrisburg Heat and Power Company, and the Harrisburg Electric Light Company all bordered Tanners Alley in 1889.⁴

Originally called Tanners Lane, this street was an ethnic potpourri of residents who practiced now-antiquated occupations that were thriving in the mid-1800s. Tanners Alley derived its name from the esteemed trade of the same name, and with such a name, it is not surprising that many tradesman had once called the avenue home. The alley contained a pastor, a sextant, a butcher, a huckster, a teacher, a cooper, an engineer, a moulder, a domestic, and uniquely, a hominy. The earliest reference to a business being located on Tanners Alley was in 1839. The first Boyd's edition cited a butcher, Hugh M'Donnell, at the corner of Tanners Lane and Cranberry Alley. In 1866, a blacksmith, a dry goods dealer, and three restaurateurs were referenced as having their business locations on Tanners.

Being a mostly African-American area, Tanners Alley seems to have been greatly affected by the national debate over slavery. As the conflict between North and South intensified, the northern city of Harrisburg become increasingly race conscious. The publishers of the 1860 city directory saw people as being in two distinct categories--colored or not. No other categorization or ethnicity appeared in the *Boyd's Harrisburg Directory* that year except "col'd" (colored). By either including the notation "col'd" beside individuals' names or not, the directory decidedly revealed race. Of the forty-three residents noted as living on the small, narrow alley that year, thirty are listed in the directory as being "colored." Although other parts of the Eighth Ward witnessed the movement of ethnic populations into and out of its homes,

³ Michael Barton and Jessica Dorman, eds., *Harrisburg's Old Eighth Ward*, (Charleston: Arcadia, 2002) 18.

⁴ Barton, 128, 107.

Tanners Alley remained a predominantly African-American community until the ward was demolished in the 1910s. Nevertheless, evidence of other ethnic peoples living on Tanners can be found. Even though using surnames to determine ethnicity can prove unreliable, they do reveal that a minority of residents living on Tanners Alley during the period of this study were most likely of Jewish, Irish, and German descent.

The religious orientation of the United States was towards Old Testament concepts in the early years of the nineteenth century. This is evident in the naming practices of the era, and the 1860 *Boyd's Harrisburg Directory* illustrates this. Eleanor Boon, a resident along Cranberry Alley at the corner of Tanners Alley, was noted as being the widow of Mordecai Boon in 1860. This Mordecai was most likely named for the biblical advisor to the King of Persia of the same name, who appears in the Old Testament book of Esther.

Tanners Alley appears to have been a pious section of the Eighth Ward. At the corner of South Street and Tanner's Alley was the Wesley Union African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. The Wesley Union church was founded in the late 1810s at another location in Harrisburg but was situated on Tanner's Alley in the 1839 city directory—the earliest volume available for study. Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison came to Harrisburg and addressed the congregation at the Wesley Union church before the Civil War, indicating that anti-slavery feelings were strong among Tanner's Alley residents, some of whom were escaped slaves.⁵ Some parishioners were undoubtedly involved with the Underground Railroad, while others intermarried with newly free slaves. Church member Harriet McClintock married escaped slave Elisha Marshall in the Wesley Union church in 1864.⁶

In fact, abolitionism flourished not just in the church, but among Tanners Alley residents as well. Two Tanner's Alley residents, Joseph Bustill and William Jones, have been linked

⁵ Pennsylvania Historical Marker located on Walnut Street near Fourth Street on the Pennsylvania State Capitol grounds. Inscription can be viewed on the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission website, located at <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us>.

⁶ Eric Ledell Smith, "The Underground Railroad in Dauphin County," *Susquehanna Heritage*, (2004), 11.

directly to the Underground Railroad. Their homes, located a block apart, harbored fugitive slaves.⁷ In 1860, Bustill was listed in the city directory as a colored teacher who lived on Cranberry Alley near Tanners Alley, but he was much more. Bustill was a freedom broker. He negotiated freedom for slaves using financial, legal, and as his involvement with the Underground Railroad reveals, extra-legal means.⁸ Through his correspondence, Bustill constructed an elaborate network of people and itineraries in order to secure freedom for the enslaved.⁹ Another Tanners resident, Dr. William Jones, belonged to Wesley Union church and also aided fugitive slaves through his participation in the Underground Railroad.

Tanners Alley residents' involvement with abolition impacted their community in unexpected ways. Underground Railroad stops were located in and around Tanners Alley, and it appears as if many fugitive slaves never ventured further north than Harrisburg. For example, the existence of the hominy trade in the alley in 1860 speaks to the cultural impact of the movement of southern slaves through the Eighth Ward. The 1860 *Boyd's Harrisburg Directory* notes that alley resident Jacob Miller was a hominy. Miller, listed as colored, was engaged in either the processing or sale of hominy at his Tanners Alley address. Hominy, probably of Algonquian origin, is hulled kernels of corn used to make grits.¹⁰ Grits are ground maize kernels with the germ removed, which are served boiled with water or milk.¹¹ The significance of this occupation being in Tanners Alley is that grits were then and remain now a staple of the American South, especially among African-Americans. That Jacob Miller could make a living selling grits in a northern city in 1860 suggests what census records after the Civil War show; although they were not free to disclose their birth states openly until after the war, a large population of southern blacks made their homes in the Eighth Ward by 1860. This simple job

⁷ PHMC Marker.

⁸ Smith, 11

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*, (Boston: Merriam-Webster, 1984), 578.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 538; and Judy Pearsall, ed., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, Tenth Revised Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 626.

description reveals how south-central Pennsylvania's culture was influenced by the movement of Southern blacks through its environs.

Tanners Alley was a thriving African-American neighborhood throughout the nineteenth century. Residents of the alley were mostly laborers and semi-skilled tradesmen, who supported abolition and participated in the Underground Railroad during the pre-Civil War years.

Although humble and poor, the alley's residents undoubtedly had a huge impact on the individual lives of the southern slaves they helped to free, many of whom found the lively neighborhood suitable for their new home.

| Appendix A: Residents of Tanner's Alley in Harrisburg's Old Eighth Ward, 1839-1867 | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|------|
| <i>Address</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Colored</i> | <i>Occupation</i> | <i>Years of Residence</i> | |
| ne c Walnut & Tanner's | Susan Stutzman | | Boarding House/Widow | 1843 | |
| Walnut c Tanner's | George Bashore | | Tailor/h: Walnut n 6 th | 1860 | |
| | R. Elscheid | | Tobacconist/b: same | 1866 | |
| | R. Lowenstein | | Dry Goods | 1866 | |
| c Walnut & Tanner's | Richard Langley | | Cooper | 1856 | |
| c Tanner's Alley | John Giles | C | Engineer | 1860 | |
| Tanner's n Walnut | John Barry | | Laborer | 1860 | 1866 |
| | Aaron Bennett | C | Moulder | 1860 | |
| | James Butler | C | Laborer | 1860 | |
| | Richard Carter | C | Laborer | 1860 | |
| | Elizabeth Galbreath | C | Widow of George | 1860 | |
| | Patrick Lloyd | | Laborer | 1860 | |
| | John Preston | C | Porter | 1860 | |
| | Richard Ramsay | C | Laborer | 1860 | |
| | Samuel Stanton | C | Porter Laborer | 1860 1866 | |
| | Mary H. Brown | | Widow | 1866 | |
| | John Ward | | Laborer | 1866 | |
| | Eliza Winerd | | Widow | 1866 | |
| Tanner's n Cranberry | Samuel Bennett | C | Waiter | 1860 | |
| | George Fry | C | Waiter | 1860 | |
| | Amelia Gaitor | C | Widow of John | 1860 | |
| | James Gaitor | C | Waiter | 1860 | |
| | John Gaitor | C | Waiter | 1860 | |
| | Richard Harkius | C | Sexton | 1860 | |
| | Mary Mars | C | | 1860 | |
| | Jacob Miller | C | Hominy/b: same | 1860 | |
| | John Preston | C | Porter | 1860 | |
| | Amelia Shaver | C | Widow of John | 1860 | |
| | James Thomas | C | Waiter | 1860 | |
| | Thomas Allen | | Laborer | 1866 | |
| | Aaron Bennett | | Moulder | 1866 | |
| | Samuel Bennett | | Waiter | 1866 | |
| | Benjamin Bolds | | Shoemaker | 1866 | |
| | Daniel Butler | | Laborer | 1866 | |
| | Savery Dickson | | Waiter | 1866 | |
| | Robert Duffin | | Laborer | 1866 | |
| | Catherine Goodman | | Widow | 1866 | |
| | David Jones | | Laborer | 1866 | |
| | Richard Jones | | Cartman | 1866 | |
| | Edith Mahaney | | Widow | 1866 | |
| | Jane Robinson | | Widow | 1866 | |
| | Isaac Rollins | | Laborer | 1866 | |
| | John S. Wilkinson | | Laborer | 1866 | |

| <i>Address</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Colored</i> | <i>Occupation</i> | <i>Years of Residence</i> | |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------|
| c Tanner's & Cranberry | Hugh M'Donnell | | Butcher/b: same | 1839 | 1842 |
| | William Bostwick | | | 1839 | |
| | William Bostwick, Jr. | | | 1839 | |
| | Michael Newman | | Constable | 1856 | |
| | Samuel Welsh | C | Barber | 1860 | |
| | George Bell | | Laborer | 1866 | |
| | Tamsy Fitzgerald | | Widow | 1866 | |
| | Mark Gater | | Waiter | 1866 | |
| | J.R. Smith | | Barber | 1866 | |
| | Otho. Taylor | | Waiter | 1866 | |
| | T. Williams | | Laborer | 1866 | |
| r Tanner's & Cranberry | Nancy Christy | | Widow | 1866 | |
| | Henry Dickey | | Moulder | 1866 | |
| | R. Hopkins | | Widow | 1866 | |
| | Charles Porter | | | 1866 | |
| Cranberry n Tanner's | Sophia Brown | C | Cook/Widow | 1860 | |
| | Joseph C. Bustill | C | Teacher | 1860 | |
| | Cecilia Rogers | | Widow of Patrick | 1860 | |
| | John Wolf | C | Teacher | 1860 | |
| | John Myers | | Laborer | 1866 | |
| c Cranberry & Tanner's | G. Boon | | Blacksmith/b: same | 1856 | 1866 |
| | Adam Miller | | Stage Driver | 1856 | |
| Cranberry c Tanner's | Eleanor Boon | | Widow of Mordecai | 1860 | |
| | Edward B. Lytle | | Plasterer | 1860 | |
| | John A. Lytle | | Plasterer | 1860 | |
| | Adam Miller | | Driver | 1860 | |
| Tanner's Lane | Michael Beneider | | | 1839 | |
| Tanner's Alley | Richard Allen | C | Laborer | 1860 | |
| | John Davis | C | Teamster Laborer | 1860 1866 | |
| Tanner's b Walnut & State | John Basore | | Butcher | 1842 | |
| | Benjamin Buffington | | | 1842 | |
| Tanner's b High & Short | M.D.J. Davis | | | 1839 | |
| Tanner's b High & Short | Wesley Union Church | C | Church | 1839 | 1866 |
| Tanner's n South | Anthony Boon | C | Laborer | 1860 | |
| | John Dwyer | | Plumber | 1860 | |
| | Nicholas Moore | | Laborer | 1860 | |
| | Sarah Priuce | C | Domestic | 1860 | |
| | William Ader | | Porter | 1866 | |
| | George Fry | | Restaurant/b: same | 1866 | |
| | Matthew Holland | | Porter | 1866 | |
| | John O'Donald | | Restaurant/b: same | 1866 | |
| | Frank Stevens | | | 1866 | |
| South c Tanner's | Harim Watkins | C | Teamster | 1860 | |
| | W.M. Ridgeway | | Pastor/Wesley AME | 1866 | |
| Tanner's n W. State | Edward Fry | C | Barber @ US Hotel | 1860 | |
| | Elizabeth Griffith | | Widow | 1866 | |
| b=between c=corner n=near r=rear b:=business h:=home | | | | | |

| Appendix B: Business, Churches, and Residences of Tanners Alley According to the 1889 Roe Plat Map of Harrisburg | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Address</i> | <i>Owner's Name</i> |
| 100 Tanners 102 Tanners 104 Tanners 106 Tanners | Peter |
| 105 Tanners 107 Tanners | Jonathon Wall |
| 113 Tanners | Mrs. M. Scott |
| 115 Tanners | S.M. Bennett |
| 116 Tanners 118 Tanners | M. Hauer's Establishment |
| 117 Tanners | G.W. Jackson |
| 119 Tanners | Jonathon Davis |
| 120 Tanners | Mrs. Gaitor's Establishment |
| 125 Tanners | Mrs. Wilkinson |
| 127-131 Tanners | Harrisburg Heat and Power Company |
| 134 Tanners 136 Tanners | J. Broaton |
| 133-141 Tanners | Foundry |