

## **SLAVERY, HISTORY, MEMORY AND RECONCILIATION PROJECT**

### **STATUS REPORT**

*“The process of healing also needs to include the pursuit of truth, not for the sake of opening old wounds, but rather as a necessary means of promoting justice, healing and unity.”*

*~ Pope Francis*

The Jesuits USA Central and Southern (UCS) Province shares in the history of Jesuit slaveholding in the United States, as our early missions, directly or indirectly, relied upon the forced labor of enslaved people.

We deeply regret Jesuits’ participation in this evil institution. No one today can reconcile these actions with the current teaching of the Church or with our commitments as Jesuits, but they are an undeniable part of our history. This present moment of heightened awareness calls us to a more intentional response, one made in collaboration with those in our communities who continue to suffer from the consequences of slavery.

With deep remorse, we acknowledge our forebears’ contribution to the enduring wounds of slavery. As Jesuits, we commit ourselves to advocacy and outreach to the poor and marginalized, and to those who bear the burden of racism. We will continue to work with our communities to address this injustice and strive toward a future of peace and right relationships.

### **OUR COMMITMENT TO LEARNING MORE**

The Jesuits USA Central and Southern Province has committed financial resources and personnel to researching the history of Jesuit slaveholding in what is now the UCS Province. Jesuits have always maintained careful records; we are studying those historical documents now to learn more about the untold stories of the men and women who were enslaved. We are collaborating with institutions in Alabama, Louisiana and Missouri, the states where Jesuits held people in slavery, to learn the full truth of our history related to slavery, with an emphasis on the lives of the enslaved people.

Through the sharing of leadership, personnel and resources, the UCS Province has collaborated with Saint Louis University to make progress on this important research. David Miros, Ph.D., director of the Jesuit Archives & Research Center, and Jonathan Smith, Ph.D., vice president for diversity and community engagement at Saint Louis University, serve as co-directors of the Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation Project. Kelly Schmidt, a Ph.D. candidate at Loyola University Chicago, is lead researcher.

Beginning in the fall of 2016, the Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation Project has conducted research with two distinct but complementary emphases. The first was a study of the

number and names of the enslaved, the second a report on the experience of the enslaved people, their treatment and conditions. The team focused its initial research on the collections at the Jesuit Archives and the Saint Louis University Archives, as well as sacramental records at St. Louis parishes. From this, they have expanded what is known about the people held in slavery by Jesuits in what were first known as the Missouri and New Orleans Missions.

Researchers are now attempting to trace family lineages to the present, using sacramental records, census reports and property tax records, among other official documents and online resources. The going is slow, as early census surveys were not as scrupulous as today's, at times resulting in inaccurate dates and inconsistent spellings, requiring all findings to be checked against other sources.

As its name suggests, the USA Central and Southern Province comprises southern states as well as Missouri, including Alabama and Louisiana, where Jesuits also owned, rented or borrowed enslaved people. Only limited research has been done on Jesuit participation in slavery in that region of the country, hampered by a lack of extant records. The research team will revisit Jesuit records from the South as the research continues to progress.

We move forward with this research with a spirit of humility, in the hope of bringing the full truth of this history to light.

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

A story is beginning to emerge about the people who were held by the Jesuits. Indeed, there are many stories, as it is now known that in a span of just over 40 years, Jesuits owned, rented or borrowed at least 150 people. Some names are known, but not all, and so this research will continue. Discovering the identities of those who were enslaved is a priority for the research, to allow descendants to learn their family history.

Our researchers approach this study with a profound respect for the people whose stories they hope to tell, along with academic expertise. Using historical documents, they painstakingly create timelines, family trees and theories, all of which are subject to reevaluation as additional information is gathered. This report is a snapshot of our understanding at the time of its publication.

When Jesuits first traveled to Missouri from Maryland in 1823, they brought with them six enslaved men and women – three couples. Their names were Isaac and Susan (or Susanna, but called Sucky) Queen (alternatively Hawkins), Tom and Mary (often referred to as Polly or Molly) Brown, and Moses and Nancy Queen (alternatively Hawkins). In coming to Missouri, all three couples were separated from family and friends; Moses and Nancy were forced to leave behind their children.

It bears mentioning that the enslaved people who were taken from the White Marsh Plantation in Maryland to Missouri were related to the 272 people who would be sold in 1838 by the Maryland Jesuits. Those individuals were sold to non-Jesuit plantation owners in Louisiana and are not the same people who were held in bondage by Jesuits in that state. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jesuits in Louisiana were missionaries from Lyon, France, and operated under different governance from the Maryland and Missouri Jesuits.

Over time, the number of people held in slavery by Jesuits grew through the birth of children, and through “gifts” and purchases. At least one enslaved person was used as a form of payment for tuition.

Through their forced labor at the Saint Stanislaus Novitiate in Florissant, Missouri, enslaved people helped the Jesuit mission take root in Missouri and beyond. Enslaved people worked for, and often alongside, Jesuits to develop the property and cultivate the land. They cooked, worked in the fields, cleaned laundry and drove wagons. They also worked at night or on Sundays to earn an income for themselves.

The Jesuits kept careful calculations of work hours for the enslaved, as well as records of their rules about work, clothing, food and living accommodations. These accounts document punishments for disobeying these regulations, as well as rewards for extra labor performed. The Jesuits provided new clothing for the sacrament of First Communion and extra food on religious feast days.

When the Jesuits began to operate Saint Louis College (now Saint Louis University) in 1829, they transferred several enslaved people from Saint Stanislaus Novitiate to the college in St. Louis. As the Missouri Mission grew, a small number of enslaved people served the Jesuits at missionary outposts in St. Charles and Portage des Sioux, Missouri, and Sugar Creek, Kansas.

By 1831, there were at least 26 people held in slavery by the Jesuits; the majority, at least 20, labored on the Jesuits’ farm in Florissant.

Jesuits also made use of forced labor when they assumed responsibility for Saint Joseph’s College in Bardstown, Kentucky. Many of the enslaved at Bardstown were lent, donated or rented to the Jesuits. A few people were transferred from Saint Stanislaus Novitiate to Saint Joseph’s College. At least one man (known as “Big Peter” and also as Peter Queen, though he was not a member of the Queen family) was forcibly separated from his family in Missouri when he was taken to Kentucky and later sold. Enslaved laborers circulated between Florissant, St. Louis and Bardstown.

Enslaved people were baptized into the Catholic Church and were active members of St. Ferdinand’s Parish in Florissant or, later, St. Francis Xavier Church in downtown St. Louis. But they were not free and were treated like property. Their living conditions, especially in the first 10

years of the mission, were crowded and exposed them to extreme weather conditions. They received physical punishments, including whipping. Jesuits were prohibited by their own policies from whipping their laborers, but at least one priest, Charles Van Quickenborne, was reported to have whipped some of the enslaved people. There is also a recorded incident in which Van Quickenborne sold enslaved people as a form of punishment, including separating a child, “Little Peter,” from his parents, Isaac and Susan Queen, two of the original six brought to Missouri from Maryland.

The Jesuits, the local bishop and other religious orders often lent or hired out their enslaved laborers to one another or to other slaveholders, much like they might have lent or borrowed a piece of equipment.

In a telling journal entry, Felix Verreydt, a Jesuit who served as a minister to the enslaved people of St. Stanislaus, wrote, “we heard sometimes their earnest desire to be free in a free country, it was difficult not to say almost impossible to convince them of their happiness.” Father Verreydt may have believed them to be happy, but it’s clear the enslaved people had the same “earnest desire to be free” that all people have by nature. The findings of the past year reveal instances of enslaved laborers escaping their bondage, either by running away or by purchasing their freedom and that of their family members.

Matilda Tyler was an enslaved woman who succeeded in purchasing her own freedom and that of her sons. Her story is available in an accompanying document, just one example of the kind of narrative the Jesuits today hope to tell through the Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation Project.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

*History, despite its wrenching pain,  
Cannot be unlived, and if faced with courage,  
Need not be lived again.*

~ Maya Angelou, *On the Pulse of Morning*

The research will continue. More importantly, we Jesuits will search for ways to address the vestiges of slavery that exist in our nation today in the form of racism and inequality. The Jesuits of this province will seek new ways to be in relationship with African Americans, to work together to address the social injustices in our communities that are rooted in slavery.

We are motivated by a desire to uncover the truth of people’s stories, to honor their memories and heal relationships, but we acknowledge there is no clear path for us to follow. We hope this project will be a positive contribution to the national conversations on race, prejudice and social justice. It

must begin with our own conversations with descendants of the people held in slavery by our predecessors. We hope it will eventually include other members of our communities.

Enslaved people were disregarded and unheard. We will listen to their descendants. We want to learn from them how slavery shaped their families and continues to touch their lives today. We desire to bear witness to their pain and their courage and their steadfastness. We want to help them tell their stories.

No one knows where these conversations may lead us. As successors of those who held others in slavery, this process will challenge us, but it is a necessary first step to effect change, to create a new way of being together. We look forward to beginning the journey with our brothers and sisters in God's family.

The descendants of the men and women held in slavery by Jesuits deserve to know the stories of their ancestors. We pledge to make that information available as quickly as we can in ways accessible to descendants.

## **INVITATION**

While Jesuits and our colleagues are doing the research, this is not only a Jesuit story. The documents, diaries and records combine to tell the stories of individuals who lived and labored, worshipped and created, celebrated and mourned. Many had families and probably have descendants still living in our communities. They are part of the story, too.

This kind of past wrong cannot be undone. But our work today can serve as a starting point for a new future, one of solidarity and a commitment to journeying together.

We invite descendants, community members and scholars to join us in this important research. The breadth and depth of knowledge that families cultivate in their personal and oral histories can help to fill in the details of this story.

We welcome, too, the wisdom of the descendants and other members of the community who will work with us to chart a course forward, "so we can make of this old world a new world." (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

*To find out how you can contribute to this knowledge base or trace your ancestors, email [HistoryResearch@Jesuits.org](mailto:HistoryResearch@Jesuits.org) or call 314-376-2440. Visit [JesuitsCentralSouthern.org/HistoryResearch](http://JesuitsCentralSouthern.org/HistoryResearch).*