

## The Hills in 1860

Give my love to all and kiss them all for me, especially to Mother Weeks, Give my love to the old man Weeks, Mother Tierce, the old man Tierce, and all enquiring friends . . .

In his letter dated 11 March 1864, Sgt. Simeon Anderson Tierce, Company E, Fourteenth Rhode Island Regiment Colored Heavy Artillery, stationed at the Mississippi River forts outside New Orleans, asked his wife Sarah Jane to share these greetings with his family, friends, and neighbors in The Hills, the largest African American community in Westchester County, New York.<sup>1</sup> Simeon was one of the thirty-six black men associated with The Hills who served in three black regiments and the Navy in the Civil War. They grounded their military experiences in their kinship and community ties to The Hills, buffering the brutal indifference of boredom and battle, the ravages of illness and wounds, the deprivations of unequal pay, and the hostility of some commissioned officers and white troops. The Hills was the starting point for their odyssey as their family, friends, and neighbors sent them forth to enact in flesh and blood the Freedom Journey that they had long been living through prayer and supplication. Senior members of the community, like “Mother Weeks . . . the old man Weeks, Mother Tierce and the old man Tierce,” had been on the journey since their birth in the years of entrenched slavery and many had achieved their freedom through the religious impulse of their former masters or New York state’s gradual emancipation acts. Surely, all had heard the stories of slavery and freedom engrained in The Hills community history, that is, episodes in the collective memory of the Freedom Journey.

In the early 1860s, The Hills was at its peak as a northern, black community, situated not in a city, but stretching across the rugged terrain where the Westchester County towns of Harrison, North Castle, and White Plains meet. These small towns still based their economies on farming, but also had financial, social, and political ties—and railroad tracks—to Manhattan about twenty to thirty miles away. On their margins was the rocky, wooded land of The Hills, with its small clearings for homes and small family farms; its dirt roads and paths unimproved by the towns. However, over the generations, its

very ruggedness became an asset, protecting the black community from outsiders, including land speculators. What were the community's origins in the late 1700s? What were its social and economic characteristics in 1860, and did the public recognize The Hills as a black community?

"Thirty years ago there was a settlement of two or three hundred colored people in the northwest corner of the town of Harrison about two miles from this village [White Plains]. Nearly all were born and raised there." In July 1897, in writing about The Hills as it was in the 1860s, the *Westchester News* reporter confirmed the local perception of its size, approximate location, and population origins. Although an analysis of the 1860 federal census shows the population to only be around 190 residents, this newspaper account draws attention to the substantial size of the community at its peak.<sup>2</sup> The Hills had its own school, church, and cemetery. It based its stability on property ownership, male-headed nuclear and extended families, gender balance, and links, especially through its church, to New York City and New Haven, Connecticut. In 1860, the original and long-time family surnames appeared one right after another on the census, names like Tierce, Barker, Seymour, Halstead, Brown, Mitchell, Griffin, and Purdy—all surnames appearing among the thirty-six enlisted men.

From the origins of The Hills in the 1790s through its growth in the 1830s and 1840s, to its vibrant years in the 1860s, the African American family was the dominant, stable social unit for the community and many of the families were related. The system of kinship in The Hills cannot readily be separated from the concept and reality of community.<sup>3</sup> In the fluid and fragile environment of the first half of the nineteenth century, African Americans rarely had the luxury of limiting kinship to the nuclear family. They needed the extended family, fictive or biological, and the black community. Endangered by racial violence, made specific in the anti-abolition riots in New York City in 1834 and the threat of kidnapping for shipment South, they always needed to live on guard. Targeted nationally by institutionalized racism in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, they lived under the bitter heel of the law. Blacks were also severely constrained socially and economically by racial prejudices, made visible in segregation in transportation, education, and employment, especially in the skilled trades. Politically, black men were barely viable as voters given the New York State requirement of \$250 property value as eligibility to vote. With all these threats and constraints, the family unit needed the buffer of community, church, and mutual aid associations to survive. And the very first motive in settling on this rugged land was establishing or re-establishing families in freedom away from supervision and harassment of white society; then came the church and school to support the families.

In the late 1700s, The Hills began as a settlement for blacks freed by religious dictates of their masters, especially by members of the Society of Friends, the Quakers in the Purchase (Harrison) Meeting, and local Methodists, and further aided by the state's gradual emancipation acts. The settlement slowly coalesced as a community as other freed blacks joined in a pattern of chain migration and family reunification that culminated in the mid-nineteenth

century. The majority of residents settled along Stony Hill Road on the Lake Street, Harrison side of The Hills. The standard explanation for the origins of The Hills was the account in the section on Harrison in J. Thomas Scharf's *History of Westchester County, New York*, published in 1886, and reprinted in Alvah P. French's *History of Westchester County of New York*, published in 1925: "When the Quakers of Purchase liberated their slaves, they settled them upon their rough lands in the northwestern portion of the town of Harrison, and thus the negro community, still existing northeast of the village of White Plains, was begun."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, in 1767 prompted by the Oblong Society of Friends Meeting in Dutchess County, the Quarterly Meeting of the Purchase Society of Friends in Harrison acknowledged the moral incompatibility of Friends owning slaves: "If it is not consistent with Christianity to buy and sell our fellow men for slaves, during their lives and their posterity after them, then wherefore is it consistent with Christian spirit to keep those in slavery that we already have in our possession, by purchase, gift or other ways." The issue of slavery remained prominent in the Society's business until the 1780s, when all blacks enslaved by Purchase Meeting Friends had been freed and resettled. The Purchase minutes of 1784 record that "proper settlements had been made between the Friends who had set their negroes free and the negroes so set free."<sup>5</sup> However, the details of the "proper settlements" are not clear, whether Quakers granted land outright to the freed blacks, or whether the freed men and women merely settled on their former masters' lands, with the options of purchasing these rough lands when they had acquired the funds. An 1837 indenture suggests that "settled" did not mean that former masters uniformly granted freehold property to the freed blacks. In this indenture, Jeremiah Mitchell, a founding member of The Hills community, was identified as "Coloured Man" [*sic*] who purchased four and a half acres "in a place commonly [called] the 'Hills.'" The "lot of land . . . occupied by Mitchell" was purchased from Thomas H. and Elizabeth Burling of New Rochelle, a family name associated with the Society of Friends. The deed describes the land's borders, naming those who owned or occupied the surrounding acreage, including several black men, for example, "[The land] is bounded and described as follows, viz: . . . land of David Halstead possessed by Charles Halsted (so called)."<sup>6</sup> This strongly suggests that David Halstead, a white man, owned the land on which Charles Halstead was living. This indenture and others from that period for parcels of land in this area call into doubt the generous overtones of the pious history of The Hills, specifically, "When the Quakers of Purchase liberated their slaves, they settled them upon their rough lands . . ." Although the documents of this early period illustrate the problems in concretely defining the terms of the settlement process, nevertheless, it was well under way.

Although Quaker-associated surnames are found among Hills residents, others bear surnames originating with local, white, non-Quaker families. Contemporary to the Quakers' efforts, the Methodists were active in manumitting their enslaved blacks, influenced by Bishop Francis Asbury who regularly visited

these towns on his circuit, preaching that “people should not be in bondage, nor should men hold other men in bondage.” In 1784, the Methodist-Episcopal Conference insisted on “full and entire emancipation of every slave in the possession of the members of the Church.”<sup>77</sup> Besides manumitting the enslaved blacks, the White Plains and North Castle Methodists were also instrumental in assisting residents of The Hills in organizing their church, although ultimately The Hills community empowered itself and exercised its own agency in establishing its independent congregation. The solidification of the community in the 1830s was also due in large part to chain migration and reunification of families resulting from the official end of slavery in New York State on July 4, 1827. Liberated, reunited, feeding their families by their labor on their own soil, members of the black community turned to their most immediate need, a church to feed their souls.

Church history is community history for African Americans, and the black community has at its very heart the black church. In the nineteenth century, the church was the central institution for black communities in slavery and in freedom. In fact, the church was so intimately linked with all the goals and movements of the African American people that church and community were practically one and the same. Black leader and scholar Martin R. Delany wrote to Frederick Douglass in 1849, “The Church is the Alpha and Omega of all things.” Before public records officially documented the establishment of a church in The Hills, personal testimony provides a sense of early religious practice among the families. Jane Halstead Seymore (var. Seymour) explained that at the time of her marriage, circa 1837, “We did not have a regular church building then, and had services around among each other’s houses.” Later, at the time of her son’s birth and baptism, circa 1839, she recalled, “We [had] a new minister every year.”<sup>78</sup> This should not be construed as lack of support by the community for their ministers, as it was the policy of AME and AME Zion churches—denominations that served The Hills people—to regularly rotate their ministers’ assignments.

On May 1, 1844, five black men, all residents of the North Castle section of The Hills, acting as trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Colored People of the Town of Harrison, signed a mortgage with Charles A. Purdy, a white resident of Harrison. Previously, Frederick and Deborah Stephens, white residents of North Castle, had deeded approximately one-fourth of an acre to The Hills community for use as a church or meeting house lot. The money borrowed in this mortgage may have been used to finance building a modest church on the property. Mount Hope AME Zion Church of White Plains, the congregation that traces its history directly to the church in The Hills, reported that additional land was purchased in the 1850s and the trustees at that time included Henry Seamore [Seymore] and William Henry Baker [Barker].<sup>79</sup>

In his correspondence, Sgt. Simeon Anderson Tierce referred to his position at home as “church assistant secretary.” He also favorably recalled the preaching of the Reverend Silas A. Mitchell, the son of Jeremiah and Hester Mitchell who was raised in The Hills. Mitchell was living in lower Harrison in

1860, serving as the preacher at the Second Colored American Congregational Church in Rye Neck, a section of Rye, the town adjacent to lower Harrison. Reverend Mitchell was associated with the Reverend Levin Tilmon (1807–1863), a black abolitionist minister and pastor of the First Colored American Congregational Church of New York City. Tilmon was also the president of the First Colored American Congregational Grove Company of New York City, which operated a grove in “Barry’s Woods” in Rye Neck. At the 1854 organizing meetings for the Rye Neck church and grove company, members of The Hills community participated, including Jeremiah Mitchell who served as one of the directors of the grove association. The grove was a parcel of land set up for summer gatherings, similar to camp meetings but usually of short duration, that is, one-day events. In *The History of the Negro Church*, Carter G. Woodson describes camp meetings as “social as well as religious” and explains that they “sometimes partook of a festive nature.” The grove in Rye Neck attracted blacks from the surrounding area and New York City, who traveled there on the New Haven Railroad. In June 1860, Tilmon advertised the attractions of the Congregational Grove in the *Anglo-African*: “It is easy of access, beautifully located, and well adapted for excursion, grove and camp meetings. The improvements consist of wood shanties, a well of never-failing water, a small dwelling house, etc.” He further wrote, “This grove deserves the patronage of the colored people of the city and county of New York, who are accustomed to celebrate the first of August and hold picnics, Sabbath-school excursions, and camp and grove meetings, and is every way adapted for the same.” African Americans celebrated the First of August, the date in 1833 when Britain abolished slavery in its West Indies colonies, and this grove would provide a countryside setting for the festivities. In his correspondence, Simeon references revival-style gatherings at the grove at Rye Neck attended by him and his comrade Jacob Smith, likening them to the “class meeting” he and the others attend at their post in Louisiana.<sup>10</sup>

Families from The Hills had instituted their own church, had benefited from the ministry of the Reverend Mitchell in The Hills and at Rye Neck, possibly attending his preaching in Reverend Tilmon’s church in New York City, and through these experiences were connected to black abolitionist preaching. In 1864, Reverend Mitchell moved to New Haven, Connecticut, where he served as pastor of that city’s AME Zion Church and as the agent for the *Anglo-African*, New York City’s prominent black newspaper, an aggressive voice for abolition and rights. Any reference to blacks in New Haven, a center of black activism in religion, education, and abolition, must include mention of the Reverend Amos G. Beman, the peripatetic, African American, Congregational minister who was always headquartered there, no matter where his work took him.<sup>11</sup> Through this network with strong strands in New York City, Rye Neck, and New Haven, The Hills was already on its Freedom Journey and well acquainted with the forces at work in the black abolitionist movement, dispelling the sense of a socially isolated community tucked away in the hills of Westchester.

Among the thirty-six men associated with The Hills who served in the Civil War, six received promotion as noncommissioned officers, in part reflecting their education. Among those six, the Barker brothers and Simeon Tierce, and, most likely, William Henry Purdy, gained their education in the school in The Hills, sitting on wooden benches next to boys who would be their comrades in arms. Concerning his friendship with Simeon's brother Solomon Tierce, Thomas Lea Brown of the Twenty-ninth Connecticut explained, "We were school boys together." Also, Simeon's wonderfully articulate letters are testimony to both his intelligence and his schooling. Their schoolhouse was The Hills church building, as described in the 1886 *History of Westchester County*: "A small frame building was erected in the northwestern part of the town of Harrison, just over the line of North Castle, which was used by the colored people as a schoolhouse and chapel." The school was officially instituted on March 4, 1843, when the school district trustees authorized the "formation of a new school district partly out of the towns of White Plains, Harrison and North Castle for Colored Children," conforming to the boundaries that constituted The Hills. The circumstances surrounding this "colored school" are complex and open to differing interpretations. Children from The Hills had been attending school with local white children as indicated in the extant documents for the 1838, 1839, and 1842 school years. On May 26, 1841, the New York State Legislature enacted a statute providing that "[a] school for colored children may be established in any city or town of this state. . . ." Two years passed before the commissioners of common schools established the separate school for Hills children. The "School Report for 1845" describes the operation of the Colored School, District Number 6, and is dated January 1, 1846, almost three years after its establishment. The district trustees reported that the school had been kept by a qualified teacher for ten months of the preceding year. Was the segregated school imposed upon the black community? Or, inspired by the calls for community control by the era's Negro Conventions, did the black parents take advantage of this 1841 state law permitting segregated schooling? Historian Carleton Mabee acknowledged that black parents sometimes petitioned for segregated public schools, hoping to improve their children's education or provide a more encouraging classroom experience, free from prejudice.<sup>12</sup>

In 1845, forty children attended from the three adjoining sections of The Hills: twenty-three children from Harrison; fourteen from North Castle; and three from White Plains. Among the twenty-two family surnames listed on 1845 school register, eleven family names appear among the thirty-seven recruits: Thomas, Odell, Barker, Halsted, Griffin, Tierce, Gilchrist, Butler, Johnson, Mitchell, and Seymour. Some families of recruits had not yet arrived in The Hills and not all families could afford to send their children to school. Until 1849, the common school system was not free education, and parents were charged for the number of days their children attended, creating a disadvantage for poor families unless they declared themselves to be paupers.<sup>13</sup> Investing even a small portion of their very limited funds in their children's education

represents the importance of education among the Hills families. Whatever beliefs motivated its creation as a segregated institution, the “colored school” further enhanced the sense of community in The Hills.

How were young men from The Hills able to apply their community school education in the wider world? With difficulty—given the racial prejudice in white society, the barriers to practicing skilled trades, and competition from recent Irish immigrants. Regardless of age, every adult resident of The Hills experienced economic constraints imposed by race. In fact, this was the common struggle of all blacks, as explained by the black intellectual and militant leader W.E.B. Du Bois: “the question of economic survival [was] the most pressing of all questions’ for nineteenth-century American blacks.” Being part of the Hills community did provide some margin of security, with land to farm for their own sustenance and surplus for market, with the sharing of resources, and being surrounded by white farmers who knew these black men and women as neighbors. Hills blacks worked for the prosperous Quaker farmers in Purchase and on the large estates in the areas; young men in particular worked as farm laborers. From the Civil War veterans’, widows’, and dependents’ pension depositions, details of prewar labor emerge. For example, elderly Harvey Seymore described how he was able to supplement his income by farming his land: “I own this property, which has about one acre of ground . . . I raise some vegetables etc. on my patch of ground, which keeps us. I also raise potatoes and cabbage and turnips etc. for winter use. Also some apples. This along with occasionally a few dollars I earn, and my son’s help, is the way in which we have lived for years.” Distinctions were made between day and long-term laborers. Being employed by the month was preferable, more secure than day labor. Harvey Seymore proudly testified that his deceased son, William Henry Seymore, veteran of the Fourteenth Rhode Island Regiment, had “always worked by the month, and never worked day’s work at farming. He always was engaged by the month as a farmer.” Moses F. Fowler, a white farmer living near The Hills, verified this, explaining: “[I] used to engage the son generally by the month [and] he was paid by the month for his labor. . . . That the amount paid him per month was about sixteen dollars. It was not less than twelve dollars per month and board.”<sup>14</sup>

In reviewing the 1860 census for Westchester County towns, “laborer” was the occupation most frequently cited for black men; however, too often, the census enumerators simply used this common term, although the “labor” may have been more specific and skilled. Other occupations employing black men included: white washer, boatman, waiter, gardener, hackman, teamster, and drover. A few blacks operated boarding houses and livery stables. Also listed were more skilled trades, although such skills were exceptional: machinist, shirt maker, butcher, barber, carman, sailor, blacksmith, and carpenter. For The Hills population, census records list masons and stone-cutters as a common occupation for Hills men. Given the rocky terrain and stone quarries in the area and use of stones for walls, opportunity existed for this heavy labor. Shoemaking was a major cottage industry in Westchester County in the 1850s and 1860s,

the predominate industry in North Castle and West Harrison. However, in an analysis of eleven census manuscripts, only three black men were listed as shoemakers. More black men may have unofficially practiced this occupation and other officially closed trades. In her claim for a pension, Tierce's widow Sarah Jane described her deceased husband's occupations: "By trade he was a carpenter but followed and worked at farming or as a laborer when he could not get work at his trade. . . . Also before his enlistment [he] used to do some work in dull times at shoemaking. Anything in fact that he could earn an honest penny."<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, the other black men in the community would have worked at whatever employment was available, but most likely they were more skilled and more experienced than the common term "laborer" implied. Black women's work is less visible in the census record for this period, but later accounts confirm that they worked as domestics for white families and as laundresses and took in boarders to contribute to the family income.

Property ownership was a major factor in the attractiveness and stability of The Hills community. The opportunity to own land was tied to family security, even manhood, that is, as the male head of the household providing for his family by owning their land. The 1860 federal census noted the "Value [of] Real Estate." In The Hills, twenty-four household heads were listed with property values, ranging from a low of \$50 to a high of \$1,000. Only those few men with real estate values of \$250 or better could vote. Beginning in 1821, the New York State Constitution removed the property qualification for all white males, but retained it for black men. To be allowed to vote, a black man had to be a citizen of the state for three years and possess an unencumbered freehold of \$250 or more on which he had paid taxes. Despite repeated attempts at repeal, the qualification remained in effect until the Fifteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution voided it in 1870. Under this restrictive measure, William Tierce, father of soldiers Simeon and Solomon, and several others could vote, but because their voting records have not been located, whether or not they voted is unknown. Their vote would have been especially critical in the 1860 federal and state elections. Besides the four-way presidential campaign spot-lighting Republican Abraham Lincoln and Democrat Stephen Douglas, New York voters were again addressing the question of equal voting rights for all black men, removing the property qualification. In Westchester County, especially in White Plains, the proposed black suffrage amendment was viciously attacked by Democratic political boss Edmund G. Sutherland, owner and editor of the *Eastern State Journal*. For the editorial page of the weekly issue of Friday, November 2, immediately preceding the Tuesday, November 6 election, Sutherland composed a racist commentary entitled "The Negro Box," as he designated the legally mandated box in which to deposit votes "for" or "against" unrestricted suffrage for African American men. He proclaimed that should the amendment succeed, "the African race are placed on an equal footing with white men at the polls. . . . *Carry this amendment, and the Negro will hold the balance of power at the town meetings in Harrison, and*

*perhaps in North Castle* and other towns of the County” (italics mine). This is an obvious reference to the large black population of The Hills with most of its property owners in Harrison and some in North Castle. Sutherland saved the vilest of his racist commentary to conclude: “Whether this Negro box is to be painted black, and decorated with tufts of *black wool*, the Law does not declare. However, it ought to be sprinkled with chloroform, so as not to offend the nostrils of the people.” Sutherland and the other pro-slavery Democrats running for office had good reason to worry. If the property restriction were removed for future elections, based on 1860 census records and projecting teenage males coming of voting age, in the area encompassing The Hills community, at least sixty black men would be eligible to vote. In addition to the Hills men were the black men in other sections of Harrison, White Plains and North Castle and in the other Westchester towns. In all likelihood, Westchester blacks would not be voting for Sutherland and his cohorts, thus threatening the Democrats’ stranglehold on county politics. However, in 1860, coming up against Sutherland’s opposition, men from The Hills who were eligible to vote would need more than proof of the property qualification. They would need the economic independence to offend Sutherland who welded social, political, and economic power in the county seat of White Plains and throughout the county. From references in his Civil War letters, we know that William Tierce’s oldest son Simeon was employed as a carpenter by the Edmund Sutherland family. Would his skilled employment—an uncommon advantage—be at risk if his father voted? New York state voters struck down the amendment with 197,503 “for” and 337,984 “against.”<sup>16</sup> Despite repeated attempts at repeal, the property qualification remained in effect until the Fifteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution voided it in 1870.

Some Hills heads of household were not property owners, rather they dwelled in separate households on other families’ land, thus, disqualifying the men from voting and reducing them to second-class citizens. In some cases, it is not clear how these families are related to the property owners. Also, did Hills property owners practice the capitalistic system requiring rent in cash or services? Or, considering The Hills’ complex kinship network did a more shared communal sense of the property and other resources exist? In a study of rural, southern black families in the 1880s, Crandall A. Shifflett concluded that the “solidarity of strong black kinship networks” relieved the burden of poverty.<sup>17</sup> His conclusion could be applied here as well.

Did concern for the welfare and security of fellow blacks extend beyond Hills family and community members? Was The Hills community a station on the Underground Railroad? No. Not in either the popular or historical usage of the term. In an extensive search, no credible source has been found for identifying The Hills as a station or even on an established route. The classic, authoritative texts on the Underground Railroad do not include the Hills community, or White Plains, Harrison, or North Castle: for example, Wilbur H. Siebert’s *The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom*, originally published in 1898, and Charles L. Blockson’s *The Underground Railroad* (1987), and recent stud-

ies, such as the best seller, *Bound for Canaan* by Fergus M. Bordewich (2005). Nor is The Hills mentioned in regional studies, such as *Slavery, Antislavery and the Underground Railroad: A Dutchess County Guide* (2010); or in Horatio T. Strother's 1962 study, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*, which includes routes beginning in New York. This is not to suggest that individuals in Westchester were not involved. In Tarrytown on the Hudson River, Amanda and Henry Foster were founders of the AME Zion Church and are credited with assisting fugitive slaves. In *Quaker Crosscurrents*, the definitive resource on New York Friends Meetings, the editors cite individual Quakers in Westchester who aided fugitive slaves: "One documented Quaker route ran from New York City to the house of Joseph Carpenter at New Rochelle, continuing north through Westchester County, stopping at the homes of Joseph Pierce at Pleasantville and John Jay at Bedford, and ending at the house of David Irish at Quaker Hill, Dutchess County." The description, "[C]ontinuing north," is not sufficient evidence of stopping at or passing through The Hills. David Irish and the other Friends at Quaker Hill and in the Oblong and Nine Partners Friends Meetings in Dutchess County had a long and admirable resistance to slavery, starting with their insistence that the Purchase Friends Meeting take up the issue in 1767. What about the Purchase Quaker Meeting? Wouldn't it be the logical ally here and partner with The Hills blacks to operate a Station? Unfortunately, it was not one Quaker Meeting but two in Purchase and most other places due to the complex Orthodox-Hicksite Separation beginning in the early 1800s, culminating around 1828 and the early 1830s, and continuing long after. Following Elias Hicks' earliest preaching against slavery, the Hicksite Friends were of varying degrees of abolitionist sympathies, whereas the Orthodox Friends feared aggressive abolitionism and generally held to gradual measures of liberation. Although "divisions had occurred in all the monthly meetings up the Hudson," the split at Purchase triggered a court case that reached the New York Supreme Court in 1832. So bitter was the division within the Society of Friends, the editors of *Quaker Crosscurrents* state: "Families and friends were separated for life, and each group refused to recognize the other as Friends. . . ." Did the Hicksite faction engage in Underground Railroad activity? In 2007, Ryan P. Jordan published a very revisionist interpretation of the Society of Friends and abolitionism in which he challenged the idealized view of a close working relationship between Quakers and Abolitionists through Underground Railroad activities. Jordan demythologizes the popular image of the devout and courageous Quakers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and even casts doubt on the Hicksites's support for Underground Railroad activities, despite individual members' involvement. Overall, the Society of Friends disassociated itself with activist abolitionism and the civil disobedience of the Underground Railroad to protect its public image as respectful, obedient citizens.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, one cannot assume that where Friends Meetings existed, so too did strong abolitionist activism and formal Underground Railroad activity.

In 2004, historian David W. Blight edited an excellent revisionist study, *Passages of Freedom: the Underground Railroad in History and Memory*, in

which the contributors deconstruct the Underground Railroad, which has been so popularized and idealized in American mythology that historical facts are ignored. Most fugitives did not travel on the Underground Railroad, did not even know of its existence, and struggled on their own or with one or two companions, on desperate occasions being lucky enough to find assistance from compassionate whites, but mostly being self-reliant. More realistically, The Hills was part of an informal process that historian Harry Bradshaw Matthews identified as “The Freedom Journey,” the concept adopted for the title and theme of this book. Fugitives probably did pass through the community—informally, but even if no fugitive slave ever moved along its paths or slept in its cabins, The Hills was part of the Freedom Journey. Matthews’s broader, more elastic interpretation accommodates more individual agency and resistance in small measures as well as dramatic episodes. And “The Freedom Journey” incorporates both individual and consistent, communal resistance against oppression.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, by its very existence with its emphasis on family, church, school, and community, and through its association with the Reverends Mitchell and Tilmon, The Hills was part of “The Freedom Journey.”

Also, the political situation in nearby White Plains, the county seat, was definitely not favorable to antislavery activities, especially those of an overt abolitionist character. Westchester politics as a whole and especially locally were under the strong influence of pro-Southern, Democratic politician, Edmund G. Sutherland, editor of the *Eastern State Journal*, the county paper of record. Sutherland wielded tremendous power and served in important political positions, for example, as superintendent of common schools of White Plains and the town’s representative on the county board of supervisors in 1862.<sup>20</sup> Individuals wishing to curry favor with him might choose to demonstrate their loyalty by reporting any suspicious activity, helping him to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law of which he was so fond. This was not the environment in which to establish a station, as such activity would have endangered the fugitives and the black community. Thus, one cannot identify The Hills with the popularly imagined or historically documented Underground Railroad when evidence does not support such a claim. Rather, the wiser course is to honor the community’s greatest role in “The Freedom Journey,” the enlistment of thirty-six men associated with The Hills in the Civil War.