

Slaves and Servants on Prince Edward Island: The Case of Jupiter Wise (Introduced by H.T. Holman)

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Documents

Slaves and Servants on Prince Edward Island: The Case of Jupiter Wise.

INTRODUCTION

Slavery was not a common institution on the Island of Saint John, but following the coming of the Loyalists it was not at all unusual for the wealthier inhabitants of the colony to possess one or more black servants. Slavery had been given legal sanction in the colony by a 1781 act which stated that all black or mulatto servants who had come to the Island as slaves or who might be imported in the future would continue in bondage until freed by their masters.¹ Nevertheless it does not appear that slavery became widespread in the colony, and while the nature of the employment relationship is not always clear, the black population included both free blacks and slaves. The size of the black community is difficult to estimate. In 1784 16 black servants were noted in the muster of disbanded officers, soldiers and Loyalists, but it is probable that some blacks were already living in the colony;² indeed in the following document those identified as slaves belonged to colonial officials resident in the colony before the arrival of the Loyalists. The black community grew considerably in the 19th century and in 1881 (the first year the census recorded such information) some 155 people gave their origin as "African". By 1921 the size of the group had shrunk to 43, the majority of whom lived in Charlottetown.

Court records have generally been underutilized by historians of the black communities in the Maritimes, but as these records usually identify blacks as such, greater use of them may allow investigation of the social history of a community which by and large is not well served by other types of historical record. The following document is an exception to the usual pattern of terse reporting found in judicial material and for this reason allows an interesting insight into life within the small black community in the colony. The document reveals details of work, recreation and discipline, but the most interesting theme is the repeated discussion among the slaves concerning plans for escape from the colony.³ In the light of such evidence Robin Winks' assertion that slavery on the

1 "An Act declaring that Baptism of Slaves shall not exempt them from Bondage", 21 George III Ch. XV (1781).

2 T. Watson Smith, "The Slave in Canada", *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society for the Years 1896-98*, 10 (1899), pp. 68-71.

3 Information of James Stevens, *King v. Jupiter Wise*, RG6 Case Papers, Public Archives of Prince Edward Island [PAPEI].

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Island was “genuinely benign” seems open to question.⁴

Jupiter Wise appeared in court on 22 February 1786 and three indictments were found against him, the burglary described in the document below and two assaults. He was acquitted of the burglary but found guilty of one of the assaults, which involved the use of a cutlass and was therefore a felony.⁵ At sentencing Wise escaped hanging by pleading benefit of clergy, and was sentenced to be “transported for seven years to some one of His Majesty’s Islands in the West Indies”.⁶ Wise and another prisoner awaiting transportation escaped from prison but were recaptured in Nova Scotia.⁷ Their fate is not known.

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4 Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (New Haven, 1971), p. 44.

5 Information of John Clark, *King v. Jupiter Wise*, RG6 Case Papers, PAPEI.

6 Supreme Court Minute Book, 22, 23 February 1786, RG6, PAPEI.

7 Executive Council Minutes, 1 July 1786, RG2, PAPEI.

James Stevens’s Information against Jupiter Wise for a Burglary.

Island Saint John Queens County

Information of James Stevens (A Free Black Man) residing at CharlotteTown in said County made upon Oath before me James Curtis Esquire One of His Majesty’s Justices of the Peace for said Island — That some time last Summer Mingo, (Captain Callbecks black Slave) complained to him as they were walking together in that His Master had just been beating him, and that if he could get some associates he would run away, and further proposed to the Informant to join him, in which he consented, It was likewise agreed to propose the scheme to Ben (Gov. Pattersons black Slave) but the aforesaid Mingo said he would first mention it to him as a joke, as he had no great dependence on his faith And also that he would speak to the Chief Justices Black Slave Peter, on which determination they parted. The Informant and said Mingo repeatedly met afterward and on The second evening found that Ben had not been spoke to on which the Informant said he would undertake it — but was advised by said Mingo to be careful not to go too far as Ben had no bottom, having before deceived some men who had intended to run away with a Schooner from Governor Pattersons Farm — And that he (Mingo) would speak to him the first opportunity in the manner before mentioned. But Informant going that Evening to Governor Pattersons House met the aforesaid Ben in the

Yard, to whom he proposed the scheme of running away, to which the said Ben instantly consented, and said that by God he had been a long time waiting to join some others in running away and further said he would have a Dance before he went off — for which purpose he would sell all his Cloathes but two or three Shirts. He (Ben) proposed taking the Governors green barge and going to Boston where he could work for more Cloathes — The Informant told Ben that Mingo aforesaid would make one, that he would speak to Peter the Chief Justices black Slave to join them, and would let him know at the next meeting to which Ben answered it was very well, & observed that he would not take Peg (a female Slave of Governor Pattersons) as he could not trust her, — And that he would provide something for the Passage — That about a week afterwards the Informant and Mingo aforesaid met the said Peter near the Town Pump and they all walked toward the Governors Field when the Informant and Mingo proposed to Peter the plan of running away to which he consented but objected to the Governors Boat, and said his Sloop would do better, — They (Informant and Mingo) then told him that Ben was to be one to go with them and that the first who flinched would be put to Death. After some further conversation Peter sayed he could muster some Musquet Balls for the voyage but had no Powder, to which Mingo sayed he had powder enough and a Musquet which he would take — And if any Boat pursued them and they would stand Sixteen rounds would do — Peter said that one Owen Murphy had proposed to him some time ago to run away but he would not trust him Mingo observed that he would look about to see if anyone was near to overhear them as he was surprized some Evenings before when talking with Ben on the plan of running away by a person lying near them who was drunk, & they asked him where he lived, who returned for answer that when he had Money he lived at MacFees, but when he had none he did not know where he lived — Not finding anyone to interrupt them they soon afterwards walked back to the pump & parted.

The Informant further says that Peter frequently afterwards came to him at his Masters House to consult with him on going away — And that Ben told him that whilst he was making Hay at the Mermaid Farm he had walked from thence to the Judges Lott opposite the Town in order to get across but not finding a Boat he returned in the night and did not get back to his Work until eight O'Clock the next morning — That Mingo had spoke no more to him and that there the matter dropped. — Informant says that shortly after Captain Burns' arrival in Town he was in his (Capt. Burns') kitchen, and one of his Black Servants namely Jupiter Wise called him out and asked him if he could get a Gimblet, and he would Swill him with Rum which was not his Masters, and which Informant answered he could, and then went and borrowed one with which he returned, when the said Jupiter asked him for a candle which the said Informant brought from his Masters House and gave the said Jupiter who put it into a Lanthorn and then took a Stone Jugg with which they left the Kitchen and

the Informant followed him until they came to the House lately occupied by *Mr. Michael McDonald* in CharlotteTown and on their getting to the back of said House, in the Yard, or Lott, the said Jupiter told the Informant to stand and watch, and on his so doing he saw the said *Jupiter lift a sash Window* near to the back Porch of said House and go into it — And after some short time he saw the said Jupiter return from out of a Door on the back part of the House with the said Jugg which he shortly after handed to the Informant who found it to be full of Rum and supposes it to contain near *two Gallons* with which they came as far as Mr. Spences two Lotts behind his House where they deposited it behind the Pickets — Informant having loosened one of them for the purpose, But afterwards by desire of said Jupiter Wise he took the said Jugg from there and hid it in the little Fowl House under the Oven in Mr. Spences Yard where it remained until Sunday evening following when *he*, the Informant, the said Jupiter Wise, Guy (a black Servant of Capt. Callbecks) and Joe another of Capt. Burns' black Servants, met at one Raineys Hutt near the Parade a[t] CharlotteTown aforesaid and the said Jupiter Wise and Guy aforesaid proposed having a Dance the next evening at said Raineys which was agreed upon, and Jupiter and Guy undertook to bear each half of the expence of the Supper — The Informant said he would find half the rum, And Joe said he would offer a Dollar if it was wanted — That having met at Raineys they drank what little Rum he had, and then said Jupiter Wise told the Informant he knew where to get more and accordingly he left Raineys Hutt and went with a Mugg to Mr. Spence's Yard which he filled out of the said Jugg and after replacing it as before he returned with the Mugg full of Rum which was drank out — And after agreeing that he the Informant should invite the Company for the next evening in his own name, the said Jupiter Wise promised to get Master Stukely Burns to write Cards of invitation to their different friends after which they departed and went to Capt. Burns' Kitchen where Jupiter got said Master Stukely Burns to write the Cards which were sent round to their black acquaintances that evening and one to Mrs. Pollard Capt. Gores Servant Maid — After which The Informant delivered the said Cards as directed and returned to Captain Burns' Kitchen. On his coming away from thence the said Jupiter Wise called him in the Yard and gave him four Fowls which *he*, Informant observed him to bring from a little House or Hutt near to the Dwelling House and which Fowls appeared to be just killed (being warm). And desired him to take them to Raineys — where he went & found them in bed but on knocking at the Door Mrs. Rainey got up and asked who was there and he answered that it was him with some Fowls upon which she opened the Door & he threw them in on the Floor, and then went home to his Masters House.

Informant says that on Monday morning following about nine O'Clock he met aforesaid Guy going by Capt. Burns' House with a Basket in which was a Handkerchief tied up containing as he was informed by Guy some Flour and

Butter which he took to said Raineys, for the entertainment, and that also to his knowledge the said Jupiter Wise took a piece of Beef the same morning and some Potatoes in the Evening to Raineys for the same purpose — Informant further says that the Company met at said Raineys on said Monday evening and that by said Jupiter Wise direction he went and fetched from Mr. Spences House the Jugg aforesaid with the remainder of the Rum which was Drank at Raineys — And on that Night Capt. Callbeck came to Raineys and took away His black Slave the aforesaid Guy sometime after which they broke up and went severally home — and further Informant sayeth not —

His
James X Stevens
mark

Sworn before me at
Charlotte, this
30th Day of November
1785

James Curtis

Witnesses present at
the whole Information
reading thereof and
tendering of the Oath

John Russell Spence

Waller Berry