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Slavery in Pennsylvania: The Account of Cuff Dix

Slaveholder Name: Bird, Mark
City or Township: Birdsborough/Reading
County: Berks County
Occupation: Ironmaster, Hopewell Furnace

Notes:

Slave Name: Cuff Dix
Slave Sex: Male
Slave Age: 28
Slave Date of Birth: 1746 (estimated)
Slave Status: Slave for life
Slave Description: "Negroe Man"
Slave Notes: Ran away September, 1774. Text of runaway ad placed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* by Mark Bird (note the following items of interest--Cuff had been secured by leg irons, and was already an experienced forge worker):

Berks County, November 16, 1774.

FIVE POUNDS Reward. If out of the Province, and THREE, if in, WILL be paid by MARK BIRD, Esq; for taking up and securing a NEGROE Man, called CUFF, who ran away the latter End of September last, with a Lock and Chain about his Leg; he is a well made Fellow, about 5 Feet 3 or 4 Inches high, 28 Years of Age, by Trade a Hammerman, and is fond of strong Liquor.

Cuff must have been captured or returned of his own volition, but made another escape attempt in May 1775. Bird immediately placed an ad, which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on May 24, seeking to recover Dix. It was not successful. Dix had been away for five months when the following ad appeared on October 11, 1775:

SIXTEEN DOLLARS Reward.

RUN away, the 8th of May, 1775, from Birdsborough Forge, a Negroe man, named Cuff, goes by the name of Cuff Dix, a smart well set fellow, about 5 feet 4 or 5 inches high, speaks good English, but has a little stoppage in his speech; had on, and took with him, an old felt hat, an iron collar round his neck, it is likely that he soon got that off, a brown jacket, ozenbrigs shirt and trowsers, leather breeches, and good shoes; is a hammerman by trade. Also a Negroe man, named Chester, on Saturday night, September 8, 1775, a stout fellow, about 5 feet 8 inches high, speaks good English, is pockmarked, and flat footed; had on, when he went away, a good beaver hat, a light coloured Wilton coatee, ozenbrigs shirt and trowsers, and good shoes. Chester formerly belonged to one Keys, in the Jerseys, and was seen on the road to Philadelphia. Whoever takes up said Negroes, and brings them home, or secures them, or either of them, in any goal, so that their master may have them again, shall have THREE POUNDS reward for each, and reasonable charges, paid by MARK BIRD.

Documentation of Cuff's capture is in this *Pennsylvania Gazette* advertisement placed by the Chester County Jailor:

Chester, November 7, 1775.

WAS committed to my custody, on the 23d day of October last, a certain Frances Lyons, on suspicion of being a runaway servant, she is of a darkish complexion, and middle size. Likewise a Negroe man, on the 29th, who calls himself Cuff Dicks, and says he belongs to Mark Bird, Esq; in Berks county. Their masters (if any they have) are desired to come, pay the charges, in three weeks from this date, otherwise they will be discharged, on paying their fees, by JOEL WILLIS, Goaler

Cuff had run away again in June 1776 when Bird placed the following ad. In it he gives more details about Cuff, including a surname, notes that he runs away often and that he believes him to be on his way to join the British forces. The effect of Lord Dunmore's proclamation on Pennsylvania slaves is evident by Bird's remark "As Negroes in general think that Lord Dunmore is contending for their liberty, it is not improbable that said Negroe is on his march to join his Lordship's own black regiment:"

THREE POUNDS Reward.

RUN away from the Birdsborough Forge, in Berks county, Pennsylvania, on the 16th of June, 1776, a Negroe Man, commonly called CUFF DIX; he is an active well made fellow, and a most excellent hammerman; he is about 5 feet 5 or 6 inches high, fond of liquor, understands English well, though he stammers in his speech; there is an iron ring in one of his ears, which if he can take out, a hole will remain it, large enough to receive the small end of a pipe stem, in which case he will probably endeavour to conceal the hole by filling it up; he wore, when he went away, a small old hat, light coloured homespun jacket, tow shirt and trowsers. He has often run away, changed his name, denied that the subscriber was his master, and been confined in several goals in this province; he was employed the greatest part of last summer by a person near Dilworthtown, in Chester county. Any person who shall harbour said Negroe shall be dealt with as the law directs, and his name not omitted in a future advertisement. As Negroes in general think that Lord Dunmore is contending for their liberty, it is not improbable that said Negroe is on his march to join his Lordship's own black regiment, but it is hoped he will be prevented by some honest Whig from effecting it. Any person who shall bring said Negroe home to his master, or secure him in any goal, so that he may be had again, shall receive the above reward, and reasonable charges, paid by MARK BIRD.

Bird placed several more advertisements throughout the summer and fall of 1776, most with fewer details than the one above. Despite his skill at eluding his captors, it appears that Cuff did not make it to the British lines. The following advertisement shows that he was captured in New Castle, Delaware:

New Castle, March 2, 1777.

NOW in the Goal of New Castle on Delaware, a certain NEGROE Man, named CUFF DICKS, the Property of Colonel MARK BIRD, of Birdsberry, Berks County, Pennsylvania, who is requested to come, pay charges, and take him away.

THOMAS CLARK, Goaler.

Date of Records: November 23, 1774; May 24, 1775; October 11, 1775; November 15, 1775; July 17, 1776; October 16, 1776; March 12, 1777

Source: *The Pennsylvania Gazette*—July 17, 1776.