

RESURRECTING VOICES

The Philadelphia Black Experience

A Podcast By the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Episode 1 — Remembering the Black Metropolis: Philadelphia in 1838
Featuring guest speaker Michiko Quinones
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Table of Contents

<u>Resource Guide.....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Resources at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Resources at the Library of Congress.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Additional Resources.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Glossary.....</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Full Transcript.....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Credits.....</u>	<u>31</u>
<u>Project Team.....</u>	<u>32</u>

Resource Guide

Resources at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

- Leon Gardiner Collection of American Negro Historical Society records
 - The American Negro Historical Society was founded in 1897 by Black Philadelphians to document the “Black Metropolis,” as it is called by Michiko Quinones and the Philadelphia 1838 Black Metropolis history project. This 16-box and 35 volume collection features administrative records, reports, minutes, speeches, membership lists, portraits, and more items documenting the life of the American Negro Historical Society. The collection also includes materials on the Banneker Institute, Pythian Baseball Club, Lebanon Cemetery, and other Black organizations. Founders and members Robert Adger, W.M. Dorsey, and Jacob C. White included their materials in this collection. Leon Gardiner, a historian and postal worker, was an avid collector of African American ephemera, clippings, and other memorabilia. He donated his collection to HSP in 1934.
 - [View digitized records from the Leon Gardiner Collection.](#)

- Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers
 - Founded in 1775 as the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society was established as the first society committed to the cause of abolition in America. In the late 1780s, their mission expanded to include improving the living conditions of Black Pennsylvanians. The records of PAS span over two hundred years of the society's history, and include minutes, correspondence, financial documents, manumission records, indentures, and more.
 - [View digitized records from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers.](#)

- [View other Black history collections at HSP.](#)

Resources at the Library of Congress

- Black History Collection, 1623-2008
 - The Black History Collection spans 1623-2008, though it primarily concentrates on the period between 1800 to 1865. Materials in this collection include correspondence, financial documents, court records, slave deeds, family papers, military records, birth records, and more. Please note that this collection is not available to view digitally, but is open to researchers at the Library's Manuscript Reading Room.

- Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers
 - Chronicling America features millions of newspaper pages from across the United States published through 1963. Researchers can search these newspapers by state, ethnicity, and language.
 - View African American newspapers published in English in Pennsylvania.

- African American Perspectives: Materials Selected from the Rare Book Collection
 - This digital collection provides a comprehensive examination of the history and culture of African Americans. It mainly consists of two collections housed in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division: the African American Pamphlet Collection and the Daniel A.P. Murray Collection, spanning from 1822 to 1909. The majority of the works were authored by individuals of African-American descent, while a few were written by others addressing significant subjects within African-American history.
 - View selections related to Philadelphia.

Additional Resources

- The 1838 Black Metropolis
 - The 1838 Black Metropolis is a project founded by Michiko Quinones and Morgan Lloyd. The project asserts that the Black Metropolis was “a city within a city built by more than 20,000 free Black people in Philadelphia in 1838.” The project includes an interactive website featuring digitized primary sources (many of which are housed at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania), maps, educational tools, blog posts, and more.
 - [View the 1838 Black Metropolis digital archive.](#)

- Philadelphia City Directories and Streets Index
 - [Directories online - Philadelphia Directories - Research Guides at Temple University](#)
 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2469/>
 - ancestry.com subscription required
 - [Philadelphia Historic Streets Index](#)

- Death Records
 - [Philadelphia city death records \(before 1906\)](#)
 - free account required
 - [Pennsylvania death certificates \(after 1906\)](#)
 - PA residents can view these for free by following instructions [here](#); otherwise, a subscription is required

- Church records
 - [PA and NJ Church and Town Records \(available to onsite researchers at HSP\)](#)
 - ancestry.com subscription required
 - [Philadelphia Congregations Early Records](#)
 - [Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church Archives](#)
 - [The Historic African Episcopal Church of Saint Thomas Archives](#)

Glossary (in order of mention)

Congo Square: The former colloquial name for Washington Square in Philadelphia. The square was occupied by free and enslaved Black Philadelphians and served as a place to celebrate, sing, socialize, and maintain connections to Black and African languages, music, and traditions.

Washington Square: One of Philadelphia's five original squares laid out in the 1683 map of the city created by William Penn and his surveyor general Thomas Holme. It was referred to as Southeast Square until the early 1800s.

Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME): A church founded in 1794 by Richard Allen (1760-1831), a Black minister and writer. The first independent Black church in the United States. Still located at 419 South 6th Street in Philadelphia.

Black Metropolis: Coined by the 1838 Black Metropolis history project and movement, a term describing the “city within a city” of free Black people in nineteenth century Philadelphia.

Potter’s Field: An area within Southeast Square (Washington Square) designated by William Penn in 1706 as a public graveyard for Philadelphia's poor. A final resting place for, among others, enslaved and free Black Philadelphians.

Richard Allen: (1760-1831) A Black minister, writer, and community leader. Founded Mother Bethel AME as a safe place for Black Philadelphians to gather and worship.

Free African Society: A benevolent organization for free Black Philadelphians established in 1787 by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones.

Colored Convention: A convention gathering free Black citizens and leaders at Mother Bethel AME from 1830 until after the Civil War.

Samuel George Morton: (1799-1851) A white Philadelphia-based physician, scientist, and writer who was an early proponent of scientific racism, specifically polygenism, the notion that different races denote different human species.

Louis Agassiz: (1807-1873) A Swiss-American biologist who dedicated part of his research and writing to polygenism. Like Morton, Agassiz claimed a correlation between skull measurements and the intellectual superiority of white people.

Edward Williams Clay: (1799-1857) A Philadelphia-based political cartoonist famous for his cartoon series, *Life in Philadelphia* (1828-1830) that featured racist depictions of Black characters.

William Fogg: A Black farmer from Luzerne County, Pennsylvania who filed suit against the county commissioner in 1835 after being turned away from voting at the polls. Fogg's case proceeded to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court after his triumph in the lower courts.

Musical Fund Hall: A venue for musical events and speakers opened in 1824 by the Musical Fund Society. The space was originally Fifth Presbyterian Church.

Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS): A benevolent group founded in 1775 as the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage. The first abolition society in the United States. Became the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in 1784 with an expanded mission of "improving the Condition of the African Race."

Charles W. Gardner: Pastor of the First African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, and 1838 census data collector.

First African Presbyterian Church: Founded in 1807 by John Gloucester (1776-1822), a man born into enslavement in 1776 and later manumitted. The congregation still exists, worshiping at 4159 West Girard Avenue.

Philadelphia Reparations Task Force: Created in June 2023 by the Philadelphia City Council to report and mitigate the disparities faced by Philadelphia's descendants of enslaved people.

Pennsylvania Social History Project: An interdisciplinary project active between 1969 and 1985 to study minority Philadelphians between 1838 and 1880. Focused on the ways minorities were impacted by urbanization and industrialization in the city.

Weccacoe: A Philadelphia playground that was previously the site of the Bethel Burying ground of Mother Bethel AME. Between three and five thousand nineteenth century Black Philadelphians are believed to be interred on the site. Located at 400 Catherine Street in Philadelphia.

Northern Liberties: A former industrial neighborhood of Philadelphia that has become a popular area for artists and nightlife, largely through the process of gentrification.

African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas: The first Black Episcopal church in the United States, founded in 1792 by Absalom Jones. Originally located at 5th Street and Adelphi Street, the congregation continues its legacy at 6361 Lancaster Avenue in the Overbrook section of Philadelphia. .

Colored Creole Corner: A term coined by Bernice Dutrieuille Shelton describing the area of 4th Street and Spruce Street, Philadelphia popularized by Haitian immigrants to the city.

Bernice Dutrieuille Shelton: (1903-1983) A Black Philadelphia journalist. Concerned with the struggles of the Black press and active in multiple benevolent organizations.

African Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church: Founded in 1794 by free Black men in Philadelphia. Served as a vital stop on the Underground Railroad and the meeting place for the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee. Originally located at 405 Brown

Street in Philadelphia's Northern Liberties neighborhood, the congregation now worships at 3259 North Broad Street in North Philadelphia.

Emma Lapsansky-Werner: (1945-) A historian of antebellum life, Quaker history, nineteenth century American religion, and the American West. Professor Emeritus of History at Haverford College.

Society Hill: A popular neighborhood in Center City Philadelphia. One of the oldest neighborhoods in the city.

College Settlement of Philadelphia: A group founded in the 1890s to support college settlements for women. Commissioned W.E.B. DuBois's study of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward, later published as *the Philadelphia Negro*. Key player in the 1895 destruction of a block of Black businesses, churches, homes and schools on Lombard Street in Philadelphia.

The Philadelphia Negro: An 1899 study of Black Philadelphians written by W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), a prolific Black sociologist, author, and historian.

Starr Garden: A park on Lombard Street in Philadelphia that used to be the site of a Black neighborhood.

Henrietta Duterte: (1817-1903) A Black funeral home owner and abolitionist from Philadelphia. The first female mortuary owner in the United States.

Gentrification: The transformation of a neighborhood by an influx of more affluent residents. Often enacted by new white residents who displace minority communities.

Francis "Frank" Johnson: (1792-1844) A distinguished Black musician, composer, and abolitionist. Most widely known for cotillion music.

Eileen Southern: (1920-2002) A musicologist, author, and educator. Centered her research on Black American music.

Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette: (1757-1834) A French member of the Continental Army in the American Revolution, given command power over Continental Army troops. Also active in the French Revolution and the 1830 July Revolution.

Absalom Jones: (1746-1818) A prominent Black clergyman and abolitionist who founded the Free African Society and the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. The first Black Episcopal priest in the United States, venerated as a saint in the Episcopal calendar.

Benjamin Lundy Philanthropic Association: A philanthropic society who provided funding for medical care from the 1830s through the 1850s.

Benjamin Lundy: (1789-1839) A white Quaker philanthropist, abolitionist, and newspaper publisher.

James Forten: (1766-1842) A prominent Black abolitionist, veteran of the Revolutionary War, and businessman native to Philadelphia. Helped found and wrote for the newspaper *The Liberator*. An original member of the Free African Society.

Charles L. Blockson: (1933-2023) Historian and Curator emeritus of the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University, which contains over 700,000 items related to global Black life.

American Negro Historical Society: A historical preservation group founded by Black Philadelphians in 1897.

Banneker Institute: A Black literary society founded by Philadelphians in 1854. Named after Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806), a Black mathematician, astronomer, author, and farmer.

Robert M. Adger: (1837-1910) A Black Philadelphian businessman and collector of publications by Black authors.

Cherelle Parker: (1972-) Democratic Mayor of Philadelphia since 2024. The city's first Black woman mayor. Previously a Pennsylvania State Representative and Member of the Philadelphia City Council.

Daughters of Africa: A mid-nineteenth century social and beneficial society formed by Black Pennsylvanian women.

Pennsylvania Hall: A Philadelphia abolitionist building built between 1837 and 1838. In 1838, it was burned by anti-abolitionists during a meeting, destroying the building.

MOVE Bombing: The May 1985 bombing of a residential area in West Philadelphia by Philadelphia Police officers against MOVE, a Black advocacy group. Eleven people were killed in the bombing and over 250 lost their homes.

Agricultural and Mechanics Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey: An economic association founded in 1839 that crowdsourced funds from the free Black community for the purposes of buying and improving land.

Vigilant Association of Philadelphia: An abolitionist and Black aid group founded in 1837 by Robert Purvis in Philadelphia.

Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia: A secret division of the Vigilant Association of Philadelphia that collected and managed funds to operate the Underground Railroad. Active between 1837 and 1852.

Robert Purvis: (1810-1898) A mixed-race abolitionist based in Philadelphia for most of his life. Helped establish the American Anti-Slavery Society and served as President of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society between 1845 and 1850.

Jacob C. White, Sr.: (1806-1872) A Black Philadelphian entrepreneur, abolitionist, barber, physician, cemetery owner, and agent of the Underground Railroad. A member of the First African Presbyterian Church, Vigilance Committee, Free African Society, and the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society.

Jacob C. White, Jr.: (1837-1902) A Black Philadelphian author, educator, and community organizer. Among other leadership positions, served as President of the Banneker Institute, secretary of the Pennsylvania Equal Rights League, and committee member of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery.

Melvin Garrison: A retired educator for the School District of Philadelphia. Mr. Garrison currently serves as an education volunteer at HSP.

Julie Winch: (1953-) Historian and author of *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy* (1988), *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (2002), and other publications on Black America.

Full Transcript

Selena Bemak: Welcome everyone to the pilot episode of *Resurrecting Voices: the Philadelphia Black Experience*, a podcast brought to you by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and funded by the Library of Congress. Founded in 1824, this year marks the 200th anniversary of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Since our founding, HSP has collected an astonishing array of documents that brings the people of the past into conversation with us today. Alongside the collections at the Library of Congress, these records serve as the basis for this podcast.

I'm your host, Selena Bemak, and I'm thrilled to be your guide as we embark on a journey through these narratives of nineteenth and twentieth century Black Philadelphia. Join us and our guest speakers to uncover the stories, resilient voices, and vibrant culture that shaped this pivotal period in history. Plus, stick around to hear from genealogist Katy Bodenhorn-Barnes about how you can use this history to find your own ancestors.

Today we are joined by Michiko Quinones, a co-founder and Director of Public History and Education for the 1838 Black Metropolis. She has been a docent in Philadelphia for over twelve years at the Rosenbach and the African American Museum. She's also the creator and cohost of the *Philly People Now Deceased* podcast, which focuses on untold histories of important Philadelphians that historiography has ignored. Michiko is also a co-founder of the Black Docents Collective, a community of docents who are passionate and knowledgeable of Black Philadelphia history.

Selena: Michiko, picture it. Philadelphia in 1838. Can you take a moment to do some world building for our listeners? What did the city look, feel, and taste like in that time?

Michiko Quinones: Sure. I think the first thing to keep in mind with Philadelphia is that when you get into the middle of the city, the grid hasn't changed. That means you can sit on a corner and you really can imagine what happened there. If somebody was killed in that spot, or if some important thing happened, you can almost see and feel the people walking down the street because the grid is exactly the same. And in some cases, the buildings are the same as well.

I think what you want to try and picture in your mind is sort of that traditional colonial Philadelphia that you see. You'll see that in the old pictures. But in that streetscape, you're probably seeing white people. And that is where things are very different. And that is what we've been trying to resurrect here, is that at the center of Philadelphia, there was a city within the city of close to 20,000 free Black people.

So if you want to think about Congo Square, which is Washington Square, picture Washington Square on a Sunday. And Washington Square didn't look much different. Then if you think all around Washington Square, there were about eight or nine Black churches within, say, a two-minute walk. As those churches would let go on Sunday. I'm talking thousands of people.

Mother Bethel AME, which most folks know, exists at the corner of 6th and Lombard. And we're now finding that there was about 4,000 people, men, women, and children, who attended Mother Bethel alone. So if there was Mother Bethel plus all of the other eight churches within the two-block radius, no cars. So there's all these people.

You know, the other kind of myth that's come out about free Black people in the antebellum time or in the nineteenth century, there's always this kind of narrative around poverty. People were very poor. They were living in slums. I want you to push that out of your mind because the majority of the people were kind of working class people.

They were washers or they were servicepeople. They were carters and porters. But, they looked great. When we look at the pictures, they all would get tailors. They would have dressmakers. I don't want you to picture people in slums on the street. These were proud people who are going to church every day and who are really serious about their families, and about their connection, and about their moral standing. Really serious. I mean, they're creating organizations about it.

So now we're thinking of a street on a Sunday, it's sunny. There are literally thousands of people. Let's imagine right before church ends around three o'clock on a Sunday, because we went to church all day. Let's say it's three o'clock on Sunday, it's quiet, but then all of a sudden there's this kind of growing sound of people just pouring out of church.

I don't know if you've been to a church or any type of religious service, how that noise just erupts after service is over. And then people start talking and "Where are you going?" and "Who's doing what?" and, "What are we eating?" and all these kinds of things. That's the conversation that's starting to happen.

And people are rolling into the street and then they're seeing their friends and they're seeing other people, kids are playing, and again, no airplanes, no cars. What you would hear is probably cobblestone, like maybe the sound of hooves or the sound of a cart on the street. Mostly you would just hear people.

Then, people would go walk over to Washington Square, because early in the civilization of the Black Metropolis, around the beginning of 1800, there was a cemetery in Washington Square. And those bodies are still there. That cemetery was arranged for by the leaders of the Black Metropolis. So Richard Allen, Free African Society. One of the first things they did was, "We've got to bury people correctly." They were able to arrange for it in what was called Potter's Field, which was part of Washington Square

We also call it Congo Square. Basically everybody's walking and now they're bringing instruments. They're bringing conga. They're bringing clave. I say these words because we know clave and conga came from Africa. They're bringing all these traditions, but there's also people from across the Black diaspora. There's Haitians, there's people speaking Mande. We know this for certain. Mande is from Guinea-Bissau. So we've got an African language thrown in there. Then we've got English.

I want you to imagine a thousand people picnicking, enjoying their family lives on a Sunday and some music playing, and maybe some drums. We know that people were using milk pails because there were complaints about it.

So there was all of that noise and that life and all of those voices, and if you go to Washington Square there is actually a plaque there that says, "This was called Congo Square," because of all of that activity, because of all of that joy happening on a Sunday, and the plaque actually says "A thousand people were here," on almost every Sunday. Washington Square exists today like that so, when next time you're in Washington Square, just think about it.

We were talking about Sunday in the Metropolis and what it looked and felt like. You know, I think the part that got me first was when I realized how big the civilization here was. So when you compare 20,000 people to say all of Buffalo at the same time, and I'm talking Black and white. Buffalo was less population. I think it was like maybe 16 or 17,000 people compared to 20,000 that were here in Philadelphia.

The 20,000 is sort of our upper estimate because the census of 1838 was 18,768. We believe that's an undercount because there were always people who were seeking freedom, who probably did not want to get, you know, put to the book.

Selena: So this census that you're telling us about, can you elaborate on what you mean by that? It was taken by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, correct?

Michiko: Correct. So 1838 was a very, very pivotal year, especially in regards to race relations in this country. What happened was there was this kind of massive emancipation and set of manumissions that started in 1776, which is really interesting, because that is also the date of what, the Declaration of Independence.

Here you have this declaration, which could have also said something about emancipation of Black people, but did not. Instead you have the Quakers who turned out to be the ones who started this effort to manumit, or at least officially.

Quakers decided that anyone who owned an enslaved person would be kicked out of the Quaker meeting. They started doing that. You started to have by about 1800, around three, 4,000 free Black people in Philadelphia.

Then you had the Haitian Revolution. What happened was, a lot of white enslavers bought their slaves up from Haiti, and assumed that they would be able to have people continue to be enslaved to them. And instead, I guess they just didn't understand the law, or they didn't realize that they were bringing their enslaved people into a Black city, and they just like, disappeared into the city. You know, so like there's about 800 people who came in on top of all of these manumissions.

So you're getting to like 1800, you're getting to 1810, and you're getting into the civilization building. You've got churches that have started to get built. You've got even the first Black denomination where Richard Allen is saying, "Nah, y'all ain't gon' treat me like that," and moves out and creates his own church, right? And there's, you know, all that rigmarole. Two major churches, the beginning of sort of Black political organization with the Free Africa Society. So now you've got this growing civilization and people are doing pretty well.

Here's the other thing. You started to have a monopoly within say some industries, like the carters, the porters, the waiters, and the dock workers had monopolies, okay? And they were kind of running things. I'm talking Black monopolies of labor.

You started to have that, you started to have people kind of establishing themselves, more churches growing, more organizations growing, literary societies growing. It's starting to become clear that Black people are more understanding their importance. And then you started to get to 1830 and you have the first Colored Convention here in Philadelphia.

Now what's happening is regional connections between free Black people in the North, but let's not forget that Richard Allen was constantly sending people into the diaspora, Africa and into the South, starting AME churches, and that some of those churches were sort of where some of the slave insurrection started. We are starting to see a sort of political transnational identity of Blackness develop here in this cultural center of Philadelphia. That's 1830.

Commensurate with that, the rise of race science that also began here with Samuel Morton and Louis Agassiz at Harvard, and Edward Clay. You start to get this rapid pushback on all things Black, the beginning of anti-Blackness.

You can imagine by 1830, you've got this civilization. Then you start to see attacks and you start to see attacks on the Black community that are really super violent. That starts around 1834. Then you start to see Black men exercise their right to vote. They've been going to these conventions, and they're like, "We should start to exercise our right to vote."

So in Bucks County, you had about 40 Black men change the election. Then you had also a guy named William Fogg, who was a farmer, a Black farmer in Pennsylvania, sue Pennsylvania for the right to vote in 1835. You're starting to see this Black political activism at the same time that you're also starting to see some things happen in the South that are shaking up the slave empire.

By 1838, you also have, you have immigration, and in the Pennsylvania legislature, they started to talk about, let's get everybody to vote, right? Because we have all of these people now who have come in, and we want to expand the right to vote, universal suffrage. But then, a few legislators realized that if they did that, they would have a tremendous voting bloc in Philadelphia of Black people. There could conceivably be a Black candidate in 1838 from Moyamensing area. They decided that was not something they were going to allow to happen.

You also were starting to see kind of a national trend of removing suffrage for Black people at that time as well. So what happens is then there's a kind of introduction of an idea that they have to clarify who can vote and they want that to specifically be White people and they want to put "white" into the Pennsylvania Constitution. And that whole discussion happened right over here at Musical Fund Hall.

So all of those delegates who were trying to decide whether or not to insert the word white, were walking past Black churches, Black barber shops, schools, were seeing all this Black excellence, they're walking by it, and they're still deciding that they don't want Black people to vote. And when we're talking about how many, 40,000 Black men in all of Pennsylvania will be disenfranchised.

So we get to 1838, and it's very clear that there's a constitution's going to change. And so Black leaders form with white allies, Pennsylvania Abolition Society, and who had been a white ally all this time, and decide that they're going to try to do a heart and mind campaign.

Like if you were in a nonprofit today, you were trying to increase brand awareness, you were trying to get people to be aware of your cause, you would do different things. You would, you know, take out ads and you'd have a petition. You'd get t-shirts and you'd have church meetings. So it's not that different. So in

1898, that's what they did. They had all these kind of hearts and minds campaigns, that's how we have all of these documents that kind of describe this fight to keep the right to vote.

The census was taken by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, but it was also led by Charles Gardner, who is the pastor of the First African Presbyterian Church. Maybe he's the first noted Black statistician in the United States. But he also helped get everybody together to get these numbers together and they asked some incredible questions in this census.

They asked, you know, "How much do you pay for taxes?" This was very important, right? To understand if people can vote, but also, you know, what church you went to, what beneficial society you went to, "How many kids do you have? Do they go to school?" So you're asking these important statistical questions. But also, "How were you freed? And, how much did you pay for your own freedom?"

I know there's a new Philadelphia Reparations Commission and I emailed them, I'm like, "We can start here," because there's data that we can start with that, I mean, that's never going to be enough, but at least we can start there, This is this incredible statistical snapshot of a free Black population of nearly 20,000 people in 1838 taken for the purpose of really proving that this was a viable society, that people were good citizens and should not lose the right to vote. That is why we have the 1838 census and all of the corresponding documents that go with it.

Selena: And you know, it's my understanding that the way the census was taken was door to door. They knocked on doors. So if people were not home or did not answer that day or decided not to participate, there are so many more who possibly could have been a part of this community, right?

Michiko: Yeah, 100%. So there were people who also may have been freedom-seekers, who did not want to put their name on paper, because then somebody could find them. But it's so interesting. So many people did put very interesting things in the census about who they were.

One guy said he had—he put a little note, little star, 2,700 Spanish galleons, is what he had. It says that, I'm like, "Okay. You want to tell everybody you have all this gold in your house? All right, you know, that's up to you!"

It's really interesting. I think going through the census on that, like you found, Katy, just going through, you'll find a person and they'll speak to you and then you find all these interesting things about them.

Katy Bodenhorn Barnes: It's incredible how much detail is on there, especially if you compare it to the 1840 federal census that was taken like two years later, and it's just tick marks, and there's none of that data about occupation. I mean, we're talking, that's for white people and the richest people in the nation on the 1840 federal census. They're just a name and a statistical checkbox, but this 1838 census is so rich. We're going to talk about that a little bit more with the genealogy stuff later on.

Michiko: I'm glad you brought up the 1840 census because obviously your question around whether people would even answer the door is really important because did people have trust for the US census takers? Probably not, knowing that the whole of Pennsylvania was trying to remove the right to vote. When Charles Gardner or his agent comes knocking at the door, you were probably more willing, and there is

some stuff in this in the PAS documentation that says people were very happy and very, very kind to us and very happy to see us. There's a couple of letters in the PAS archive about that.

So there's like no trust of US census takers. That's what makes this such an incredible document that really scholars should take a look at. That's what it was like. I mean, people knocking on doors. I also think there was some gathering in churches, like people coming into the churches, like, "Oh, we're going to do census today." I think there was a bit of that too.

Selena: Why do you think people trusted Gardner to take their data, especially if there's vulnerable information that they are giving up for this census? Did they recognize how important it was or did nobody really realize it at the time?

Michiko: I think people were really aware. So this community was like, being in a church was so important. Most people were like, very active in churches, so I think that there was this kind of communication going on in the Black Metropolis to really understand that people were going to be affected by this vote. So there's probably some encouragement around that.

Charles Gardner, first African Presbyterian was maybe the 3rd, 4th largest congregation at the time. So people talking to each other, families talking to each other, just saying, you know, "It's really important that you give this information." Especially when it's also the way that you could be allowed to vote, also had to do with taxes. Being able to have an aggregate amount of taxes that the Black community paid was also important to say, "These are the people you're disenfranchising."

I mean, I think that's why, and I would say that the community was super organized. Let's remember there were 80 beneficial societies. Beneficial societies are these groups of people, usually having about 50 to 200 members who give pools of money to one pool, they have a treasurer, and they would then distribute the money to people who were sick, who couldn't work, or who needed a burial.

It's so funny, because I went to the Weccacoe, I read the architecture diagram, like the architectural report on Weccacoe. The person writing it was like, how did these people afford these headstones? So one, the bias said everybody was poor. And then second, there were these beneficial societies and burial rites that comes from Africa, right? We care about how we bury our ancestors and how we live on because in Africa, we think about ourselves, not just this person in this time but of all of our ancestors and how we treat them is super important. So being buried is an important rite.

There were 80 beneficial societies and those folks were helping each other when it came to burial. That also meant those lines of communication were pretty tight. Imagine, there's no cell phones, how does everybody learn everything? Well, there's also a tight community. So 6th and Lombard, you've got a lot of people there and then you've got a huge amount around Northern Liberties. So I think that's how those communications channels were happening.

Selena: So this neighborhood that's really being captured in this census is a robust Black community that we're talking about. Was it always a Black neighborhood?

Michiko: I think early on, like in the late 1670s, no. I think that it started to become a Black neighborhood around, well, probably when Richard Allen went and planted Mother Bethel at 6th and Lombard. You know,

the story of Richard Allen, and his first church was a building that he had to put on a cart and towed it to 6th and Lombard. There's like a famous picture of this, where Richard Lombard building on a cart and he's pulling it in. That is the first church.

Also, St. Thomas also was just east of Washington Square on 5th. Literally eyes view for Independence Square. So St. Thomas, which is also the church that was founded in the late 1700s, was right in that area as well. So I think that people started planting around the churches.

Then you had that huge Haitian influx. And that Haitian influx actually influenced what people called that area, they called the area around 4th and Spruce, the Colored Creole Quarter. and we get this from the Bernice Dutrieuille Shelton papers. So she wrote a history at HSP. We know Richard Allen's house was on Spruce between 4th and 5th. So we know that whole area started to just kind of build up and I think that's just where people went and became like a zone of safety.

But let's not forget Northern Liberties, because Zoar was up there as well. Zoar AME was another, the third church that was founded. It was like St. Thomas, Mother Bethel, and Zoar. Zoar was founded in like the late 1700s as well. And then by 1809 you had Union AME. So you have all these churches in Northern Liberties as well.

So there's like a Northern Liberties neighborhood, which had thousands of people. And then there was a center of labor around the city of Lombard. And I think because of this building up around the churches. For sanctuary. Emma Lapsansky-Werner did coin the term "zone of sanctuary" or "spatial sanctuary" is what she called it. The ability for Black people to come in and in a space have some sanctuary. So I'm going to give some props to her for that term. It's perfect, and it describes why people would have moved into this area and stayed in that area, spatial sanctuary.

Selena: Spatial sanctuary. That's powerful. So then why did people eventually move out of this neighborhood? Why did they migrate out of this metropolis?

Michiko: What's really interesting to me is the resilience of the community, there were repeated attacks with this rise of racism, starting from 1834, 1838, 1842, 1849. Some historians will argue that, well, that put a lot of pressure on people and that caused people to move out of the neighborhood. But I think the censuses tell different—even the US censuses. I think that neighborhood stayed a Black neighborhood up until even, up until like 1880, 1890.

There were a couple of different forces, it's not just one. One, there's this growing immigrant presence, and that just kind of moving in as well. The churches started to outgrow their original churches. And so you have this massive church building boom. Where were they going to put them? They actually started moving a little bit west.

So they moved into sort of like Christian Street and then moved to 16th Street or 17th Street. So you had that. But it's interesting to me that I don't think that people moved out because there were attacks on the community.

In fact, what we see is that even when some buildings were burned down, they would rebuild the same building, the same spot. This is a sense of, “This is still our neighborhood. This is still where we built our things.”

We did have a tour recently where a woman who was an octogenarian became very emotional, and we realized that she could remember in the twenties, in the ‘30s, that this was still a Black neighborhood.

There's a really good sociologist at Penn who's been writing about the gentrification of sort of Society Hill and how it was made to look like this ancient colonial place that had always been that way when in fact, it was this Black neighborhood, and it might've looked a little bit different, but also, that there was a lot of pushing people out. But she does document that happening even up into the ‘60s.

For example, I read in her article that there was a woman who lived on Lombard, in one of the older homes that had been there from like the 1700s, between 6th and 7th. And somehow she was pushed out of that home, and into low-cost housing, also in that neighborhood, but out of that traditional home. So this process has been continuing.

I will also mention that in 1900, there was a group called the Settlement Group. And this was a group of white women who kind of went into what they deemed to be impoverished neighborhoods to go help children. That group made a decision that the neighborhood needed a park, and they basically arranged for a whole block of the Black Metropolis to be knocked down. This is now Starr Garden. And this is around 1900. Ironically, this was once the hired DuBois to do *The Philadelphia Negro*.

Katy: This is wild. I walk by Starr Garden all the time. So I had no idea about that actually.

Michiko: Oh yeah. Why would there be this open park? There's another one right down Lombard Street. Why are there two massive big open spaces? Those were Black-owned homes and a lot of people, including Henrietta Duterte, who was the first female mortician in the United States who owned her own shop. She started in 1850 as a mortician and that her whole shop was just knocked down.

I don't know the whole specifics, but I do know that there's missing pieces of history that are gone, including also that was on Starr Garden, the Second African Presbyterian. That Second African was knocked out. So there's just a lot that we don't know. I can't explain all the forces, but there are many, many forces acting on why people moved out.

Most of it I would think is gentrification, which I now call “whitification.” And I think it was just that moving people out of the neighborhoods through various means. I guess it just really hit home when this person on our tour started crying that our tour's a little bit about grief.

There are lines of people who still continue to live in Philadelphia who have deep memories of this environment and what it was like. And then to walk through it and to kind of feel separated from that and to almost feel like you're walking into a space where there might be surveillance or there might be people watching you in a space that was traditionally a Black space, right? There's that sense of loss as well.

Selena: Well, Michiko, and to those people, we are going to dedicate this episode. We're going to take a quick break, but stay tuned because when we come back, we are going to hear more about the 1838 Black Metropolis and we'll hear the music of a rather famous musician.

[Break]

Selena: Welcome back to Resurrecting Voices. Now Michiko, was there anyone particularly famous a part of this 1838 Black Metropolis that we've been talking about?

Michiko: Yeah, I think most people have heard of Francis or Frank Johnson. Frank Johnson was a musician and he lived at the corner of 6th and Pine. He was right in the heart of this neighborhood. And I think he was born, I want to say mid 1810s, and then died about 1844, that sounds about right, just to give you an idea of when he lived. And he became massively famous for a couple of reasons.

[Frank Johnson's "Bird Waltz" plays]

Well, first of all, he started to build this cotillion culture in Philadelphia, so, because he and his band of musicians were really good at doing the song that was a cotillion, which is a dance. People would come together and they would go to like halls and they would hire his band to play and this was like 1818, 1819.

There's some evidence from musicologist Eileen Southern that he actually sort of intentionally created the market. You know, like you might have a promoter now, who promotes a certain type of music and gets people to come out. So there's some hint that he may have also done that and helped build cotillion culture in Philadelphia.

But he's most famous for, he played for Lafayette and then I think he got really famous for in 1837, he went overseas to play for Queen Victoria, and that kind of put him on the world stage. Frank Johnson was like, you know, he was a celeb. Right here, in River City, I mean he went to Absalom Jones' Church, he went to St. Thomas, and there's some, also indication that he was raised by the church family, by Absalom Jones, and the Forten family is very close to them.

Selena: He's a really interesting figure and I would love if we can hear some of Frank Johnson's music. So we are going to play a snippet for you. This recording of his composition called "The Grave of the Slave" has been provided to us by the Museum of the American Revolution.

[Frank Johnson's "Grave of the Slave" by B.E. Farrow plays]

Selena: Death was freedom at last.

Michiko: Yeah, that song is really, it's kind of atypical. He is usually, some people think of the song they think of like the marches or the cotillion type music, which is like jaunty dancing type music.

But I think what's important to recognize about everyone who was in this Black Metropolis area—and I can't say it for everyone, but we say a lot of people were very clear that they were free Black people, but that there were five million of their family that were enslaved. And they were constantly working for that. They were helping to bring people in Philadelphia, and find safe haven and sanctuary here, and move north.

The industries—Richard White of the Black Docent Collective said, “Hey, there's industry in this city, in that city of the Black Metropolis. One is the industry of emancipation. All cities will have industries in which they build infrastructure. And the industries for the Black Metropolis are emancipation.

Emancipation infrastructure was things like, organizations that would help people come in, monies collected, they may not have been physical, but sometimes they were. So it could be churches, it could also be safe houses. Also, people who worked on the rivers to help bring people in from the South.

There also was the infrastructure of sanctuary, which is to create businesses, to create churches, to create safe spaces for people to come. So all of that activity needed almost everybody. And Frank Johnson was a member of what's called the Benjamin Lundy Philanthropic Association, which was an organization and the records for that are here, that was started around 1830 and went up through about 1850.

What it was was, people who were fairly well off, free Black people who had a little bit more money, came together to pull their resources, not for themselves, which kind of makes it different from a beneficial society. It makes it into a philanthropic society. You can see in their records that they're giving that money to people who need medical assistance. Frank Johnson is one of those people in the Benjamin Lundy Philanthropic who is giving a little bit of his money in order to help other people.

Most of the people in the Black Metropolis, again, there was a really important decision. There was an effort to try to get people to leave, to leave the United States. The American Colonization Society started to rise up and become sort of a powerful institution to encourage Black people to move back to Africa.

That also coincided with the sort of growth of Haiti after the revolution, and people trying to figure out if they wanted to go live in Haiti. So you had free Black people here in like, in say, 1818, 1819, 1820, trying to figure out are we going to go to Africa or are we going to go to Haiti or are we going to stay here?

There was a really important decision in, I would say, January in 1817 at Mother Bethel, where 3,000 people met and were asked, “Do you want to go to Africa? Do you guys want to go to Haiti? Or are you going to stay here?” And the words that they used were like, “We are staying here, our kin, our brethren are enslaved, and we're going to stay and continue to fight for them.” I call it the “Great Decision.” It was such an important decision.

It was 1817, Frank Johnson would have probably been in that church and probably been a part of that decision. So here in this song, he's writing a song alongside Sarah Forten, who is the daughter of James Forten. And as you know, that whole family is a very important abolitionist family.

[Frank Johnson's “Grave of the Slave,” instrumental by B.E. Farrow plays]

She's writing this heartfelt poem which does make me feel like, some kind of way, honestly, when I listen to that song, because I do think of my ancestors and just, I don't know how people made it through. And yet I am sitting here, testament of people who did.

So it does affect me very strongly even today to hear that song, to hear those lyrics, but it also represents people in the Black Metropolis actively working together all kinds of ways through music, also through

monies, just to continue to support emancipation activities and the Underground Railroad, and people coming in here and becoming safe. So we can't just think of Frank Johnson as just the cotillion guy, like he's really more than that, and so many other people were as well.

Selena: Frank Johnson is amazing. And when you mentioned Sarah Forten writing this as a poem, I was thinking it sounds like poetry when we listen to it. We are lucky that we can listen to hear his music in 2024, that we have his compositions and they can be recreated and we can hear what this community heard as well. We actually have some of his sheet music here at HSP if anyone's interested in coming and seeing it. I would love to learn more about Frank Johnson and if you can tell us about the influence of his music that he might've had on this neighborhood.

Michiko: I'm going to refer back to Eileen Southern, her incredible research on antebellum nineteenth century Black music. But what she found was that even within these churches, we've come to kind of associate Black church music with, like, we know early Negro spirituals, we've all heard them, you know, "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" or, you know, any of the civil rights songs. We've heard these kind of, what were traditionally called "spirituals."

Then we know that there's this choir tradition in Black churches. So what's interesting in Southern's work is that she is able to trace that early on in, say, the 1800s in the beginning of Black churches in Philadelphia, that some of the older generation was not interested in having anyone sing as a choir.

They felt like there should be sort of hymnal type songs. Richard Allen actually produced one of the first hymnals as early as 1801. A lot of those songs were written by people in Philadelphia, most probably Black men in Philadelphia. Those hymnals then became popular and they were reprinted four times. Then they went into the white churches so that we kind of lost the fact that they started with Black men in Philadelphia.

So there's that kind of move of these hymnals and spirituals into those churches. But then you hit this kind of 1830 period, you've got the organ come in, all the churches start to get the organs, Frank Johnson starts doing these concerts, and they're called "African Harmonic Choirs." He's got one at First African. He did one in New York. There was one at the First African Presbyterian where Charles Gardner was the pastor from the census. There's an ad in the Colored American for Frank Johnson's African Harmonic Choir.

There's a struggle between people who want to do these kind of more quiet, solemn hymns, and then the people who want to move into this space of choirs. You know, there's all kinds of worship music now, right? It's all kinds of genres. I mean, I love Kirk Franklin, for example. That's just kind of like, you know, sort of maybe like a rap genre of gospel. And you just think like every single generation, there's always like this push against what can be considered to be worship music.

It's so interesting to see that same push happening in 1830. Because that's what's happening today. What is considered to be okay to sing in church? And that exact same dynamic is happening. Maybe it's just a generational thing that happens all the time.

So the African Harmonic Choir Concerts, I think we have one here at HSP, one of the programs. So a lot of times they were kind of, it was a little bit of classical music from Europe. But then I do wonder if Frank Johnson had his own compositions and that kind of started to get people thinking about larger choirs with

organs. But that was here in Philly. And I think that's important to note too, that the growth of Black church music really did start here.

Selena: While we're on the topic of churches, and we've talked a little bit about this before with Richard Allen and Charles Gardner, I'd really like to explore how these churches were not just spiritually active, but also socially, politically, economically active as well. We talked about that, I think, in your story from 1817 when Frank Johnson was probably in that room with Absalom Jones, but I'd love to hear more if you can expand on that.

Michiko: Yeah. Mother Bethel AME church records are here. They are digitized thanks to Charles Blockson. So, and so we need to shout out Charles Blockson in this conversation and in this room and in this building because of the work that he did to make sure that those records got microfiched, right, at the time, and that didn't get lost.

There's been a lot of scholars who've come in and taken a look at that and found that there were these community, almost like small claims courts, or just courts between people who had issues with each other. And again, being part of a church was so important. You wanted to be like, seen moralistically, and be a part of the community.

So if somebody bought suit against you, you could go in front of the elders, in front of this kind of small claims court that was occurring at Mother Bethel. And in the records here, you can see, years and years and years of people having these kinds of courts. And some of them are funny. They're just, you know, two women who didn't like each other.

Some of them are more serious, they're like infidelity and so yeah, definitely, you weren't supposed to have premarital sex, you were supposed to get married, and if you got caught living together, that would be another thing that could bring you before the court.

So there's that kind of social thing happening, and then you have leaders in the church, and oftentimes the women leaders were also sort of like neighborhood matrons in a way, sort of looking out for people on the street, but probably also a little bit making sure you behaved. You know, and I think that that kind of energy, I know, I personally know lots of older women who I, you know, I make sure that I'm behaving. I think that that kind of, that's kind of what was happening then. But you know, of course, the churches were a place where people were meeting.

If you think about St. Thomas, which is the, sort of the elite church, right? So the wealthy free Black people must have been meeting each other on Sunday talking about business, talking about how they were going to help each other, you know, how would you start a business, you would need somebody to give you some capital. I imagine those conversations also happening in the churches.

Then of course, raising of the children, having Sunday schools, teaching kids about the gospel, but then I think also teaching kids on Sunday. So there's the Sunday school and that often turned into a regular school where you were doing reading, writing, arithmetic. Mother Bethel, for example, I think had about 60 students in their own church and that was like as early as 1805 that Mother Bethel was starting to teach children on Sunday, basically, how to read and write.

This is in addition to all of the other 23 public and private schools that happened. Then there was also adult schooling. So, the church is the center of education. It's the center of potentially getting funding. It is the center of social propriety and what you're supposed to do. And then it is also the center of political. So how do you know what's happening on a political level? You're going to go to the church.

Prince Saunders was this international diplomat who actually got his degree at Dartmouth. He got his degree, a Black man, free Black man, got his degree at Dartmouth in late 1800s and became an emissary of Prince Henry in Haiti. He was going from Haiti back to Philadelphia, working in Absalom Jones's church, and then back to London and kind of doing this circuit all through 1818, 1820. And he was really someone who pushed to have people go to Haiti, but his talk about moving to Haiti happened at Mother Bethel Church in 1818.

So again, now you have this kind of Black transnational idea of, this church is now a center of not just our political stuff that's happening here in our locality, but also how we're finding out information about the full Black diaspora. And that's kind of proven out by visits and the talk by Prince Saunders in 1818 at Mother Bethel AME. So the churches were kind of everything.

Selena: I think that makes sense why we start with the church when we paint this picture of 1838, because this is the center of the community. This is the center of life. People are coming to and fro every single day.

I also want to just take a moment to acknowledge what you said, and acknowledge Charles Blockson for the work that he has done to preserve this Black history that we have. We would not be able to do this podcast without the work that he's done and the foundation that he set.

Michiko: I would also want to call out the American Negro Historical Society. And then Leon Gardiner. So I'm probably going to get too esoteric here for a second. But there is a throughline of people from late 1890s recognizing that all of this stuff needed to come together. William Dorsey had all these snippets and newspaper stuff. Robert Adger had the book collection. And then the Banneker Institute's collection of minute books and documents that transitioned into the American Negro Historical Society.

Leon Gardiner was one of the last members in the 1930s. American Negro Historical Society started in 1895. They kept that history, understanding the oppression that was occurring in this country and that they were getting written out, literally written out of all the histories, and thank God they kept it. It was such an important treasure trove. And then it moved, Leon Gardiner gave it to the HSP in 1933. Then there was a 30-year period and then Blockson came in after that.

I think his work, he did a lot of things. On this collection, he worked really closely with the president of HSP, became very close to him. Then he also, of course, arranged for all this digitization. So that throughline of historians who have taken what I call this treasure trove of history that would have been lost and kind of almost like a relay race. You know, there were times when it could have just completely fallen apart.

In fact, Robert Adger's book collection, which was originally here, is now part of Wellesley's collection. Dorsey's scrapbook collection, imagine, you have the scrapbooks, you have the books, all first editions, and then you had the minute books and the ephemera, all as one major collection. It sort of dissipated, but the core of that ephemera is here at HSP. It is really, I said to your president, it's like the Black National Archive. It's so important. I think Blockson realized that very early on.

He wrote the book *Black Genealogy* in 1977, and that sort of got people interested and thinking, “Hey wait, there are records I can look at.” You know, to know that there were these censuses, I don't think most people knew 1838, 1847, 1858 Black censuses existed. People need to know that they're there. He made sure that there was a book called *Black Genealogy* that said, “Hey, there's these records and you can go get them.” So yeah, he was amazing.

Selena: I think this is really an important recognition of him because so many people know the remarkable Blockson Collection at Temple, which is just absolutely vast and incredible, and I encourage everybody who's doing Black Philadelphia research to look into it. We must give due credit to Charles Blockson, especially in this first episode, because we can't do a Black history in Philadelphia podcast without talking about him.

Michiko: We stand on great shoulders.

Selena: Speaking of great shoulders, this is an interesting moment in time for us too that we're living in. We just had a major election with the appointment of the city's first Black woman mayor, Cherelle Parker. So I'd love to dive into the politics of 1838 and the through lines connecting them to contemporary Philadelphia as we have just witnessed history right now.

Michiko: I mean, I, it's emotional for me because I read the names in these collections and I get to know the people. And there's one particular group, the Daughters of Africa, that is a group of Black women who were single or widowed. And I get emotional thinking about what they must feel. What they would have felt to see Cherelle Parker as the mayor of this city. So many times the mayor position in this city has been used against the Black community.

We'll go back to 1838, and we'll talk about the burning of Pennsylvania Hall, when the mayor had the keys and did not properly protect an incredible building that people had spent years putting in and would have been a pearl in Pennsylvania's cap. Okay. A beautiful 3,000-seat building dedicated to justice, allowed to burn. There's been a little bit of an allowance of things burning when it comes to Black history and that throughline has come all the way up into the '80s with the MOVE bombing, there's always a sense of “Oh, well, let it go.”

So for me, it's very restorative. I feel like all these people who were now just resurfacing all the things they did, it was buried, it wasn't valorized. It wasn't talked about as how important it was.

We're bringing it up, we're finding the Daughters of Africa's minute book, we're finding what they did, how they got along but more than that, we're thinking of a group of women who lived together and supported each other. There's a phrase in the Bible that says, you know, “He's going to do more than we can even imagine.” I think it's from Ephesians. I don't think they could imagine a Black woman mayor in Philadelphia.

It feels restorative because of all of this history of people just not being able to rely on a municipal authority, of needing to build their own municipalities within churches, of needing to be so full of support for each other because there wasn't any when it came to you being a free Black person in the municipality of Philadelphia. Right? And now here we have Cherelle Parker.

I feel almost as if there's a dance going on. There's this Nigerian saying that says about the god Eshu, Eshu is like the god of chaos and time. It says, "Eshu threw a stone today that killed a bird yesterday." I think about Chelle Parker and just the joy and the energy around a Black woman mayor throwing the stone back and sort of beating something up in the past.

I think about just a joyous celebration of the Daughters of Africa in 1830 somehow feeling, somehow having the creative imagination to have this happen at this time. So I know that's probably a little bit more emotional than I had intended, but that's what it makes me think about.

Selena: It's inspiring to have a Black woman mayor who also was born and brought up in this city, and has gone through the city, through its school system, and experienced it and lived in the same streets that we're talking about.

Michiko: Who knows, maybe she's got some ties to the 1838 census.

Selena: We'll just have to have Katy do her genealogy.

Katy: Yeah, sign me up.

Selena: It's incredible how much we can connect this community to the city that we know. It really is, drawing these through lines that you were talking about. And of course, so much of that is thanks to your work with the Black Metropolis Project.

Michiko: Thank you. It's a lot of work. It's an archive that just sucks you in. Once you start, you go down to the rabbit holes and you keep uncovering things. You know, it's kind of sad in a way that some things, some historians, I would say like Emma Lapsansky-Werner, for example, doing this archive justice, right? Like all of her work on Banneker, all of the things she was able to surface from this archive.

But then you do wonder, like, there's so many other things that went to really go into it. Like, for example, we just found the connection between, well, we found an organization called the Agriculture Mechanic Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. That sounds like a lot. Sounds like a modern organization. It's 1839. And it was the same leaders as the Vigilance Committee.

So you had the people in the Vigilance Committee also leading this economic group who were taking stocks, and issuing stock certificates, and then using the monies raised from that to then create, we know of one mortgage for a woman named Margaret Williams.

So here you have like these sophisticated economic instruments being used and we have the stock book here. The notes about how it's being used are here and the Jacob C. White collection with all of his receipts. Of course it's Jacob C. White Sr. who needs the whole like five podcasts just for the work he did.

And I think people always think, well, the Vigilance Committee was aiding people, giving them clothing, and housing, but wait, are they also resettling people? Jacob C. White is purchasing tracks of land in New Jersey. Why is he doing that? Probably because he's going to get people who need to live somewhere there and settled.

So, we don't give agency enough, or strategy, strategic thinking enough or economic sophistication enough to free Black populations. I'd like to see historians do that, to go back and just really honor what is in these records, and really, really read them. Because when you do, then you start seeing all of the things that we, you know, Morgan and I have been able to kind of surface.

I have to also call out Melvin Garrison who did an amazing job of getting this information out and making sure it got into the Philadelphia Public School System. There was a whole round of work, Julie Winch was involved, really making sure the school system had a lot of basic information. But we really need a sociologist to go back and run the numbers on the 1838 census, and run it in comparison to other censuses that were happening, and really, really be able to tell a story that does not include bias.

[Frank Johnson's "Grave of the Slave," instrumental by B.E. Farrow plays]

Selena: Well, sticking with that theme, I think it's important to talk about how our listeners can find some of these sources, can find these records, and maybe even find their own ancestors embedded within the metropolis. I mean, if we want people to do it, the conversation starts here with this base of knowledge that we are hoping to give. I think we really can be the first stepping stone into uncovering more. And just inviting people into the archives, not just here at HSP, but into the archives in general to really start finding deeper stories in the records.

With that said, it's my pleasure to reintroduce Katy Bodenhorn-Barnes, who has been with us on the podcast, but she is also our in-house genealogist at HSP. Katy, can you please guide our listeners on how they can find their families in these stories and how they might be able to navigate these records?

Katy: Yeah, absolutely. This is something we're going to be talking about bit by bit over this whole podcast, because as you said, we want our listeners to be able to find that information necessary to tell their own stories, to put themselves in this historical narrative, and find out how their ancestors were part of this American story, especially these parts that have not been told the way that they should have.

The general idea for just getting down to brass tacks practicality is that you want to go into detective mode. That's probably going to start with interviewing those living archives in your life. Your grandma, your great uncle, you know, those people. But when we're talking about this 1838 period, there are also a lot of historical documents. When I talk about being a document detective, that's kind of what I'm speaking of, is getting into these historical records and using them, following the breadcrumbs and seeing where they lead. One record will say something about your ancestor that will lead you to another record and so on.

There's a huge variety of records. They're going to vary by family, and they're located all over the place. You've got some of them that are online. There are lots of them in archives like HSP or the Library of Congress or even in Grandma's attic. Another good reason to start with a family that you know. You want to start with yourself, with your parents, ask those questions about, "Where are you from?" "What school did you go to?" "What's your birthday?" You know?

I think there was a study a while back about like, something like a quarter of Americans don't even know where their grandparents were born. So start there trying to answer those questions. And then going back from there, you can start getting into these earlier periods.

So I'm going to cover a couple of the kinds of records that your ancestors might appear in. We've been talking about this 1838 Pennsylvania Abolition Society Census. I want to use that as a launch pad to show how you can find people in other historical records, kind of using the information that you get there. And as always, we will have links and specifics in our show notes, which you can find on our website.

We've talked about the 1838 census, which you can find page by page, all of it, at 1838blackmetropolis.com for free. It's incredible. Even if you don't have ancestors recorded in this census, it doesn't matter. It's fascinating, go look at it. It's such a beautiful and educational resource.

So from the genealogical perspective, what can it tell you? Michiko hit on some of it earlier, but it's basically going to go by the households. So it's going to give mostly the names of adult men, but also some widowed or single women. It gives occupations for the adults in the households, what church they attended, the worth of the property they owned, whether they were freeborn or had been enslaved and later manumitted and yes, how much it cost them to free themselves or to be freed.

We also talked a little bit ago about the 1840 federal census taken a couple of years later and how it contains only a tiny fraction of that information. But that's another resource that you can use. The US has been taking a census every 10 years since 1790, most Black people are not on it until 1870 forward because of slavery, but that's not the case in a place with a high free Black population like Philadelphia. So 1840 is an option for you, but there's also 1820, 1830, 1850 after that.

From the 1838 Abolition Society Census, we're actually going to follow an example. We've got John P. Burr listed on the 1838 census, page 20. He's working as a hairdresser, which was in occupation in 1838. It sounds very modern, but that's what he was doing.

It doesn't list the name of his wife, but it says that she was a shopkeeper, and they had a pretty large household. We're talking ten people total, at least seven of whom it seems were probably children. It says five of them were of the age to attend school. They were going to school, and all ten were born in Pennsylvania, the census says. Though if you're using the 1838 census to research your own ancestors, that actually wasn't the case for a lot of the Burr's neighbors. There's a column about whether they're a native of the state or if they came from somewhere else.

It was common, obviously, for people to come into Philly from elsewhere. Three members of the Burr household attended church and they did so at the famous St. Thomas African Episcopal. And that was on 5th Street at the time.

Selena: Are we able to pinpoint where they're living considering they went to church at St. Thomas AME?

Katy: Yeah, actually the census does give that information and they were actually living on 5th street themselves at 113 South 5th street. That's so interesting to me because it's right, if you look on a map, a modern map, that's right in the dead center of Philly's historic sites today. It is a block from Independence Hall and it's around the back of Library Hall of the American Philosophical Society, which was founded by Benjamin Franklin.

Now, the Burr's house no longer stands. There aren't any buildings at that address today at all. It's a park. But I still think it's very fitting that that's where they were living since John Pierre Burr is the son

of—unacknowledged, I believe—son of former US vice president, Aaron Burr of *Hamilton* fame to some of you, and a woman of color was working as a servant in his household.

John Pierre Burr was also a noted abolitionist of the time. It's only been confirmed by DNA in recent years that he was Aaron Burr's biological son. That is a rabbit hole we do not have time to go down, but it was so interesting encountering him just on that one page of the census. Maybe your ancestors are not as notable within Pennsylvania, within Philadelphia, but that 1838 census is going to capture them just the same.

Selena: So he was a Burr, but it really wasn't confirmed until the advent of DNA analysis. But I'm wondering if he appears in other records.

Katy: Yeah, he absolutely does, including in Philadelphia. Like I mentioned, the 1840 census, he's in there. But again, it's just kind of his name and a tick mark about the people in his household, their sex, and their ages. So not a lot of detail on that. But there was also a city directory made every year in Philadelphia starting in 1785, and Black people were included in them in Philly for the first time in 1795.

Now, a city directory was a precursor to phone books. I was kind of giving that a shout out for the younger listeners, but I guess phone books aren't really a thing anymore, so it's still kind of an archaic reference. But you could use these books to look people up, alphabetically by their surname and get their address and their occupation. So for that 1839 directory in Philly, we've got John P. Burr listed as a barber, you know, that corresponds to his occupation as a hairdresser on the 1838 census. confirms his address on 5th Street.

So if I wanted to, I could keep tracing John forward in the different volumes and years. Maybe your ancestors moved and you can use the city directory to trace their addresses and then you can map those and kind of get an idea where they lived. Some of them may have changed occupations over time, and that's documented in a city directory as well.

You can find these city directories for free at archive.org online. I'll put this in the show notes, but the oft-mentioned Temple University has actually made a really great compilation of these Philly city directories and where to find them. And some other years and places are online at ancestry.com. You'll want to use both in tandem. While Ancestry is not free, it is a subscription site, you can access it for free by coming to visit HSP or the Library of Congress. You can do that in person.

If you're not local to here, or you can't come in, most public libraries also have an online, free subscription to Ancestry and other genealogy websites. I know at HSP, we have Ancestry, we have Find My Past, we have newspapers.com. Don't just think of us as a library for materials. Use us, use your public library as a place to access those online resources for you doing your genealogy.

Then lastly, we know John P. Burr also has a death certificate. which is kind of unusual because unlike many places in the US during this time period, that were not keeping death certificates, the government was not keeping death certificates, Philly was. They started doing that in a systematic way starting in 1860. There were some death certificates, death records, cemetery records kept in the city even earlier than that, just not as consistently.

We know that from his death certificate, that John Pierre Burr died in 1864. Nearing the end of the Civil War, that would have been so significant to him as an abolitionist, and that he was buried at Olive Cemetery,

which was a historically Black cemetery in Philly. Death records for Philadelphia City you can find online at FamilySearch.org. Those are actually for free if you have an account. Again, HSP is an affiliate library for FamilySearch, so you can also view those here.

Just a side note, Pennsylvania as a Commonwealth didn't start keeping death certificates until 1906. So you might have trouble finding death certificates for your ancestors prior to 1906 if they lived outside of Philadelphia. But really that kind of varied by time and place.

Anyway, that's what I have for you so far. There's so much more I could say, but we'll be doing this genealogy thing every episode. My purpose here is really just trying to light a fire in you to go and research your own family, find out where they fit into the story, see if this generates some memories of what you've heard from your family in the past, and document it.

Selena: Something that you said that I think we will say every episode is talk to your people. Talk to your parents, talk to your grandparents, your aunts, your uncles, your cousins, talk to your people, because that is your first stop. And from there, you can dive into the historical record.

Thank you so much, Katy, for that excellent information, which I'm sure can kickstart our listeners who are really eager to jump into their family history research journey. And of course, thank you so much, Michiko, for sharing your wealth of knowledge and expertise with us today. We encourage all of our listeners to explore the 1838 Black Metropolis both on social media and on their website at 1838blackmetropolis.com.

They have assembled an amazing collection of resources available to you for free, and it is all available on their website. A special thank you to Matt Skic and the Museum of the American Revolution for the use of their recordings of Frank Johnson's original compositions and to Stephanye, our advisor; Bella, our audio tech; and of course, the Library of Congress for bringing this podcast to life.

If you're interested in learning more about what you heard today, please make a research appointment at HSP. You can come and physically hold and read these documents, sift through our archives yourself. We're open to the public Tuesday through Friday. Make an appointment, submit questions to our librarians, and more at hsp.org. For updates on this podcast, as well as other fun HSP news and tidbits, follow us on social media, [@historicalpa](https://twitter.com/historicalpa).

Thank you for tuning into our very first episode of Resurrecting Voices, the Philadelphia Black Experience. We hope you'll join us next time as we sit down with Michiko's counterpart, Morgan Lloyd, to unpack William Still and the Underground Railroad in Philadelphia. Until then, I'm Selena Bemak with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Credits

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