**Eliza and Dunmore Gwynn**

Eliza and Dunmore Gwynn were two enslaved people from a plantation in Stafford County, Virginia. The plantation owner’s son, Moncure Conway, was a minister and abolitionist in Ohio. The Conways fled their Virginia plantation as the Union Army moved in.

As Union soldiers began to ransack the plantation, a soldier recognized Moncure’s portrait and his work as good abolitionist. The looting stopped. The Union Army instead turned Conway’s boyhood home into a hospital for the troops. Moncure’s father would be told the story by the wounded soldiers after a flag of truce was flown.

In 1862, Moncure received a note saying the Qwynns had made it to Georgetown, but that the rest of their enslaved family was still on the plantation. He resolved to bring them all to Yellow Springs. Moncure went to Washington D.C. where he got President Lincoln’s blessing and warned of the dangers of such a mission. Moncure knew of one childhood friend in Georgetown, an escaped slave named Benjamin Williams, who might help him to find the Qwynns. The Qwynns were found to have set up a candy store, but they were ready to move on and reunite with their family.

Despite all Moncure’s plans to find his father’s slaves in Virginia, when he knocked on Benjamin Williams’ cabin and announced his name there was a shout and the door flung open. The small house was filled with exhausted adults, sleeping children, their worldly possessions, and a sense of hope - all of Conway’s plantation slaves had made the walk from Virginia themselves.

Getting to Ohio would be difficult. Washington and Maryland were full of proslavery and Confederate gangs. The large group of Conway’s plantation families also posed a challenge; they could be mistaken as being enslaved to be shipped into Maryland. As the Conway-led group approached the train station, they were surrounded by curious bystander. Then as the Conway band whispered their destination to freedom, the hostile crowd became very joyful. That celebration was noted and by the time they reached the train station, the abolitionist crowd was replaced by a very angry anti-abolitionist mob. Viewing the mob the Railroad ticket agent would not sell Moncure tickets. When he saw Moncure’s military order that mentioned his “father’s slaves,” the agent mistakenly assumed Moncure was taking his group to be sold and was delighted to sell Moncure the tickets and gave them a whole car to themselves.

Moncure viewed Dunmore as the patriarch of the plantation group. Moncure wrote “he and his family were the colored gentry of the region…Eliza being near as chamberlain to suggest my role and support me in it.” Other names in the Conway party were Harrod, Hempstead, Cuffee, Morgan, and Taylor.

The group succeeded in reaching Yellow Springs. In 1862 Moncure Conway set up housing (known as the Conway Colony), for the group of 30 freed slaves to settle in. The ruins of the Conway House may still be seen in the underbrush on the hill heading down to the Grinnell Mill.

*Jean Payne*

 