

Resource Sheet #7

Edward Gorsuch (b. 1798 - d. 1851)

MSA SC 5496-7018

Slave owner, Baltimore County, Maryland

Biography:

Edward Gorsuch of Baltimore County is best known for his role in the Christiana slave uprising in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. On May 28, 1851, Gorsuch petitioned the United States District Court for the Maryland region for the return of 6 of his runaway slaves. His petition was to obtain the benefits of the act of Congress approved September 18, 1850 entitled *An Act Respecting Fugitives from Justice*.¹ Gorsuch acquired the slaves listed in his petition, among other things, including a large amount of land and property under the will of his uncle, John M. Gorsuch of Baltimore County, who died in the summer of 1845. Edward's Uncle's deed of manumissions revealed the length of servitude owed for each slave beginning in 1833. Along with this information, Edward also described his six missing slaves. The witness for Gorsuch was his brother Thomas T. Gorsuch, who lived within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from Edward's farm, and testified that he knew the slaves Noah, Nelson, Joshua, Eli and Charles.

The first slave was described as a bright mulatto man named Noah Baley, twenty-four years old, who was to serve twenty-two years beginning in 1833. He was 5'9" or 5'10" in height and "tolerable stout built." The second, described as a Black man named Nelson Ford, twenty-three years old, was to serve twenty-three years. He was described as dark brown, nearly black, and stood "about 5 feet 7 inches (perhaps a little under that height)" with round shoulders and who "talked fast and was rather timid." The third, a described as a Negro man George Hammond, called Hammond by Thomas Gorsuch, was twenty-four years old, was to serve twenty-two years. He was 5'8" or 5'10" in height. The fourth, described as a dark Mulatto man named Joshua Hammond, was twenty years old, and was to serve twenty-six years. He was described as well grown, 5'9" or 5'10" in height, dark brown, and appeared older than he really was. The fifth was described as a dark Mulatto man named Eli Ford, twenty-six years old, was to serve twenty years. He was described as dark yellow, 5'4" or 5'5" in height, with a "nose broad and flat at the end, particularly broad and flat at the end, the broadness did not run up the nose." The last was described as a Black man named Charles Ford, twenty eight years old, who was to serve eighteen years. He was described as 5'3" or 5'4" in height with "arms rather short and had a peculiarity in his walk."

The slaves Noah, Nelson, George and Joshua escaped from Edward on November 6, 1849. Eli and Charles escaped from Edward's Uncle John M. Gorsuch on May 12, 1844, fleeing his Baltimore County land prior to his death.

Gorsuch received a letter from William Padgett, a farm worker in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, saying that he knew where his slaves were hiding. Gorsuch gathered some of his family members and local whites and headed to Pennsylvania via train. Once in Philadelphia, they met up with Deputy Federal Marshal Henry Kline, completed the necessary paperwork,

and then continued in pursuit of the escaped slaves. On September 11, 1851, as Gorsuch, his party, and Padgett were making their way to capture the slaves. Early on they were spotted by one of the slaves, who then hid in the home of William Parker, a known Black abolitionist in Christiana, a small town in Lancaster County. Parker met Gorsuch and his party at the door and refused to give the slaves up. As Parker confronted Gorsuch, Parker's wife Eliza opened a second floor window and blew a horn, which was an alarm for local African Americans. She was shot at (but not hit) by a member of Gorsuch's entourage, but not before townspeople armed with guns and various weapons responded to the alarm. Gunfire was exchanged, and Gorsuch's son, Dickinson, was badly wounded but managed to flee to a nearby cornfield. Edward Gorsuch himself was killed. Thirty-six Blacks and five white men were indicted for high treason against the United States as a result of the so-called 'Christina Riot.' All of the defendants were found not guilty.

<http://www.msa.md.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5400/sc5496/007000/007018/html/007018bio.html>