KATY FERGUSON

Catherine Ferguson, the founder of the first Sabbath school in the City of New York, was born during 1774 while her slave mother, in passage from Virginia to New York, where she had been sold. As was not unusual under that system, mother and daughter were later separated when the mother became the property of another owner. This occurred when Katy, as she was known, was eight years of age.

The little girl who was later to become widely known for her religious and social welfare undertakings in the interests of the young, was allowed to attend the religious services of the Reverend Dr. John M. Mason, who was to befriend upon an occasion that she sought his advice. It was at these services that this illiterate slave girl stored within her excellent memory the knowledge of the scriptures that was later to form the basic teachings of her school.

When sixteen years of age, Katy was so fortunate as to have been purchased by a woman of abolitionist sentiments for the sum of two hundred dollars, who returned half of the sum to her in eleven months service, promising her freedom on payment of one hundred dollars. Katy received the promised money at the end of the stipulated period and through the kindness of Divee Bethune, a philanthropic merchant of the city, received her freedom.
Established in the profession of cake baker, a capacity in which she was known to hostess of the city for fifty years, Katy was married at eighteen and shortly after became the mother of two children.

It was with the loss of her own children while living on Warren Street that Katy became interested in the children of the neighborhood; an interest which grew to include the adolescent inmates of alms houses and orphan asylums. Collecting the children of the neighborhood, both black and white, Katy began the practice of taking them into her home on Sunday and giving them religious instruction. Her work having secured the approval of the adults of the neighborhood, she brought in as many white adults as she could interest as assistants. She was later aided in this work by Isabella Graham, the wife of Rev. Bethune, and the founder of The Society for the Relief of Poor Widows, the Magdalene Society, and other organizations of this nature, who sometimes allowed the school to meet in her home as a relief measure.

Engaged in such work at a time when there was widespread disorganization of the family and large sections of the population of the city in a dissolute condition, Katy attracted the attention of many of the prominent people; Dr. Mason was one of these. Hearing of the progress of this protege, his father, he visited Katy's school and was so impressed that he invited her to transfer her school to the basement of his new church on Murray Street. This was done; and the Murray Street Sabbath School, the first school of its kind, was established.

As active as she was in this work, Katy Ferguson's
philanthropic interests did not end here; during her life she took forty-eight children, twenty of them white, from the almshouses of dissolute parents and brought them up out of her own earnings or secured good homes for them about the city. Respected for her work and the subject of many tracts telling of her high character and effective works, Katy Ferguson died July, 11, 1854.

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**SOURCES** This material has been compiled from the brief and inadequate accounts in Lossing's "INFLUENT AMERICANS" and in "COLORED AMERICANS", by Mott, Field, And Wood. These are to be found in the Schomburg Collection.
Washington (signing the Declaration of Independence)

Perhaps the most famous of all incidents of Washington, this

act with undiminished popularity continues to be a great favorite.

To many of us, it is symbolic of the entire history of our

country — the dangers and hardships of the early days, the strength

and courage of the pioneers and the masterful leadership

of Washington.

Regent Building Sketches

Made by H. Twyford 1862
Catherine (Katy) Ferguson, a Negro woman, born a slave, may be regarded as belonging to the tradition of Frances Coppin, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. Her contribution was not that of an abolitionist, however, but rather, of a humanitarian.

The historian, Lossing, states that Catherine (who sometime in the year 1794, was generally known as Katy) was born a slave, while her mother was passing from Virginia to New York. At the early age of eight she saw her mother sold from her and this "taught her to sympathize with desolate children."

She secured her freedom partly through her own efforts, and partly through the benevolence of others. "A benevolent lady purchased Katy's freedom for $200, when she was sixteen years of age, and allowed her $100 of it, for 11 months service. The excellent Divie Bethune raised the other $100, and Katy became free." (Lossing)

At eighteen she was married, and she had two children. She lost these children, and this factor, combined with her early experience, set her off upon the career for which she was famed. From that time on "she put forth pious efforts for the good of bereaved and desolate little ones." (Lossing) She immediately began to gather around her children from almshouses and the offspring of dissolute parents. She reared 48
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children, twenty of them white, and as rapidly as she could, found homes for them.

Katy gathered about her, in her home in Warren Street, the needy children of the neighborhood. One report reads: "Sometimes the sainted Isabella Graham would invite Catherine and her schools to her house, and there hear them recite the catechism, and give them instruction." (Hallie Q. Brown)

Finally Dr. Mason, her early influence, heard of her school and made a visit. "What are you about here, Katy," he asked. "Keep your school on the Sabbath?"

Katy was troubled, for she thought the question a rebuke. "This must not be, Katy; you must not be allowed to do this work alone," he continued; and then he invited her to transfer her school to the basement of his new church in Murray Street, where he procured assistants for her. (Brown)

"In the 1922 edition of Cubberley's History of Education we find this: In 1793 Katy Ferguson's School for the Poor was opened in New York, and this was followed by an organization of New York women for the extension of secular instruction among the poor. So meager were opportunities for education of any sort for the poor that this effort is given significant place in..."
the early beginnings of American education. The Sunday School movement, originated by John Wesley and worked out in England by Raikes in 1780, had two years previous made a start in Philadelphia. Katy Ferguson, with no knowledge of the Raikes' movement, with scant material, and with no preparation save her piety and her warm mother's heart, gave to New York City its first Sunday School; and because Sunday Schools at first gave secular as well as religious instruction, her name is regarded with other early American educators. (Brown)

With the passage of the years and the growth of Katy Ferguson's movement, her school was addressed by eminent divines of the period. The Rev. Dr. Ferris, once chancellor of New York University, acknowledged an indebtedness to the experience he gained at her school. (Brown)

She died of cholera in New York on July 11, 1854, at the age of 75 years. Her last words were: All is well. (Lossing)
About the year 1774, Katy Ferguson was born. Her mother was a slave, and was taken from her young child and sold to another master.

"Uneducated and unaided in her parental duties, this poor Christian mother had been faithful to the extent of her abilities, and left upon the mind of her child indelible religious impressions. Katy, in speaking of this cruel separation many years afterward, said: 'Mr. B. sold my mother, and she was carried away from me; but I remember that before they tore us asunder, she kneeled down, laid her hand upon my head, and gave me to God.'

"Katy's active mind sought every opportunity of acquiring knowledge. Her mother had taught her much that she herself remembered of the Scriptures. Other persons had taught her the catechism, and her retentive memory seldom lost what had been committed to it." She became the founder of the first Sabbath School in the City of New York. --NARRATIVES OF COLORED AMERICANS, by A. Mott & A.S. Wood, New York, Bowes & Co., 1862.
as the summer of 1706:

"By his excellency, Edward Lord Viscount Cornbury, Captain-General and Governor in Chief of the Provinces of New York, New Jersey, and the territories depending thereon in America, and Vice-Admiral of the same, etc. Whereas, I am informed that several negroes in Kings County have assembled themselves in a riotous manner, which if not prevented, may prove of ill consequence; you and every of you are therefore hereby required and commanded to take all proper methods for the seizing and apprehending of all such negroes in the said county as shall be found to be assembled in such manner as aforesaid, or have run away or absconded from their masters or owners, whereby there may be reason to suspect them of ill practices or designs, and to secure them in safe custody, that their crimes and actions may be inquired into; and if any of them refuse to submit themselves, then to fire on them, kill or destroy them, if they cannot otherwise be taken; and for so doing this shall be your sufficient warrant. Given under my hand at Fort Anne in New York, the 22d day of July, 1706. "Cornbury.

"To the Justices of the Peace in Kings County, and to any or every of them."

"Although there were some instances of unruly slaves upon this island, as is indicated by the preceding
proclamation of the Governor, yet as a general thing they
were a peaceable, orderly race, much attached to the fam-
ilies in which they were owned, and where they would remain
from generation to generation; the only separation that
was known was when some of the younger members of the
family would marry and leave the homestead to keep house
for themselves, one or two of the younger slaves would
voluntarily accompany them to form the new household,
and in some instances where an old negro wench had acted
as the dry nurse of her young master or mistress, she
would insist upon accompanying them, which was almost
invariably consented to, although her services would
be of little value, unless it might be as a kind of
oracle for the family in all matters of old family his-
tory, or of the weather, which she would deliver with
great show of importance and no little pride, from the
kitchen chimney-corner, a seat appropriated to her use,
knowing that all the other members of the household
were too young to know much, if anything, about it.
And she, together with the other old negroes of the fa-
mily, would become high authority in all the numberless
superstitions which are accustomed to congregate about
a farmer's kitchen fireside; where the younger members
of the household, white and colored, would delight to
assemble on the long winter evenings to hear their
stories...
us who had been brought upon the western part of Long Island, even within the last forty years. The general docility of these slaves and their long connection with the families, caused them to be highly valued when an occasion did offer for a sale or a valuation, as upon the event of the death of the proprietor. In an inventory taken on the 16th of December, 1719, in Kings County, on this island of the estate of a deceased person, a negro wench and child are valued at £60, while five milch cows, five calves, three young bulls and two heifers were collectively valued at £80.

"Previous to our Revolutionary war there were, besides negro slaves, a species of white servants from Europe, who, upon emigrating to this country, sold their services, for a certain number of years. By some they were called apprentices, but that term, as now used, will not convey a proper idea of the situation of these persons. They were as much the subject of sales during the period of their service as the negro slaves, as we find in the New York Gazette of December 24, 1767, the following advertisement: 'To be disposed of, the remaining time, being about three years, of three German servants, one a baker by trade, one a butcher, and the other a laborer. They are very industrious, good men, whose honesty has been tried, and may be had on reasonable terms. Inquire of the printer hereof.' On examining the old journals of the General Assembly of the
province of New York, from 1691 to 1763, I found, par-
ticularly between 1691 and 1725, many regulations in
relation to 'negro and Indian slaves'..." (—ANTIQUI-
TIES OF LONG ISLAND, 'by Gabriel Furman, New York, J.J.
Bouton, 1874, pp. 221-225)

"When the western and southwestern parts of this
State were first settled, there being but very few mills...they adopted as a substitute these seed mortars...This
process, however, was slow, it being a day's work to
convert half a bushel of corn into coarse meal. The
settlers who owned a few slaves employed them in this
work; and hence this process was vulgarly called in
that part of the State 'niggering corn.' On Long Is-
land, however, this duty was performed by the young men
and stout boys in the family, although in some cases there
it was also done by the negroes. Slavery existed upon
Long Island and also in most other parts of this State,
only in name, for no distinction as to the kind of work
to be performed was made between the slaves and the white
young men and boys of the household. They were almost
universally treated with great kindness, and were a care-
less, happy race of mortals, and when they became too
old for work, they were not cast off, but cherished and
taken care of by the family in whose services they had
spent their best days." Ibid, pp. 228, 229
TONEY, CHARLES EDWARD .... Municipal Court Judge; NY County Lawyer's Association; and the Executive of the United Colored Democracy.

WATSON, JAMES W .... SPECIAL Assistant Corporation Counsel from 1922-30; was appointed Judge in 1931.

WRIGHT, LOUIS THOMPKINS .... In 1929 he became the first Negro surgeon on the permanent staff of the Harlem Hospital. In January he was appointed Police Surgeon - in this also the first of his race.

Wheaton, J Frank .... Member NY Bar Association ....