

The Father Tolton Guild

OFFICIAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF
THE CAUSE OF CANONIZATION OF FATHER AUGUSTUS TOLTON (1854-1897)

New Research in the Life and Times of Fr. Augustus Tolton: Just the Facts

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On August 6th, 1863, a ten year old boy by the name of Augustus stood with some members of his family and other slaves on the grounds of the Elliott family farm in Ralls County, Missouri. They were there because the owner of the farm, Stephen E. Elliott, died failing to leave a will. Stephen Elliott's wife, Ann Sevila Elliott, was forced to sell off the assets of the farm to settle the estate and pay creditors. Ann engaged the services of a George L. Hardy, to administer the settlement of the estate. To that end, Mr. Hardy and his associates were charged to; "... make a perfect inventory of, and faithfully administer all of the estate..."; of Mr. Elliott. Augustus and his family were there to be inspected and appraised for their relative worth to the Elliott estate. Poor Augustus did not appear to be feeling well, as a copy (below), of a portion of that inventory documents. He was noted to be "afflicted" (sic).



one Blackman 21 years old. named Charles - - - \$100.00
one Blackwoman 32 years old named Martha 50.00
one Blackgirl 15 years old named Cordelia 75.00
one Blackgirl 12 years old named Ann 75.00
one Blackboy 10 years old named Augustus (afflicted) 25.00
one Blackboy 6 months old named Ben - - - 1.00
one Blackboy 3 months old named Nat - - - 1.00
The above slaves were conveyed to the widow by her
grand Father John Manning of the State of Kentucky 33/4/63

All the property of the estate is listed in the inventory submitted to the Ralls County Court: every knife, spoon, shovel, harness, livestock animal, table and chair, including the human property. Everything was given a value.

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A ten year old boy was evaluated at the same price (\$25.00) of a twelve year old Bay Mare (horse).

one bay mare - - 12 years old - - - - - 25.00

These documents contradict previously held beliefs about the date Augustus' mother, Martha, and her children escaped slavery and fled to Illinois. But these documents do prove they escaped slavery and that the escape was fraught with peril, as the Elliott will documents the hiring of slave hunters.

In the final settlement of the estate, the administrator, Mr. Hardy records the following credits to the estate and when they were incurred.

The Administrator claims the following Credits \$				cts
July 1863	Paid for publishing notice of letters	Boards etc 1	\$	00
"	" Joseph M Hampton services	2	1	50
"	" John D Clark "	3	2	00
"	" C & Lancaster etc "	4	1	75
Sept 21 "	Services of self & J. D. Clark			
	and expenses hunting fugitive slaves		10	00
	Paid, for stamps to go on bond & letters		7	00
	For collecting and preserving estate &			
	hiring out slaves		5	00
	The Administrator claims a credit			
	for the appraised value of the slaves, all			
	of whom have fled the state and are			
	entirely from under his power to control		337	40

Note that on September 21, 1863, the estate credited payments for services,

Services of self [Hardy] and J. D. Clark and expenses hunting fugitive slaves. Paid for stamps to go on bond and letters.
For collecting and preserving estate and hiring out slaves. The administrator claims a credit for the appraised value
of the slaves, all whom have fled the state and are entirely from under my power to control them.

These documents clearly indicate that Martha, her brother Charles, and Martha's children Cordelia, Ann and Augustus, and two infants, fled the Elliott farm sometime between July 11th and September 20th, 1863. It is almost certain that Martha's husband, Peter Lefevre (sometimes listed as Lefever), who was a slave on the nearby Hagar farm (documented in James F. Hager's will), fled with them. We know this because we found Peter's military record. Peter Lefever joined the Union Army on September 20, 1863 in Hannibal, Missouri at the age of 25. He died in a military hospital on January 12, 1864 in the Regiment Hospital, Helena, Arkansas. The cause of his death is listed as, "congestive intermittents."

History is based on facts, found in records, and interpretations of records and events by trained historians who are able to put those events in the context of the times and places they occur. When records are scarce or non-existent, oral histories or written testimony

based on memories may suffice as the only source of information. These newly found records, documents, and legal testimony both support and challenge the information long provided to us in oral histories.

Records show that Augustus' mother, Martha, begins the military pension application process on October 19, 1866 in the County of Marion, Missouri, before the Court of Common Pleas. In her application, Martha stated she was 39 years old and the widow of Peter Lefevre. She declared she married Peter Lefevre on October 20th, 1859, in Ralls County, Missouri, by Rev. Kelty (actually Kielty) and the name before her marriage was Martha Thompson. Her deposition further states that there were no living children from their marriage and that no official church or civil record exists. In order to prove her testimony she brought forth two witnesses Elisabeth Wilson and Emily Thompson who stated that they were at the marriage and knew Peter and Martha from 1859. Martha's claim was accepted and she began receiving a widow's pension of \$8.00, on January 13, 1864 until her death on November 10, 1911.

The wills of Stephen E. Elliott, and James F. Hager, the military records of Peter Lefevre, census records and many other documents recently discovered by a number of archivists working collaboratively in Rome, Chicago, Southern Illinois, Northeast Missouri and Louisiana have provided new insights into the origins and life of Augustus Tolton. Some of these documents contradict previous research and others leave us with still some unanswered questions but all support the notion that Fr. Tolton lived a remarkable life, from a humble childhood born into slavery to the first diocesan priest of African-American descent in the United States.

I am indebted to my archival colleagues, Michele Levandoski of the Diocese of Springfield, Illinois, and Dr. Emilie Gagnet Leumas of the Archdiocese of New Orleans for their contributions to this research. Michele's research of local sources in Quincy and Southern Illinois provided departure points for more primary research, and her tireless dedication to the cause is an inspiration. Emilie's expertise in researching slave records and her ability to document her findings in a report to the Commission is of immeasurable assistance.

There is still some more research to be done before we can say every document relating to Augustus' life and ministry has been explored, but we are close. There is so much more to tell about our research: what we have learned and what questions still need to be answered. **If you are interested in the rest of the story, please attend the Tolton Fundraising Gala, Sunday, October 27, 2013, at 12 noon. It will be held in the Union League Club, West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago.** Dr. Emilie Gagnet Leumas will speak on the latest research into the early life of Fr. Augustus Tolton.

A Page from the Past

Among the treasurers of the Right Reverend Monsignor Rihaneck, former rector of the Archiepiscopal Seminary in Prague, Czechoslovakia, is a copy of the "Leo" magazine of the year 1886, containing an account of the first Mass in America of the Reverend Augustine Tolton, first Negro priest in the United States.

Monsignor Rihaneck and Father Tolton were classmates at the Propaganda College in Rome. Lately, a transcript of the original German article was sent to us; the following is a translation:

"On the 18th of July, 1886, the Catholics of Quincy, Illinois, USA, celebrated a feast, beautiful and memorable. In their midst, where his youthful days were lived and where his virtuous mother and his sister dwell, Father Augustine Tolton, the first black priest in North America offered up the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The ceremonies were arranged for 10.30am in order that the members of other parishes might take part in the festivity. According to a report to the Cologne Volkszeitung, the pastor of St. Boniface Church, Father Bruener (formerly chaplain in Wadersloh, Diocese of Muenster) had adorned the church in festive splendor and carefully attended to all other arrangements.

The large church as filled to capacity with worshippers; the middle aisle having been reserved for Negroes. In the Mass of the young priest, his mother and sister and eighteen Negro members of his relationship received Holy Communion... the Reverend Father Tolton spent six years at the Propaganda College in Rome, taking his courses in philosophy and theology. He now assumes the spiritual care of the members of his race in that city where his mother found refuge. A church and a school are in readiness; and, as a gift on the occasion of his first Mass, he was presented with a well-furnished home."

OUR COLORED MISSIONS, VOL. XLVII, PP. 66-67

A Letter from the Past

TEUTOPOLIS, EFFINGHAM COUNTY, ILL.
MARCH 12, 1887

REV. AND DEAR SIR:

I AM IN RECEIPT OF YOUR ESTEEMED FAVOR OF THE 8TH INST., BY WHICH YOU SOLICIT INFORMATION ABOUT REV. AUGUST TOLTON, THE FIRST COLORED PRIEST OF THIS COUNTRY.

I MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MR. AUGUST TOLTON AT QUINCY, ILL., ABOUT THE YEAR 1877. I THEN HAD FORMED THE INTENTION TO DO SOMETHING FOR THE SPIRITUAL WELFARE OF THE COLORED PEOPLE AT QUINCY. I FOUND MR. AUGUST TOLTON TO BE PIOUS, MODEST AND A STUDIOUS YOUNG MAN, AND REQUESTED HIM TO AID ME IN MY UNDERTAKING, AS I WAS NOT ACQUAINTED WITH ANYBODY OF THE COLORED POPULATION.

SOON HE HAD A NUMBER OF CHILDREN TOGETHER, BOTH OF CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT PARENTS,

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A Letter from the Past continued from inside

WHOM I COMMENCED TO INSTRUCT IN THE CATHOLIC RELIGION EVERY SUNDAY. THE FIRST LESSONS I GAVE THEM IN THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL HOUSE OF ST. FRANCIS' CONGREGATION; BUT IN A SHORT TIME, FOR CONVENIENCE SAKE, WE LOCATED OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL IN THE CENTER OF THE CITY. THE COLORED CHILDREN LIKED IT SO WELL, THAT A PROPOSITION I MADE TO THEM, TO OPEN A FREE DAY SCHOOL, WAS HAILED WITH JOY. ALWAYS ASSISTED BY MR. AUGUST TOLTON AND HIS WORTHY MOTHER, AN ACCOMPLISHED LADY AND DEVOTED CATHOLIC, I SOON HAD A SCHOOLROOM IN AN ABANDONED SCHOOL HOUSE OF ST. BONIFACE'S CONGREGATION, BOTH REV. J. JANSSEN, THE RECTOR OF ST. BONIFACE'S CONGREGATION, AND GOOD CATHOLICS ASSISTING ME IN FURNISHING THE SAME.

AT MY REQUEST, THE REV. MOTHER CAROLINE, SUPERIORESS OF THE SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME AT MILWAUKEE, APPOINTED GRATUITOUSLY, SISTER M. HERLINDE TO TEACH AT THE SCHOOL, WHICH WE OPENED WITH TWENTY-ONE CHILDREN. NOTWITHSTANDING THE OPPOSITION AND INDIGNATION MEETINGS OF THE METHODIST AND BAPTIST COLORED CONGREGATIONS, WE SOON HAD FORTY CHILDREN AND WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR HAD, WITH THE HELP OF GOD THE HAPPINESS OF SOLEMNIZING SEVERAL TIMES, BAPTISMS, FIRST COMMUNIONS, CONFIRMATIONS AND MARRIAGES.

WHEN I, COMPELLED BY OVERWORK AND NERVOUS PROSTRATION, HAD TO LEAVE QUINCY, THE SCHOOL WAS CLOSED FOR SOME TIME BUT WAS REOPENED BY REV. THEODORE BRUENER, THEN RECTOR OF ST. BONIFACE'S CHURCH, AND IS EVER IN EXISTENCE, AND YET CONDUCTED BY THE SAME FAITHFUL AND ZEALOUS SISTER M. HERLINDE, ASSISTED BY A CANDIDATE. REV. BRUENER SECURED ALSO, NOT WITHOUT THE HELP OF THE FRANCISCAN MONASTERY OF QUINCY, CATHOLIC WORSHIP FOR THE LITTLE COLORED CONGREGATION IN THE SAME SCHOOL-HOUSE WHICH HAD BEEN A PROTESTANT CHURCH. REV. AUGUST TOLTON HAS, AT PRESENT, CHARGE OF THE WHOLE LITTLE AND DIFFICULT MISSION.

HERE YOU WISH TO KNOW HOW IT HAPPENED TO PASS, THAT MR. AUGUST TOLTON BECAME A PRIEST, AND WHO DIRECTED HIM TO ROME.

AS FAR AS I KNOW I CONCEIVED THAT IDEA FIRST AND COMMUNICATED IT TO THE LATE RIGHT REV. BISHOP P. I. BALTES. WHEN SOON THEREAFTER THAT PRELATE MADE HIS VISIT, AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM, HE TRIED TO GET THE YOUNG STUDENT, MR. A. TOLTON, INTO THE PROPAGANDA, BUT IN VAIN. I THEN WROTE TO OUR MOST REV. FATHER GENERAL, MOST REV. P. BERNADINO, A PARTU ROMETINO, WHO RESIDES AT ROME AND HE SUCCEEDED IN SECURING MR. A. TOLTON'S RECEPTION INTO THE COLLEGE "DE PROPAGANDA FIDE," WHERE HE, SOON THEREAFTER, BEGAN AND FINALLY ENDED HIS STUDIES.

I HAD LAST SUMMER THE HAPPINESS TO SEE HIM A PRIEST IN NEW YORK CITY, JUST ON HIS ARRIVAL FROM ROME. MAY IT PLEASE DIVINE PROVIDENCE TO ACHIEVE MUCH GOOD THROUGH REV. A. TOLTON FOR THE SALVATION OF THE COLORED RACE IN THIS COUNTRY.

WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT, I AM, DEAR SIR, YOURS IN CHRIST,

P. Michael Richardt, OSF

P. MICHAEL RICHARDT, OSF

RECTOR OF ST. JOSEPH'S DIOCESAN COLLEGE, TEUTOPOLIS, ILL.