

The Fulani of the Yarrowsburg Area

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July 4, 2017

It could have just as easily been called Yeroville or Mamadouville, but it wasn't. It took on the flavor of a German name. It became known as Yarrowsburg. So says James H. Johnston in his book, From Slave Ship to Harvard. It's *not* an incorporated community, but it doesn't matter because it's laden with history. And it's *not* important because of who lives there now, because it is a small community that tallied only 133 in the 2010 census. It is important because of what the name and area represent.

Yarrowsburg is located in Washington County, Maryland, right next to the state line of Virginia. It was home to the family of Yarrow, an 18th century Muslim Fulani slave who likely was born in the area known as Futa Jallon, found today within the borders of the country of Guinea, but known historically as the region of Senegambia.¹ Around 1752 Yarrow, also known as Yero Mamadou, was taken aboard the slave ship, *Elijah*, and brought to Annapolis, Maryland, which then was the Chesapeake Bay entry port for slaves.²

As a boy of sixteen when he arrived in Maryland in 1752, Yarrow brought with him his Muslim religion and a knowledge of Arabic.³ He was one of several slaves in colonial times known to be Muslim, although not the most well-known. That distinction belongs to another Fulani, Job ben Solomon, also known as Diallo. Like Yarrow, Diallo had grown up in Futa Jallon and had been enslaved in Africa by the Mandingo people and shipped to Maryland where it was learned that he was the son of an imam, educated in Arabic and the Koran, and quite ill-suited for hard physical slave labor. He eventually became a celebrity and returned to Africa.⁴

Other identifiable Fulani Muslim slaves who were brought to America, but not living in Maryland, were Abdul Rahman, another native of Futa Jallon, who lived in Mississippi, and Omar ibn Seid, brought in through Charleston, eventually ending up in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Both men could speak and write in Arabic. Rahman was allowed to return to Africa where he died.⁵ Omar, also known as Moro, a native of Futa Toro, remained in North Carolina and became a Christian convert.⁶

Yarrow Mamout, whose name is still with us today in the community of Yarrowsburg, served the Beall family in Maryland for many years until he finally was emancipated. He ended up in Georgetown, Washington, D. C., because of his connection with the Bealls who owned property there. Through the years, he saved his money, bought property, and invested in bank stock⁷. Like the rest of us, he had financial losses, but persevered and survived, living to the age of 87. Charles Willson Peale, the famous artist, painted his portrait in 1819, as did James Alexander Simpson in 1822.⁸

Although Georgetown became Yarrow's home, his son, Aquilla, and daughter-in-law, Polly, bought land in the Pleasant Valley farming area of Washington County, Maryland,

and settled there. After Aquilla died, his widow, Polly, worked as a midwife in the area, which was predominantly white, and, apparently, was so much appreciated that the community became known as Yarrowsburg.⁹

The focus on Yarrowsburg helps to concentrate history. While it is often difficult to wring genealogical information from recorded history, a place name such as Yarrowsburg provides a touchstone not just for a family, but for a tribe of people. In this case the tribe is the Fulani, a population of African nomads who, across the centuries, have migrated from northeast Africa all the way down into the West African countries of Mali, Guinea, and Cameroon, just to name a few. Along the way, they made conquests and planted their dna. From the 1600s into the 1800s, some of their people were caught, sold into slavery, and taken to the West Indies and America.

We will never know exactly how many of the slave cargo were Fulani. However, we have to assume that out of the 6,000 Africans brought into colonial America during the last quarter of the 17th century, the peak year being 1690, a good number were Fulani. In the early years the slaves that arrived came from the West Indies and the number was quite balanced between men and women. Many of these were already acclimated to the ways of the whites and spoke English. But this changed. By 1690, there were more slave men than women. The estimate is that there were 180 men for every 100 women.¹⁰

The proportion of men to women in the Chesapeake Bay region had its impact. Blacks, whites, and Indians often worked side by side. And unlike the experience of slavery in the Lowcountry region of South Carolina, there was more openness in relationships in the Chesapeake.¹¹ Although white female servants were not enslaved like their black counterparts, they *were indentured*, which meant they belonged to their masters for a set number of years. So there was a level of camaraderie and intimacy among laborers, not restricted by law, which produced offspring. Those offspring that were born of a white indentured servant were free. Those born of a female slave were not.

By 1700 slavery had not begun to reach its peak in the Chesapeake Bay area. Africans would continue to be bought and sold. The numbers would be greater than ever. But, it would be a mistake to assume that slavery had not already had a tremendous impact. One plantation owner declared even before 1690 that all of his slaves were native-born, suggesting that slavery had long been a fixture.¹² With new cargos yet to come, there would be more diversity of Africans than ever.

Diversity, though, is a whole different topic and only incidental information for our consideration. Our focus is on the Fulani who were in the mix of the slave cargos that arrived through Chesapeake Bay in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Philip Morgan, author of Slave Counterpoint, reports that “three-quarters of the Africans during this time were from Senegambia and the Bight of Biafra.”¹³ Add to this the presence of Senegambians on the plantation of William Byrd in 1686 and the subsequent enslavements of Job ben Solomon in 1731 and Yarrow Mahout in 1752 and

you can easily see a significant number of Fulani slaves in the Chesapeake area, even if you are not always able to identify them genealogically.¹⁴

James Johnston reports that, in addition to the two Fulani of Maryland who became known for their Muslim education and background, there were a few others who can also be identified. In this regard he mentions that among the thirty-three slaves named in the will of slave owner, Joseph Wilson of Rockville, there were two that seemed to have a Fulani name origin. One was Isaac and the other, Yarmouth. Additionally, there was actually another slave named Yarrow who, like the first Yarrow, probably also came from Futa Jallon.¹⁵

The Fulani are different from their African neighbors in several ways. And this, of course, cannot be overlooked in an assessment of their identity. First, they are a people with some interesting Caucasian features such as lighter skin and facial characteristics. To look at Diallo, for example, is to see facial characteristics that are not too different from many whites. And to view the portrait of Yarrow is to see a skin tone that is lighter than some Africans, perhaps owing to time spent among lighter-skinned people in the past.

Mungo Park in his 1816 book, Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa, described the Fulani, the description of whom was summarized in a 2011 edition of the life of Omar Ibn Said: “The Fulas (Fulani) are not precisely negroes, but seem to be a mixture of negro and Berber stock...”¹⁶ Another writer, Roland B. Dixon, believed that the shape and size of the Fulani skull suggested an out-of-Africa origin somewhere around the Caspian Sea;¹⁷ which, incidentally, is certainly a possibility since the Fulani carry 7.4% of the R1b (M343) haplogroup, the most common haplogroup of Western Europe.¹⁸

Secondly, the Fulani have a distinctive Jewish connection as evidenced by some of their religious practices. E. D. Morel, in his book, Affairs of West Africa, devotes a whole chapter to the Fulani origin and highlights some of this connection, such as the knowledge of and recitation of Jewish history and the Fulani regard for Moses. Additionally, Joseph J. Williams in his book, Hebrewisms of West Africa, seems to show the widespread effect of Judaism in Africa, perhaps having been disseminated by the nomadic wanderings of the Fulani over millennia. It is no wonder that many believe that the Fulani are the Hebrews who remained in Africa rather than migrating northward.

Thirdly, the Fulani carry the largest amount of the E1a1 haplogroup of any population, a percentage which is at least 10%.¹⁹ So, were it not for these nomadic pastoralists, assumed to be the Hyksos invaders of Lower Egypt, the shepherd kings, who, many believe, moved from northeast Africa into the Levant and established Israel, the E1a1 haplogroup might be almost extinct.

Today, there are mainly three groups in which the E1a1 haplogroup is found. Certainly it is found among Africans, though it does not reside so much in any one country as among the pastoralist Fulani people and their descendants. It is also found among those with a Jewish background. In fact, the Jewish E1a1 contingent, which only makes

up a minute portion of Ashkenazis and Sephardics, is a significant part of the E1a1 haplogroup. Lastly, E1a1 is found among non-Jewish people of European stock. However, although this group knows of no Jewishness in their background, it was almost assuredly there in the distant past.

With the story of the Fulani slaves in Maryland, there is now some daylight for those of us of the E1a1 haplogroup who have neither a Jewish background nor black skin. We may finally be able to knock down that fabled “brick wall” that has kept us from learning more about our ancestors. Maybe, for example, a male line wound up in Canada or some other far away place because that ancestor, a slave, felt the need to escape like the slave, Josiah Henson. Brutally and unmercifully beaten by Bryce Litton, his overseer, Henson took his family and fled, making a life for himself in a new and safer locale, although never fully recovering from the beating he took. The incident made such an impression on Harriet Beecher Stowe that she based the character of Uncle Tom on Henson; the enlightened slave owner, George Shelby, on George Riley; and Simon Legree, the brutal overseer, on Bryce Litton.²⁰

Additionally, perhaps there is a lesson from Chesapeake Bay history for those who have English names, but no recognizable English history, some understanding for those who can't seem to go any farther back in tracing their line than Maryland and Virginia. Maybe that ancestor was African and no record of his journey was ever recorded. Maybe, just maybe, he chose to take the surname of the English indentured servant who became his wife because he found it more convenient to take her surname than try to explain his.

It is no mystery that some families in the E1a1 haplogroup identify as white. After all, some of us became English considerably before we got to colonial America. Our introduction to English culture took place somewhere either in the British Isles or in the West Indies. And if we were in the West Indies before coming to America, we were there with some rather celebrated Englishmen. Prominent families such as George Washington's, Thomas Jefferson's, and Alexander Hamilton's, had their *own* West Indies experience. Some family members not only lived there, but are buried there today.

To say that E1a1 is a very, very small haplogroup when compared with others worldwide is almost an understatement. But it is true! It is not only difficult to find our haplogroup in major studies of nations; it hardly registers even among the slightly younger haplogroup of African-Americans who, with their E1b1a haplogroup, make up the majority of African-Americans. It is found amongst them probably at a rate of less than 1%.²¹ As a fellow researcher once said to me, “It's almost a miracle that your line is still here.”

Some may be let down when they learn of the likelihood of enslavement for some of our E1a1 ancestors. However, slavery has been a common economic commodity throughout human history and, in one form or another, has never spared *any* haplogroup. Yet, amidst our unnecessary genealogical reluctance to accept this

likelihood, how many of those suffering enslavement in colonial America ever received as much attention as Yarrow, Diallo, Rahman, and Moro, all Fulani, possibly E1a1, but certainly associates of our haplogroup?

Notes

1. James H. Johnston, From Slave Ship to Harvard, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2012): p. 7.
2. Ibid, pp. 16, 17.
3. Ibid, p. 2.
4. Arthur Pierce Middleton, JSTOR, The Strange Story of Job Ben Soloman, (Williamsburg, Virginia, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, July, 1948): pp. 343-349.
5. Johnson, op. cit., pp. 11, 12.
6. John Franklin Jameson, JSTOR, The American Historical Review, Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, Slave in North Carolina, (Oxford, England, UK, Oxford University Press, July, 1925): pp. 790-795.
7. Johnston, op. cit., pp. 4, 59-61.
8. Ibid, pp. 1, 79, 80, 99.
9. Ibid, pp. 132, 161.
10. Philip D. Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, (Chapel Hill, N. C. and London, England, UK, University of North Carolina Press, 1998): pp. 2, 3.
11. Ibid, p. 2.
12. Ibid, p. 4.
13. Ibid, p. 62.
14. Ibid. p. 444.
15. Ibid, pp. 101-103.
16. Omar Ibn Said and Ala Alryyes, A Muslim American Slave: The Autobiography of Omar Ibn Said, (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2011): p. 83.
17. Roland B. Dixon, The Racial History of Man, (New York City, N. Y., C Scribner's Sons, 1923): pp. 184-186.
18. Jana Buckova, et al., American Journal of Physical Anthropology 151: 10-21, "Multiple and Differentiated Contributions to the Male Gene Pool of Pastoral and Farmer Populations of the African Sahel," p. 12.
19. Robert E. Hall, "Haplotypes of the Fulani Pastoralists, Revised," (July 16, 2015), <https://exploringe1a1.wordpress.com>, p. 4.
20. Johnston, op. cit., pp. 107-108.
21. Robert E. Hall, "A Very Small Haplogroup, Revised," (July 13, 2015), <https://exploringe1a1.wordpress.com>, p. 7.

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