

# **Henry Evans: From Cabinetmaker to Abolitionist**

By

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The story of the life and career of Thomas Day, a Milton, North Carolina, cabinetmaker during the years leading up to the Civil War, is well documented. Day and his family were free people of color and therefore forced to contend with the extreme societal injustice of the antebellum period as they attempted to survive in a world between freedom and slavery. Day's talent and intelligence allowed him to flourish despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles. His is the story of the human ability to triumph over a system of oppression, but Day was not alone. Henry Evans, also a free man of color living in the antebellum South and a contemporary of Day, struggled against the same injustices as he maintained a successful cabinet shop in nearby Hillsborough, North Carolina.

While a number of pieces of furniture can firmly be linked to Thomas Day's cabinet shop by receipts and shared stylistic features, only one example from Henry Evans' cabinet shop in Hillsborough is currently known. A pair of circa 1850 D-end dining tables was found approximately 25 years ago in Greensboro, North Carolina (Fig. 1, D-end table by Evans) (Fig. 2, Second D-end table by Evans).



Figure 1



Figure 2



Under the top board of one of the pair, written in bold print with black paint, is “Henry Evans, Hillsbo” (Fig. 3, Writing under top of Fig. 1). This was written on the board after it was milled but before it was fitted to the table frame, as the H in Henry is truncated and bottom elements of “Hillsbo” were removed by planing.



Figure 3

The tops of the D-ends are mahogany. The rails are yellow pine surfaced with vertically set mahogany veneer. Yellow pine corner blocks, some now missing, and a one-inch tall medial brace set under the

top and morticed into the front and back rails strengthen each D-end (Fig. 4, Construction of Fig. 2).



Figure 4

The legs are well turned with three rings at the top and cone-shaped turnings surmounting balls for feet (Fig. 5, Top of leg of Fig. 2) (Fig. 6, Bottom of leg of Fig. 2). The upper stiles of the legs are rounded to add a degree of elegance.





Figure 5



Figure 6



In February 1841, 24-year-old Henry Evans placed an ad in the *Hillsborough Recorder*. Entitled “Cabinet-Making”, he thanked the public for their patronage and announced improvements to his establishment that would allow him to ensure his customers that “no pains shall be spared to give general satisfaction” (Fig. 7, Evans’ ad, 1841). He offered all kinds of furniture in mahogany, walnut, and “other precious wood”. He also offered bedsteads “of the cheapest and best quality” stained to imitate mahogany, rosewood, and satinwood. Evans also welcomed repair work and offered to re-varnish older furniture. This is the ad of a young man hungry for success.<sup>1</sup>

**Cabinet-Making.**

THE subscriber, grateful for the patronage heretofore received, would respectfully inform his friends and the public generally, that he has newly fitted up his establishment, with a great many conveniences, that will enable him to execute work in a superior style and with more expedition than heretofore; and he now offers his services to the public, with the determination that no pains shall be spared to give general satisfaction.

**FURNITURE,**  
of all kinds, will be made in the neatest style,  
of Mahogany, Walnut, and other pre-  
cious Wood.

He will endeavor to keep on hand an assortment of Furniture; among which will be BED-STEADS of the cheapest and best quality, with stains of the most durable colors, in imitation of Mahogany, Rosewood, or Satinwood. Persons wishing to buy, will do well to call, as they will be sold on very reasonable terms.

All repairing or varnishing will be thankfully received, and promptly attended to.

Orders requiring haste, will be executed with all possible despatch.

**HENRY EVANS,**

February 3. 58 - 3m

Figure 7

By the time of the taking of the 1850 Hillsborough, Orange County, North Carolina Census, that success had been achieved. Evans was listed as a 33-year-old cabinetmaker of mixed race, termed a mulatto, who owned real estate worth \$1400.00. His household included his wife, Henrietta, a 22-year-old woman of color, as well as four children, Lizzy, 6, Julia, 4, Mathew, 2, and Sarah, 10 months. Henry and his children were recorded as having been born in Hillsborough, and his wife in North Carolina. Fanny Evans, assumed to be Henry's mother, was listed as 65 years of age, of mixed race, and having been born in Virginia. The last member of Henry's household was James Allison, a 66-year-old white cabinetmaker born in Delaware. Any relationship to Henry is unknown.<sup>2</sup>

The size and scope of Evans' cabinet shop is further evidenced in the Manufacturing Census of 1850. A \$1000.00 capital investment was made in real and personal property of the cabinet shop. Woodworking supplies on hand included 10000 feet of plank and 5000 feet of timber. Four individuals worked in his shop, probably including Allison as well as Henry's younger brother, Wilson, age 22. They earned an average wage of \$60.00. Evans' output was impressive. The census noted 100 bureaus were produced, valued at \$1800.00. 100 bedsteads were also produced, valued at \$200.00, matching the production of William Thompson's cabinet shop, the largest in Raleigh.<sup>3</sup>



A comparison of Evans' cabinet shop to other cabinet shops in North Carolina listed in the 1850 Manufacturing Census offers another measure of Evans' prominence. Only two cabinet shops listed more raw materials or more workmen, Day in Milton and Thompson in Raleigh. Only three showed a greater capital investment, including Duncan McNeill of Fayetteville. No one in the state produced more bureaus or bedsteads. Considering all the different categories listed in that year's Manufacturing Census, Evans' Hillsborough cabinet shop was arguably the third largest cabinet shop in North Carolina in 1850.<sup>4</sup>

Evans' shop produced more than bureaus and bedsteads. An ad placed in the *Hillsborough Recorder* dated February 1, 1848, offered a more complete picture of what was available to the public (Fig. 8, Evans' ad, 1848). Evans now identified his establishment as a "Cabinet Warehouse", meaning finished furniture was kept on hand available for purchase rather than having to be special ordered. He listed sofas, sideboards, bureaus, bedsteads, and tables of mahogany, marble, cherry, walnut, birch, and maple. He also highlighted what he termed "his make of Portable WARDROBES and BEDSTEADS". Evans went on to list his current inventory consisting of eight dressing bureaus with looking glasses, two china presses, two sideboards, six plain bureaus, eight candlestands, one sofa, one secretary and bookcase, and bedsteads. Evidence points to this furniture having been made in Evans' cabinet shop rather than having been imported from another area, as Evans emphasized the experience of his workmen and offered to trade furniture for local raw materials including walnut, poplar, cherry, birch, and

maple. Mahogany, which was used on the two D-ends, was imported from Central and South America. This same ad ran in various editions of the Hillsborough paper through 1853.<sup>5</sup>

**Cabinet Ware-House.**

**T**HE subscriber respectfully informs his friends and the public generally, that he has on hand, and will endeavor constantly to keep, a variety of well-made Furniture, embracing all the leading articles, such as.

**Sofas, Sideboards, Bureaus, Bedsteads, Tables,**  
made of Mahogany, Marble, Cherry, Walnut, Birch, and Maple.

He would invite attention to his make of Portable **WARDROBES** and **BEDSTEADS**, which cannot be surpassed for durability, neatness, and convenience.

He would also invite the attention of all persons wishing to buy furniture of any description, to give him a call before purchasing elsewhere, as he intends to sell as low as he can possibly afford, and his workmen are all experienced hands.

He has now on hand eight fine Dressing Bureaus, with Looking-Glasses, two China Presses, two Sideboards, six plain Bureaus, eight Candlestands, one Sofa, and one Secretary and Bookcase, and Bedsteads, which he will sell low.

\* \* \* Timber taken in exchange for Furniture, such as Walnut, Poplar, Cherry, Birch, Maple, &c.

\* \* \* Persons at a distance, buying Furniture, can have it delivered at their doors, ensured safe, for less than they can do it themselves.

He returns his thanks for past favors, and will be thankful for a continuance of public patronage.

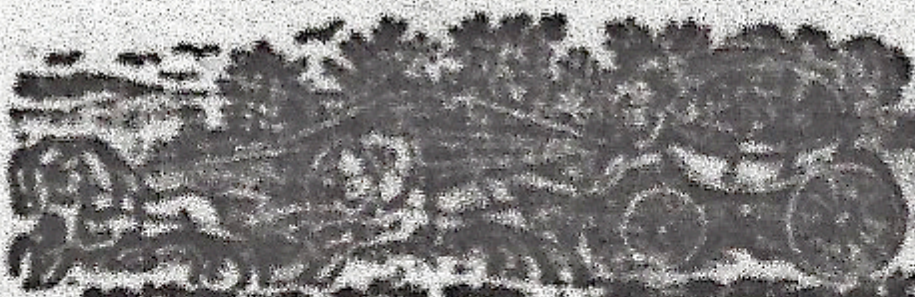
**HENRY EVANS.**

February 1. 15—

Figure 8



An added customer service offered by Evans was the door-to-door delivery of items produced in his cabinet shop. A second ad, often run near the ad mentioned above, offered what was essentially a mid-nineteenth century taxi service (Fig. 9, Evans' ad, 1849). Customers could choose from a carriage, a hack, or a buggy, and there seems to have been no limit on the number of trips or distance. This ad also revealed the location of his shop, "two doors above the Union Hotel". The Union Hotel was prominently located opposite Hillsborough's Court House Square.<sup>6</sup>



**Accommodation for Travel-  
lers.**

**T**HE subscriber is now prepared with a comfortable Carriage, a Hack, and a Buggy, to convey Passengers from Hillsborough to any other place, or to bring them here, by the day, week, or job. He has good horses and an experienced driver, and thinks he can give entire satisfaction. He can be found at his shop, two doors above the Union Hotel.

**HENRY EVANS.**

February 1. 15—

Figure 9



Death was as certain during this period as it is today, and a number of larger cabinet shops offered to make caskets as well as full funeral services. Having already invested in various means of transportation, this was a natural fit for Evans. Another ad run in 1850 informed the public of Evans' role as a "General Undertaker" (Fig. 10, Evans' ad, 1850). He offered to supply coffins for any pocketbook "of the plainest or finest style, of Walnut or Mahogany". In an unusual service, but one reflective of the times, Evans offered to supply a coffin "at three hours' notice". This ad also broaches another reality of those times and these, the difficulty in collecting what was owed you.<sup>7</sup>

**Notice.**

**A**S I am obliged to raise money to carry on my business and pay my debts, those who are indebted to me, by note or account, are earnestly requested to call and make immediate payment.

**HENRY EVANS.**

**N. B.** I have on hand a large assortment of well made Furniture, which I will sell low for cash.

I am also prepared to furnish Coffins at three hours' notice, of the plainest or finest style, of Walnut or Mahogany.

Persons at a distance may rely on being served here sooner than they can be at home.

**H. EVANS.**  
*Cabinet Maker and General Undertaker.*

**Nov. 13.** **07—**

Figure 10



Little definitively is known about Henry Evans' ancestry. Some feel, probably correctly, that he was a member of the Occaneechi-Saponi Native American community that migrated from south-central Virginia to north-central North Carolina in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> Another free family of color, the Jeffreys family, listed in period census records as mulattos, was actually members of this tribe. Uriah Jeffreys was a cabinetmaker in Hillsborough until August 1828, when he announced his removal from the town and advertised the public sale of his remaining furniture on the second day of the August Court.<sup>9</sup> Thomas Day, a friend of Uriah, was born in 1801 of mixed-race parents. In 1821, Day moved to and opened a cabinet shop in Hillsborough. Around 1823, Day moved to nearby Milton, but maintained his shop in Hillsborough until 1825. Uriah and his brother, Thomas, also a cabinetmaker, may have tended to Day's Hillsborough shop in his absence.<sup>10</sup> Uriah Jeffreys served as bondsman for Day's marriage to Aquilla Wilson in 1830. One wonders if young Henry Evans might have received his first exposure to a cabinet shop in the Jeffreys or Day shops. If not, he surely was aware of their presence.

It is known that Fanny Evans, believed to be Henry's mother, followed the same migratory patterns as the Jeffreys and the Days. She was born in 1785 in Virginia and had settled in Hillsborough by Henry's birth in 1817. The Census of 1820 listed Fanny as a free woman of color in Hillsborough as the head of a household containing four young females and two young males, one undoubtedly Henry. She must have been a

woman of fortitude and substance, as she maintained this household through the Censuses of 1830 and 1840, until she appears in Henry's household in 1850.<sup>11</sup>

More is known about the family of Henry's wife, Henrietta Leary. She was the daughter of Mathew Nathaniel Leary, who was born in 1802 in Sampson County, North Carolina, and later lived in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He was a free man of color and operated a successful harness and saddle manufactory in Fayetteville. His parents were Jeremiah O'Leary, a colonial soldier in the American Revolution of Irish descent, and Sarah Revel, a free woman of color of Croatan heritage.<sup>12</sup>

Mathew's wife, and Henrietta's mother, was Julia Menriel, said to be of Algerian or Moroccan descent, who as a child was taken to France. She came to America in 1810 after spending time in the West Indies.

Arriving in Fayetteville, her prowess as a cook became well known. Known as "French Mary", she was introduced to Lafayette during a dinner in his honor in Fayetteville. The General asked who had prepared such a wonderful meal. Upon meeting Julia, and learning her background, Lafayette is said to have exclaimed "none but a French cook could get up such a dinner".<sup>13</sup>

Henry Evans married Henrietta Leary on April 10, 1843. Henrietta's sister, Sarah Jane Leary, married Henry's younger brother, Wilson Bruce Evans, in 1854.<sup>14</sup> As stated earlier, Wilson was a cabinetmaker like his brother and undoubtedly worked in Henry's shop.



The reputation of Henry Evans' cabinet shop caught the attention of former North Carolina Governor David Swain. In 1847, Swain served as President of the University of North Carolina in nearby Chapel Hill and was planning the interior finish of two newly enlarged dormitories, Old East and Old West. Swain sought the advice of the current governor, William Graham, who had practiced law in Hillsborough before his election. Swain was considering two craftsmen, William Thompson of Raleigh and Henry Evans of Hillsborough. "Thompson of Raleigh would probably be glad to get the job. He is ordinarily extravagant in his charges, however, that I do not like to employ him. It has recently occurred to me, that Evans (a free man of color) of your town, might answer our purposes. I know nothing of him personally and will be greatly obliged to you, if you consider him a suitable person to secure him down here. In addition to this job, if he is competent to the task, the Societies will probably employ him to render furniture for their libraries and [illegible]".<sup>15</sup>

In November 1848, Thomas Day successfully submitted bids for the work in Chapel Hill.<sup>16</sup> This was a great boost to Day's career. It allowed him to display his ability to supply finished architectural woodwork as well as furniture in a very public setting. It also spread his name to numerous prominent families whose sons attended the University. Evans did not receive the commission, but his consideration does demonstrate his reputation as running one of the best cabinet shops in the state, and that he was known not only for his ability to produce

quality furniture, but also for his ability to create quality finished architectural woodwork. One wonders how the history of the two shops might have changed had Evans received the commission.

By October 1853, Henry Evans had decided to leave North Carolina. To implement his move, he was forced to seek the aid of two white businessmen who wrote to ensure the Governor of North Carolina that the Evans were “entitled to as much respect and regard as any colored family in our State”.<sup>17</sup> The oppressive migratory laws that limited freedom of movement of free people of color undoubtedly were one factor in Evans' decision to remove his family to a less hostile environment. These laws were just one example of the growing racial tensions in the South during the 1850s. Although never acted on, there were even two petitions presented to the North Carolina General Assembly that the state's entire free black population be removed from the state.<sup>18</sup>

In furtherance of his pending relocation, on October 24, 1853, Evans placed an ad in the *Hillsborough Recorder* that later appeared in the *Spirit of the Age*, a Raleigh paper, announcing his intention to sell his cabinet shop and its contents (Fig. 11, Evans' ad, 1853). He scheduled the sale of the shop for November 29, 1853, which was the “Tuesday of Court week”, insuring a large crowd. His shop was “one door above the Union Hotel, and opposite the Court House square”. Evans described his cabinet shop as “a desirable work-shop for any branch of business,

especially cabinet making. The House is large and roomy, fitted up expressly for a cabinet shop, and just in the business part of the town”.

**Cabinet Shop & Furniture  
For Sale.**

**A**S I am determined on moving out of the State, I will offer for sale to the highest bidder, in the town of Hill-borough, on the 29th day of November next, (being Tuesday of Court week,) my **Cabinet Shop**, which is a desirable work-shop for any branch of business, especially cabinet making. The House is large and roomy, fitted up expressly for a cabinet shop, and just in the business part of the town, one door above the Union Hotel, and opposite the Court House square.

And on the 27th of December, I shall offer for sale all my Tools, Benches, Turning Lathe, Hand Screws, Stock of Materials of every description, and my Household and Kitchen Furniture, and what New Furniture I may have on hand.

I shall continue to manufacture Furniture until the 25th of December, and will sell low for cash.

☞ All those indebted to me by note or otherwise, are requested to make immediate payment, as no longer indulgence can be given.

**HENRY EVANS.**

October 24, 1853. 07—

Figure 11



He also announced he would continue to produce furniture until December 25 in anticipation of the December 27, 1853, sale of the contents of his shop, as well as his household and kitchen furniture. This sale would include his tools, benches, turning lathe, “Hand Screws”, and his stock of materials. Evans’ business success also had allowed him to acquire a 185-acre farm two and a half miles southeast of Hillsborough on the Raleigh Road. The farm contained a dwelling house, a good barn and stables, and 75 acres of cleared land. The remaining wooded acreage allowed Evans a close and ready supply of timber for his cabinetry, both secondary woods such as yellow pine and poplar and primary woods of walnut and cherry. It was advertised for sale in the Hillsborough paper in late 1852.<sup>19</sup>

Henry and Wilson Evans chose Ohio as the place to begin a new life for themselves and their families. Uriah Jeffreys and two of his brothers had already left North Carolina for Ohio. Unfortunately prejudice against free people of color also existed in the North. One Ohio law required that free blacks settling in Ohio post a \$500.00 bond to ensure good behavior. In 1842, Parker Jeffreys, Uriah’s brother, refused to post the bond on the basis that he was not of African American descent. The case, *Parker Jeffreys vs Ankeny ex al*, reached the Ohio Supreme Court. That court found that Jeffreys had no African ancestry but was of white and Native American descent and therefore not required to post the bond.<sup>20</sup> Uriah continued to practice his trade in Ohio and is listed in the Cedarville Township, Greene County, Ohio Census of 1860 as a cabinetmaker owning \$825.00 of real property and \$1000.00 of personal

property. Two younger Jeffreys kinsmen, also noted as cabinetmakers, are listed beside him in the census.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, the Evans brothers experienced the same prejudices as the Jeffreys. They initially attempted to settle in Cincinnati, the largest center of furniture production in the region. However, Cincinnati was not welcoming to formerly enslaved blacks or free people of color.

After a three-month journey, Henry and Wilson Evans and their families settled in Oberlin, Ohio, a small town approximately ten miles south of Lake Erie. At the heart of Oberlin was Oberlin College, one of the most progressive institutions in the country. Founded in 1833, Oberlin College admitted women to its four-year program in 1837. Students of color were admitted as early as 1835.<sup>22</sup>

Henry and Wilson opened their cabinet shop soon after arriving in Oberlin on East Mill Street (now Vine Street). Within a few years they purchased a former Oberlin College dormitory known as Walton Hall and moved it to East Mill Street to serve as their shop and wareroom.<sup>23</sup>

The Oberlin City Directory of 1859-60 listed Henry and Wilson Evans as owners of a furniture wareroom located on Main Street between Mill and College Streets.<sup>24</sup> The Census of 1860 listed both brothers in Oberlin. Wilson was listed as a 35-year-old cabinetmaker with real property valued at \$700.00 and personal property worth \$100.00. Henry was listed as a 43-year-old cabinetmaker. His real property was valued at \$3600.00 and his personal property was listed at \$500.00.<sup>25</sup>



Wilson's home still survives in Oberlin. Located at 33 East Vine Street, formerly Mill Street, it was built by the Evans brothers between 1854 and 1856 (Fig. 12, Home of Wilson Evans). Henry's home was on Hamilton Street several blocks to the south. The brothers milled and installed walnut and oak woodwork in Wilson's home, stained to a rich brown and never painted. Deeply molded door surrounds and arched first floor doorways add to the elegance of the interior.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 12

Oberlin was a center of abolitionist activity and welcoming to people of color, both free and formerly enslaved. While obviously opposed to slavery and a proponent of the abolitionist movement, there has been

debate concerning the degree of fellow cabinetmaker Thomas Day's direct involvement in the movement. There is, however, no question about the stance taken by Henry Evans and his brother, Wilson. Both were active members of the abolitionist cause and both were willing to risk life and fortune to help those still in bondage. Ohio was a key state in the Underground Railroad as it gave access to ferry sites along Lake Erie leading to freedom in Canada, beyond the reach of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. While white abolitionists garnered most of the headlines, families like the Evans were the backbone of the Railroad. Oberlin had one of the largest free persons of color populations in the state and was a safe harbor for runaway slaves. Oberlin was located at the center of five different routes used by the Underground Railroad.<sup>27</sup>

Oberlin citizens were proud of the fact that no runaway slaves who sought shelter in their town had been recaptured. A slave catcher named Anderson Jennings of Maysville, Kentucky, was in Oberlin attempting to recapture a slave who had run away from Jennings' uncle. He could not locate the runaway slave he sought, but he did recognize John Price. Price was a runaway slave from Kentucky living in Oberlin. Jennings, two law enforcement officers, and others, devised a plan to capture Price by having a young man named Shakespeare lure him to a farm west of town on the pretense of digging potatoes for \$20.00. On September 13, 1858, Price was captured and transported ten miles to Wellington, Ohio, to await the train that would transport him back to Kentucky and slavery. This set off a series of events that became known as the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue, one of the pivotal flashpoints in the abolitionist



movement leading up to the Civil War. Henry and Wilson Evans were at the forefront.<sup>28</sup>

The citizens of Oberlin were incensed at Price's capture. Some 200 citizens, including the Evans brothers, their brother-in-law, Lewis Sheridan Leary, and their nephew, John Anthony Copeland, traveled to Wellington and surrounded the Wadsworth Hotel, where Price was being held. Wellington citizens joined in the goal of freeing Price. The clearest picture of what happened next can be derived from an examination of the transcripts of witnesses' testimony at the trials of Simeon M. Bushnell and Charles Henry Langston. As the group gathered in Wellington, a few suggested the proper course was to travel sixteen miles to Elyria, the county seat, to attempt to secure a writ of habeas corpus. However, tensions ran high and a number of the men were armed. One of the witnesses at Langston's trial "heard John Copeland and Jerry Fox say they did not care for papers, they'd have him (Price) anyhow." State authorities did issue papers to arrest those who had seized Price, but the Constable would not serve them unless he was indemnified against costs. Both of the Evans brothers were present and one stepped forward to sign the bond. The papers were served but no arrests were made. Fearing the rumored arrival of the Cleveland Grays, a military unit, the leaders knew it was time to act. Price was being held in a third-floor room facing the town square. A contingent of fifteen to twenty men gathered outside of the room where the capturers were holding Price. A man named Fay was blocking the open doorway leading to the room. Wilson Evans and Copeland were closest to Fay, as

threats, including shooting Price's capturers, were passed between the two groups. Around 4 pm, "Evans took hold of the man that stood in the door, pushed him in, and then the crowd rushed in". The fifteen to twenty rescuers rushed into the room. At the same time, others used a ladder placed on the second-floor veranda to access the third-floor room through a window. Henry Evans, by his own testimony during the trials, placed himself in the room where Price was being held at this time. He was asked under cross-examination whether he was armed at the time. After the Judge ruled that if he refused to answer so as not to incriminate himself, all his testimony would be excluded, Henry Evans acknowledged that he had "a small rifle".<sup>29</sup>

The rescuers rushed the room, separated Price from his captors, took him out of the hotel to a waiting wagon, and returned Price to Oberlin. He was secreted in a local house and later transported to Canada and freedom. Thirty-seven of the leaders of the rescuers were indicted by a federal grand jury, including Henry and Wilson Evans and John Copeland. They were jailed in the Cuyahoga County Jail, but none of those incarcerated chose to post bond to secure their release, preferring to remain in custody (Fig. 13, Rescuers in custody. Wilson Evans is fifth from the left, Henry Evans is eighth). Charges were also pending in state court against those who had seized Price. Only two of the thirty-seven were tried, Charles Langston, a free man of color, and Simeon Bushnell, a white man. Both were convicted and given short sentences. Over time, others of the thirty-seven chose to plead no-contest and received very favorable, light sentences. Those that chose to remain in



jail, including Henry and Wilson Evans, became heroes to the abolitionist cause. Large public demonstrations ensued, and the outcry for their release grew, with Ohio Senator Salmon P. Chase taking up their cause.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 13

The thirteen remaining prisoners, including the Evans brothers, were able to acquire enough parts to create a printing press and were able to publish one edition of “The Rescuer” from their jail cells. This newspaper noted that they wished to rescue the nation from “an

oligarchy of slave breeders...well organized, diligent, and desperate”.

Under the title on page one appears “DELIVER HIM THAT IS SPOILED OUT OF THE HAND OF THE OPPRESSER-Jer: 21.12”.

The edition carried descriptions of the remaining thirteen prisoners. The Evans brothers, always the businessmen, even included an advertisement as they continued one aspect of their former business. In spite of their imprisonment, the ad demonstrates these gentlemen somehow still maintained a sense of humor while getting their point across.

“Upholsters and Mattress Makers-Henry Evans and Brother (late of Oberlin, O) have removed to a shed one door west of J. Scott’s saddle and Harness shop. All persons who secure a visit from ‘Tired Nature’s sweet restorer; balmy sleep’ will please call and examine his work. You can rest on his beds, if you can rest anywhere. Government officials need not apply.”<sup>31</sup>

J Scott listed in the ad was John H. Scott, a free man of color and another of the indicted Oberlin-Wellington Rescuers. Scott had worked in the Fayetteville saddle and harness shop of Mathew Nathaniel Leary, Henry Evans’ father-in-law. He, like the Evans brothers, chose to leave North Carolina in 1856 and settled in Oberlin, Ohio, where he opened his own successful business.<sup>32</sup>

The final thirteen prisoners were released on July 6, 1859, when charges were dropped by federal authorities after state authorities agreed to drop charges against the individuals who seized John Price. Henry and Wilson Evans returned to their families and communities as heroes. A number of rescuers made speeches upon their release. Henry Evans



thanked his friends and neighbors for the support his family received during his incarceration. He also expressed his deep religious faith and thanked God for the “victory on the side of truth, a triumph, indeed, over wrong”. In closing Evans said, “I feel that we have discharged our duty; we have finished the work given us to do. The telegraph wires have flashed our victory through the country. It has gone up to heaven” (Fig. 14, Rescuers. Henry Evans is seated to the right. Wilson Evans is standing fifth from the right).<sup>33</sup>



Figure 14

The family’s joy at the brothers’ release, however, was short-lived. In mid-October of the same year, John Brown led his small group of twenty-one followers in the attempted takeover of the Federal Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. His goal was to acquire arms with which to

initiate a slave revolt in the Southern states. Three of his followers lived in Oberlin. Lewis Sheridan Leary, Henry Evans' brother-in-law and a fellow rescuer, told family members he was going on a trip, but instead joined Brown (Fig. 15, Lewis Sheridan Leary).



Figure 15

He and several other men were assigned to seize and hold the U.S. Rifle Factory. After they were overwhelmed, Leary tried to escape across the Shenandoah River, where he was shot and killed. John Anthony Copeland, the 25-year-old son of Henry Evans' sister, Delilah Evans

Copeland, was captured along with Brown (Fig. 16, John Anthony Copeland).



Figure 16

Copeland, who had been in the forefront as a rescuer, stated on December 16, 1859, the day he was hanged at Charles Town, Virginia, “I am dying for freedom. I could not die for a better cause. I had rather die than be a slave”.<sup>34</sup> Authorities refused family requests for the return of his body. The body was claimed by the Winchester Medical College as a teaching cadaver, along with the bodies of Brown’s son, Watson, and one other raider. In May 1862, the college was burned to the ground by federal troops in retaliation for the desecration of the bodies.<sup>35</sup>

Due to his light skin color, Wilson Evans enlisted as a white soldier in the Union Army in Company D, 178 Ohio Infantry, during the Civil



War. He was listed in the 1870 Ohio Census in Oberlin with his family. His occupation was listed as a wood turner. Wilson died September 16, 1898.<sup>36</sup>

The 1870 Ohio Census for Oberlin listed Henry Evans as a 53-year-old undertaker with \$2200.00 of real property and \$500.00 of personal property. Henrietta was also listed along with nine of their fourteen children. Listed next to the Evans in the census was friend and harness maker John Scott and his family. The 1880 census listed Henry and Henrietta in the District of Columbia. No occupation was given for Henry. Henrietta died August 15, 1908, in, ironically, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. She was buried in Oberlin. Henry Evans was buried in plot I-095-03 in Oberlin's Westwood Cemetery. His date of burial was September 2, 1896.<sup>37</sup>

Hopefully more examples of the furniture of Henry Evans, both in North Carolina and in Ohio, will come to light, but the story of Evans is greater than the story of his skills as a cabinetmaker. His story is truly the saga of our country. Surrounded by the horrors of slavery, Evans overcame the overwhelming disadvantages of a free man of color living in the antebellum South to create a successful business enterprise. As North Carolina passed even more restrictive laws against free people of color, for his sake and the sake of his family, Evans chose to abandon the business he had grown into what was essentially the third most successful cabinet shop in the state. He created a new home in Ohio, found a welcoming community in Oberlin, and built a successful

cabinetry business a second time. Fate then thrust him onto the national stage, and Henry Evans and his brother, Wilson, answered the calling. Despite these hardships and the tragic loss of family and friends, Evans persevered to see his children grow into adulthood and successful lives and careers. These simple D-end tables become the catalyst to tell his American story (Fig. 17, Henry Evans' D-end dining tables).



Figure 17

Footnotes:

1. *The Hillsborough Recorder*, April 15, 1841.
2. Orange County, North Carolina Census, 1850.
3. Industrial and Manufacturers Census, 1850.

4. Ibid.
5. *Recorder*, May 17, 1848.
6. Ibid, September 5, 1849.
7. Ibid, March 27, 1850.
8. Patricia Phillips Marshall and Jo Ramsey Leimenstoll, *Thomas Day, Master Craftsman and Free Man of Color*, Raleigh, NC, The North Carolina Museum of History, 2010, pp. 216-217.
9. Ibid, pp. 19-20 and *Recorder*, August 13, 1828.
10. Marshall, p. 20.
11. Orange County Census, 1820, 1830, 1840, and 1850.
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