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The History of Joseph Johns and an Examination of the Potential For Archaeological Excavations on the Site of his Former Residence

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THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH JOHNS AND
AN EXAMINATION OF THE POTENTIAL
FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS
ON THE SITE OF HIS FORMER RESIDENCE

By
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AN UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

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Abstract

Sometime in the early- to mid-19th century, an enslaved man named Joseph Johns escaped from a Virginia plantation and settled in a hut in the Blue Mountains of Union Township, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. Johns lived a peaceful secluded existence there until his death in 1906. As not much is known about Johns—or “Old Black Joe,” as he was and is, commonly known to the residents of northern Lebanon County, PA, the dual purpose of the author’s undertaken research has been: 1) to untangle the legends surrounding Johns and to provide a comprehensive overview of his life and times, which had never been done; and 2) to determine whether it is possible for archaeologists to conduct excavations at the site to supplement the limited documentary and oral history on Johns. Johns is unusual from an archaeological perspective because not only was he geographically secluded by his hermit-like lifestyle, but he was racially isolated as well in the mainly white Union Township. Furthermore, he lived in his rudimentary mountaintop hut for almost half a century, making his residence on the isolated site significant. By examining the extent of what is known of Johns and the history of the site and by reviewing the field of historical archaeology and one of its subfields, African American archaeology, this thesis concludes that archaeological excavations have the potential to “fill in the gaps” in the historical and oral history by providing new information on Johns. Although excavations probably will be hindered by the amount of disturbance on the site over the past century, excavations may still be worth doing given the possibility of household deposits and that the site is now owned by a large and thriving Boy Scout camp which has expressed great interest over the past few decades in commemorating the man who holds much fascination to this day for residents in northern Lebanon County.
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Acknowledgments

This project began last summer with a timid phone call to Dr. Patricia Gibble, an archaeology professor at Millersville University. Having heard that she knew of an ex-slave named “Old Black Joe” who had settled in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, which is where I grew up, I desperately hoped she would approve of my idea for a senior honors thesis that would examine the potential for archaeology on the site of his former residence in the case that she or any other trained archaeologist would be interested in conducting excavations there in the future. Dr. Gibble invited me to her house and told me all she knew about “Old Black Joe” (whose name I would later discover was Joseph Johns), opening wide the door for me to begin my research, for which I am exceedingly grateful. Her contacts, suggestions, and support throughout the course of my research have been invaluable and greatly appreciated. By the way, my father, Dr. Gibble’s family doctor, deserves a heartfelt thank-you for rambling one day last summer about his daughter and her lack of a thesis topic to this particular patient.

There are several people in Lebanon County who have been extremely helpful to me by providing me with information on Johns. I would first like to thank John Hower, a county historian who emailed me with all the details he knew of Johns’ life and gave me the name and contact information of another historian, Francis Ditzler, who has been most helpful in assisting me in researching the history of Johns. Mr. Ditzler has been collecting information on Johns for many years, and I thank him and his wife, Dorothy, for inviting me into their home, sharing with me all the facts on Johns they have accumulated thus far, and introducing me to other people who were willing to tell me
what they know of Johns' legend. My interviews with these local historians and other residents, such as Dave Matterness, Pete Silldorff, Evelyn Isele, and the librarians at the Lebanon County Historical Society and the Courthouse, have been very important to the historical aspect of my research, so I am enormously grateful to them for relating their stories to me and suggesting where I might find more information.

I must also thank Bashore Scout Reservation—in particular, its ranger, Dave Matterness—for allowing me to visit several times the site of Johns' former residence, which is on the camp's property. I greatly appreciate Mr. Matterness and Mr. Silldorff accompanying me up the mountain on my first trip to the site. I would have gotten lost without them.

This project required a lot of legwork to various places in Lebanon County, such as the Lebanon County Historical Society, the Courthouse, the homes of local residents, Moonshine Church, and Camp Bashore. On several occasions, I drove to the Blue Mountains and just traipsed around, trying to acquaint myself with the area. Thus, my sincere thanks go to that group of people who provided me with a car, boarded and fed me on my trips to Lebanon County, even washed my muddy sneakers: my family. My mother, in particular, deserves credit for being the best and most patient scanner of microfilm census records I have ever had the pleasure of bossing around.

Finally, I owe my greatest thanks to Dr. Robert Schuyler for advising me on my senior honors thesis. His influence on the archaeological aspect of this thesis, as well as on my overall academic career and interests, is deeply appreciated. I apologize for initially "crapping on archaeology."
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

One month before his death in 1906, the ex-slave named Joseph Johns—more commonly known then and now as “Old Black Joe”—who was living in a hut on the top of Blue Mountain in northern Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, got his picture taken. As seen in Figure 1, Johns removed his hat and posed for this picture standing in front of his hut with his Kentucky Rifle in his right hand. His pet dog sits in the background. This photograph is the only known picture of the man whose life would become a legend long after he was gone.

Blue Mountain, part of the Appalachian Mountain Range, is in Union Township, Lebanon County, which is located in southeastern Pennsylvania, as seen in Figures 2 and 3. The site of Johns’ former residence, which is now on property belonging to Bashore Scout Reservation, has remained prominent in the minds of residents in northern Lebanon County throughout the century since his death. It is believed that the exact location of his former hut is known (Figure 4), and much has been done to commemorate Johns here. Visitors to Camp Bashore have a tradition of hiking to this site each summer and even camping out at the mountaintop point. Boy Scouts have reconstructed his hut as a physical reminder of where the ex-slave’s abode once stood and several Eagle Scouts working to complete their mandatory service projects have researched and written informal histories of Johns’ life. A monument even stands in honor of Johns at the entrance to Camp Bashore.

The legend of Johns is of interest not only to the Boy Scouts who visit Camp Bashore each year, but to many local residents as well. There are periodic newspaper
articles written on Johns in the local papers. The 1906 photograph of Johns hangs in a
popular Italian restaurant in Lebanon City. Area historians and other residents have
written compilations of Johns’ life based on local lore and the scant documentary sources
on him. Clearly, Johns holds much fascination for those who encounter his legend.

This thesis, admittedly, grew out of the author’s own fascination with Johns’
unique history. A slave who escaped from a Virginia plantation sometime in the 1840s or
1850s, Johns fled north and settled in Lebanon County, eventually building a hut on land
belonging to a local farmer named John Fahler. Johns apparently was well-received by
the people in the area and was able to enjoy a peaceful life on Fahler’s property until his
death in 1906 at a claimed age of at least 112 years.

What this thesis attempts to do is examine and sometimes deconstruct the legends
that have grown up around Johns in the past century and provide a probable history of his
life and times, which is the subject of Chapters Two and Three. This investigation
involves a comprehensive assessment of the documentary and oral history available on
Johns. The remainder of the thesis paper examines the potential that historical
archaeology may have to clarify the details of Johns’ life and supplement our
understanding of his lifestyle.
CHAPTER TWO

Documentary and Oral History of Joseph Johns

“One day some southern men came looking for Joe. They had been given some
information that a runaway slave was living in the mountains north of Lebanon, and they
called on John Fahler. Fahler told the men that there wasn’t any black men living
anywhere near Greenpoint. The southern men left, but they returned more determined to
capture Joe. This time however, Fahler got out his shotgun and ordered the men off his
property. The southerners gave up, and Joe was safe again, and when the war ended, his
freedom was granted.” (Ludwig 1980b:5)

The history of Joseph Johns—or “Old Black Joe,” as he was more commonly
known—is shrouded in legend. Stories like the one recounted above have been passed
down and retold many times throughout the last century by residents in the northern part
of Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. The oral tradition surrounding Johns holds that he
was a slave who had escaped from a southern plantation sometime in the mid-19th
century, settled in the Blue Mountains of Lebanon County, PA, in a hut on property
belonging to a local farmer, and lived a hermit-like existence there into the early 20th
century.

The details of Johns’ life are difficult to find and sort out for several reasons. He
does not appear on census records, and the only documented reference to him during his
lifetime occurred a few days before his death when local newspapers heralded him as the
oldest man living in the county in 1906 ([Lebanon County, PA, newspaper] 7 February
1906; Lebanon Daily News 7 February 1906:1). Though he interacted with local
residents in northern Lebanon County, Johns lived a rather secluded life in his
mountaintop hut—especially prior to the Emancipation Proclamation declaring his
freedom—meaning that the different surviving accounts of Johns stem from a limited
number of people. These few accounts have taken on a legendary status, perpetrated
through residents in the Green Point area, newspaper accounts in the 20th century, and other compiled histories both oral and written, that has unintentionally diffused, altered, and obscured the details of Johns’ life. This chapter aims to untangle this convoluted history and to provide a comprehensive report on what is known of Joseph Johns.

JOHNS’ EARLY LIFE

Joseph Johns was born a slave on a Virginia plantation probably sometime between 1789 and 1794. The exact year of his birth is a mystery, but he is typically thought to have been either 112 or 117 years of age at the time of his death on 7 February 1906. Johns’ tombstone, erected at his funeral, in the Moonshine Church cemetery (Figure 5) reports his age as 112 years upon his death, while his obituary in the Lebanon Daily News on 9 February 1906 reports his age at death as being 117 years. Two local newspapers—one the Lebanon Daily News and the other an unnamed newspaper in Lebanon County, PA—wrote similar articles on Johns a few days before his death on account of his astounding age, which they reported as 117. According to the unnamed newspaper, Johns

...vividly recalls important historic events including those of the war of 1812, and the bombardment of Fort McHenry, to which he refers as the “Battle of Baltimore,” the death of General Ross on his famous march against the Maryland metropolis, the Battle of Bladensburg, the advance upon and spoilation of Washington, and other stirring occurrences of those days. Johns at this period was a grown man ([Lebanon County, PA, newspaper] 1906).

Also included in this article and the Lebanon Daily News article (which appears to be an abbreviated version of the unnamed newspaper) is Johns’ claim that he was ten years old at the time of George Washington’s death. Washington died in 1799, meaning that Johns
would have been born in 1789. Later accounts (Elia 1956:20; Matterness 2001a:2) state that Johns actually saw either Washington himself or Washington’s funeral procession pass through the town in which he lived, but these reports were recorded beginning 40 years after his death, meaning the time lapse could have altered or embellished Johns’ original claim in the minds of local residents who were interviewed and related these stories at mid-century.

According to a 1956 interview with a 76-year old Pete Kohr (Elia 1956:20), who as a boy had regularly visited Johns in his hut, Johns had been born on a corn and cotton plantation in Virginia. The Chesapeake agricultural economy had shifted from tobacco to wheat and other grains, including corn, by the end of the 18th century and cotton employed 75 percent of all southern slaves in manual labor at this time (Singleton and Bograd 1995:8-10), thus making it conceivable that Johns had in fact been enslaved on a Virginia corn and cotton plantation. The 1906 newspaper article from an unnamed source mentions that this plantation was near Warrenton, Fauquier County, VA. Several sources convey that the plantation owner used Johns, who was described as a big strapping man even at his death, for “breeding purposes” to increase the number of strong enslaved persons the owner had (Gilara 1964; Ludwig1980a:9). If this is true, Johns probably has descendants, although it would be nearly impossible to find them today.

**JOHNS’ ESCAPE AND ENTRANCE INTO LEBANON COUNTY**

The story of Johns’ escape from slavery and entrance into Lebanon County has varied over the years. The first account, occurring in the feature story on him in two local newspapers on 7 February 1906 and in his obituary in the *Lebanon Daily News* two days later, holds that Johns, seizing the opportunities presented by the turmoil and
uncertainties of the War of 1812, escaped from his master’s plantation in the company of another slave. They fled north into Pennsylvania, but Johns’ companion was caught and returned to the plantation. Johns apparently eluded his trackers and settled in a cave in Chambersburg, PA, which is southwest of Harrisburg, as seen on Figure 6 (Lebanon Daily News 1906a:3). He was about twenty years of age at this time ([Leb. Co., PA, newspaper] 1906). After living in Chambersburg for several years, fear of capture prompted him to seek a residence even more remote, which is why he then moved into the Blue Mountains in northern Lebanon County, seen in Figure 7. In addition to there being no mention of his settlement in a Chambersburg cave in subsequent documentary and oral histories, this story is also problematic because later sources suggest his prominent role in fathering children on the plantation, which might not support his escape at such an early age. Thus, the author does not give this report much weight.

The next account, published in a 1956 Lebanon Daily News article, varies dramatically from this first account. It states that Johns was sixty years old at the time of his escape, which was said to be in the 1850s. He escaped with two other runaways in this story, rather than just one. They reached the Susquehanna River near Harrisburg, PA after four days; the distance between Warrenton, VA and Harrisburg, which can be viewed in Figure 6, is about 130 miles—a considerable distance to travel in four days. They rested here, but not for long:

Pursuers were near, however, and before the runaways knew it, were upon them. Johns, then about 60, managed to flee even as his two companions were being captured. He reminisced later to Kohr that he would rather have drowned in the river than be caught, so he started swimming across (Elis 1956:20).
Johns then traveled north into Dauphin County, west of Lebanon County, settling north of Harrisburg and finding work as a woodcutter, before moving into Lebanon County two years later. This would have placed Johns’ entrance into Lebanon County in the mid- to late-1850s.

Supporting this account is a 1964 *Lebanon Daily News* article that gives an account of Johns’ life based on interviews with old-timers in the Green Point area. Though in this reconstruction Johns was accompanied by only one other fugitive, who was captured, the article reports that it also took them four days to escape north (Gilara 1964). This article does not hypothesize on the date of Johns’ entrance into Lebanon County, but it does confirm that Johns was there by the mid- to late-1850s. A Mrs. Annie Rhen states in the article that her mother had been held by Johns when she was a small girl. Her mother, Elizabeth Rhoads Kreiser, passed away in 1936 at the age of 85, according to the article, meaning she would have been a small child in the mid- to late-1850s.

At the conclusion of this 1964 newspaper article is a mention that a local person was “trying to locate information regarding the legend of Joe the Slave, which is supposed to bear out that Joe had been a construction worker for the S. & S. Railroad” (Gilara 1964). The S. & S. Railroad stands for the Schuylkill and Susquehanna Railroad, a railroad line that extended from Rockville in Dauphin County to Auburn in Schuylkill County, as seen in Figure 8. The S. & S. Railroad (called the Dauphin and Susquehanna Railroad in Figure 7), the first rails to pass through Lebanon County, was completed from Rockville to Rausch Gap in northern Lebanon County (Figure 9) by 1843 (Ditzler 2001, 2002b). With one exception, subsequent accounts attach roughly this date, 1843, to
Johns' arrival in Lebanon County, apparently based on the legend that he worked for the S. & S. Whether the present legend derives from this mention in the conclusion of the 1964 Lebanon Daily News article is unknown.

The one exception is a 1980 article by Merv Wagner, a local boy who interviewed several residents in Green Point to find out information on Johns in order to complete his Eagle Scout service project. One of the interviewees was a Mr. Harry C. Mease, who had obtained his information from Katie Fahler, a granddaughter of John Fahler (Tables 1 and 8), the farmer on whose land Johns resided. According to Mease, Johns settled in Lebanon County in 1861 (Wagner 1980:1).

In conclusion, it can be said with reasonable confidence that Johns entered Lebanon County sometime between 1840—if he worked for the S. & S. Railroad as construction neared Rausch Gap—and 1861, which is the latest date mentioned in the documentary and oral history. Johns was almost certainly in the county by the mid- to late-1850s. However, as the following sources will demonstrate, it is relatively clear that Johns did not settle first on the Fahlers' land upon entering Lebanon County.

JOHNS SETTLEMENT ON THE FAHLER FARM, GREEN POINT

There were several families of Fahlers (spelled various ways throughout the 19th century, as seen in Tables 1 through 7) who lived in Green Point in the 19th century, according to U.S. census records. A succession of John Fahlers owned and farmed the property on which Johns resided. Although little information outside of census records could be found on this Fahler line or their property, John Fahler is listed as applying for 18.40 acres of land in Union Township on 3 May 1815, as seen in Figure 10 (Warrant, Patent & Survey Records – Union Township). The plot of land, which can be seen in
Figure 11, was surveyed on 26 August 1817, but the date that he received the patent for the land is not listed. The next record found of this property is an 1860 map showing the name “J. Fahler” associated with the plot of land (Figure 7), so the Fahlers were definitely settled here by that year. This J. Fahler must be the son, born Jan. 28, 1828 (Table 8), of the original John Fahler, who is last mentioned on the 1850 census as 76 years of age, living with his widowed daughter (Table 4). Evelyn Isele (2002), whose ancestors grew up in the Green Point area, states that the Fahlers were settled long before Johns came, so they probably moved onto the farm before 1860. Nevertheless, it is certain that the Fahlers settled on their land sometime between 1817 and 1860.

Most sources report that Johns lived in a hut in Lebanon County prior to his one on the John Fahler property, which is where Johns was living at the time of his death in 1906. The 1906 unnamed local newspaper reports that this first hut had been located two miles from his hut on the Fahler property, while Wagner (1980:1) writes that his original hut had been built near the Kreiser’s School House, seen on Figure 12, which is less than one mile from his second hut. Local historian Francis Ditzler (2002a), however, disagrees with Wagner’s claim, stating that the “Five Points” intersection, at which Kreiser’s School House was located (the school was torn down in the 1930s), would have been too conspicuous a place to build a hut if he lived there before the end of the Civil War. Legend has it that Johns’ first hut was built in the Second Mountain, which is supported by the evidence that he worked for the S. & S. Railroad. As Figure 7 shows, Second Mountain, part of the Blue Mountains chain, is located in close proximity to the S. & S.
The date at which Johns settled on the Fahlers’ property, on a site about a half-mile south of their farmhouse on the north side of First Mountain (usually just referred to as “Blue Mountain”), is uncertain. There is a legend of a fire destroying Johns’ hut about twenty-five years before his death, but which of his huts burned is unclear. For example, the local unnamed newspaper in 1906 reports that Johns’ hut had been burned down twenty-five years earlier by the Blue-Eyed Six, an infamous band of thieves in this part of the county who were hanged a few years later for murder. These bandits were reported to have stolen $500 from Johns at this time, although the Lebanon Daily News article from this same day, which appears to be an abbreviated version of the unnamed newspaper’s article, reports the stolen sum as $50, perhaps a more reasonable figure. According to the unnamed 1906 newspaper article, Johns “built another hut and has lived in it since unmolested.” One would think that his new hut would have been built on a different location to avoid the Blue-Eyed Six, so it might assumed that the hut that burned was not the one on John Fahler’s property. However, an article by local historian John Hower (1997) states that after the fire, “Johns rebuilt the hut on the same spot and lived the rest of his years there,” implying that the hut that burned was the one on the Fahlers’ property as he lived in that hut up until his death. Hower appears to have gotten this information from the 1906 articles, so perhaps he misinterpreted and unintentionally embellished the report. According to Wagner, after his original hut burned while Johns was away at the local store, Johns wandered about for a while until coming upon the farm of John Fahler and settling there in about 1877, which is a little over twenty-five years before his death, roughly the same time period for the reported fire.
While the preceding seems to imply that Johns’ first hut was burned down between 1877 and 1881, at which time he resettled on John Fahler’s land, there is one glaring problem with this assumption. One of the most prominent legends about Johns is the story of John Fahler protecting Johns from the Southern men who came looking for him before the end of the Civil War, recounted at the beginning of this chapter. Nearly every documentary and oral history of Johns includes this tale. This would make an arrival date of between 1877 and 1881 on the Fahler property unlikely. The hut that burned twenty-five years before Johns’ death in this case would have been his one on the Fahler property, on which he resided since the Civil War, rather than his original hut located somewhere else in Lebanon County. This situation is a possibility, but it leaves the question of when Johns settled on the Fahler property with the vague conclusion of sometime before the end of the Civil War, yet after the 1840s if he worked on the S. & S. Railroad.

One final scenario to propose when Johns came to reside on the Fahler property is the possibility that Johns contemporaneously had two huts—one on the south side of the Second Mountain and one on the north side of the Blue Mountain on Fahler’s property. Perhaps the one on the Blue Mountain was used in the summertime, as it would have been cooler on the north side of a mountain then, while the Second Mountain hut, which might have been the one to burn down about twenty-five years before his death, might have housed Johns in the winter. It is known that Johns worked as a collier, which will be discussed in more detail below. Colliers had to live near their charcoal pits while working them—usually done during the warmer months of May to October (Kemper 1987:10), so perhaps Johns had been using the hut on the Fahler property (which clearly
resembles a collier's hut—compare Figures 1 and 13) seasonally while working as a collier in the surrounding mountain area. Then, when his home on the Second Mountain was broken into and burned to the ground, Johns could have moved permanently into his collier's hut on the Blue Mountain to avoid the Blue-Eyed Six and perhaps be protected by the Fahlers. This scenario is only a theory, suggested by some residents in the Green Point area (Ditzler 2001), but it again disregards the tale of the Southern men coming to retrieve Johns.

LIVING THE RECLUSE LIFE

Though he is usually remembered as having lived as a relatively self-sufficient hermit, a comprehensive look at the documentary and oral history of Johns suggests that, in addition to having several loyal friends, including the Fahler family, he interacted with his fellow residents on a regular basis. For example, a religious man, Johns attended services at the Christian Moonshine Church, located one-and-a-half miles from his hut (Figure 4), where he is said to have delighted the local children by presenting them with red-and-white striped candies (Gilara 1964). People invited Johns over for dinner and came to his hut to play cards with him (Gilara 1964). Johns was said to have been an amiable fellow, and in the words of one man who knew Johns at the turn of the century, "Joe was everyone's friend" (Gilara 1964). Yet, he remained at a distance, both literally and figuratively, in his mountaintop hut.

Johns, while befriending local residents, nevertheless appears to have been regarded as a local curiosity by many northern Lebanon County residents. For example, some people in the Green Point area considered Johns a healer (Hower 1992:10A). A local superstition held that the kiss of a black man would ward off whooping cough, a
fatal childhood illness at the time, so mothers often brought their children to Johns so that he might kiss them on the forehead (Wagner 1980:1, Matterness 2001a:2). He supposedly even kissed the Fahler children. Part of the attention on the peculiar mountaintop man, apart from his skin color, probably derived from his age. Interested people traipsing through the woods around the turn of the century often sought out Johns’ hut just for a glimpse of the old man reported to be in his hundreds. In 1906 the unnamed Lebanon County newspaper reports that “His abode has become of late a Mecca of curious sightseers and other interested persons, and all receive a cordial welcome from the centenarian” ([Lebanon County, PA, newspaper] 1906).

Food

Most accounts of how Johns secured food focus on the charitable donations he received from the local residents. According to the 1906 article on Johns in the unnamed Lebanon County newspaper, “Johns prepares his own meals, the material for which is donated by kindly residents of Green Point and other nearby places who manifest a keen interest in his welfare.” A Mrs. Reigel, born in 1881, reported in 1964 that Johns sometimes ate Sunday dinner at her parents’ home at their invitation (Gilara 1964). And hunters in the woods around his abode often gave Johns their surplus game, such as rabbits or opossums, that they bagged on their days out hunting (Gilara 1964; Wagner 1980:2). Johns often joked that he ate better than many of his friends and neighbors with all the charity he received.

Although Johns clearly benefited from the donations he received, Johns also provided for himself by buying his own food and hunting and fishing. According to Evelyn Isele (2002), Johns used to buy baked goods and bread from her grandfather, John
Lentz, who was a baker in nearby Jonestown around the turn of the century. Lentz used to drive by horse and buggy into Green Point, blow a bugle to signal his arrival for those far off in the mountains, and then sell his goods to those who came to his wagon. Johns was also often seen with a handkerchief tied to a long stick slung over his shoulder on his way to the general store (Gilara 1964). The closest store at the time was in Bordnersville, which was about two-and-a-half miles from his hut, as can be seen in Figure 4 (Wagner 1980:1). Johns probably bought tobacco here, too, as he was a reported pipe smoker ([Leb. Co., PA, newspaper] 1906).

Johns probably hunted and fished in the woods for food and drew water from one of the two springs near his hut. He owned three guns: a Kentucky Rifle, a shotgun, and a pepperbox pistol, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. He would have used the rifle for hunting big game, like deer, while the shotgun, which disperses a spray of steel pellets of less accuracy and force than the rifle, would have been useful for hunting fowl, like turkey, duck, or pheasant. He was supposedly a good shot, for the 1906 unnamed newspaper article reports that “his marksmanship is envied by huntsmen far and near.” Even in his hundreds, Johns purportedly hunted and fished to supply himself with food.

Shelter

Johns’ hut, as seen in Figure 1, resembled a typical collier’s hut, an example of which can be seen in Figure 13. The hut, constructed from oak and birch logs with mud and leaves baked hard in the sun to form an outer sealant, was circular in shape, about ten to twelve feet in diameter and approximately twelve feet high (Shay 1971:10; Wagner
1980:1). There was a wooden door, but no windows. This sounds similar to the typical collier's hut, as described in *American Charcoal Making*:

The hut was always conical in form, having a base about 8 feet in diameter and a height of about 10 feet. Three-inch poles were used for uprights, and more slender poles filled the interstices between them. Leaves were used to cover the structure and to form a mat so that the final dressing of topsoil would not sift through the few remaining crevices. A door just large enough for one man to get through was placed on the [side] of the hut (Kemper 1987:8).

Collier huts are usually temporary residences built for use while making charcoal in a secluded location for weeks at a time, but Johns apparently lived in his for many years. Perhaps this is why Johns built his hut slightly bigger than the typical collier's hut.

Inside his hut Johns reportedly had a woodstove, and there appears in the photograph (Figure 1) to be a stovepipe poking through the roof of his hut, which would have allowed the smoke to vent (Matterness 2001a:1). Evelyn Isele (2002) says that her mother, Annie Lentz, born in 1895, used to visit his hut and remembered seeing a table, chairs, and a bed in the cramped space.

*Work*

Johns was undoubtedly a hard-working man, even into his old age and despite a supposed limp he had from getting his foot once caught in a trap. When he first came up north, he apparently worked for a lumber company as a woodchopper (Elia 1956:20; Ludwig 1980a:9). Around this time, he also allegedly worked on the S. & S. Railroad, which was constructed through northern Lebanon County during the first half of the 1840s. Once on the Fahlers' property, he supported himself by gathering huckleberries, when in season, from the surrounding mountains to sell or barter in town (Gilara 1964). He also helped out local farmers by performing various chores, including butchering
(Wagner 1980:2). His main source of income, however, came from working as a collier, or charcoal-maker.

The process of making charcoal was suitable for a solitary person. It was an arduous and sometimes dangerous job that required constant attentiveness, as described in Kemper’s *American Charcoal Making* (1987). For up to two weeks at a time, usually from May to late October when the wind is not as strong as in the winter months, the collier had to continuously monitor his charcoal pit while the cut wood smoldered into charcoal. Sometimes colliers simultaneously tended as many as ten pits, which were separated from each other by up to a quarter-mile.

The charcoal-making process began with the building of the pit. The collier would clear the debris from an area usually thirty to forty feet in diameter and then rake the surface to provide a smooth, tough base for the pit (“pit,” though misleading, refers to the charcoal mound). The raked surface had to be level in order to ensure even smoldering. It was advantageous for colliers to simply reuse their pit surfaces, which improved with each accumulation of charcoal dust. The collier, who usually cut his own wood beforehand, began by building a three-cornered chimney in the center of the pit by triangularly stacking lap-wood—small pieces of wood one-and-a-half to four inches in diameter. Once the chimney, which had an eight-inch opening, reached a height of about five feet, the collier would next lean billets—longer pieces of wood four to seven inches in diameter—against the chimney, increasingly slanting them with each concentric ring away from the chimney so as to reach a gentle slope. This process was repeated on a second and third tier, until a stable mound of wood was constructed, as seen in Figure 14. Next, bits of lap-wood were used to fill in air spaces. Finally, the collier packed leaves
and charcoal dust leftover from the previous burn onto the mound, as seen in Figure 15, until there were several inches worth of this final layer.

After the charcoal pit was built, the next step was lighting it. The collier climbed the mound, put kindling in the chimney, and then threw hot coals in to start the burning. Then, the collier covered the chimney with wooden slabs and more leaves and dust in order for the smoldering to begin. The pit would not burn properly with an open flame. From this point on, the collier’s task was to monitor the charcoal pits to make sure that fire did not break through the covering of leaves and dust, which would have disrupted the process and destroyed the charcoal. Also, the collier had to frequently examine the pit for air pockets, or *mulls*, by climbing onto the mound and probing it for soft spots. The mulls would decrease the quality of the charcoal if neglected, so the collier had to stomp out these air pockets with his feet. This was an extremely dangerous job as there was a smoldering fire several inches beneath him.

After the charcoal was formed, usually after a week or two, depending on the size of the pit, the collier had to rake it out. This was a tedious and dangerous job that had to be done carefully as the charcoal was very hot. Typically the collier then loaded up a mule-pulled wagon with the charcoal to transport it to a furnace.

It is not known where Johns sent his charcoal. Cornwall Iron Furnace, twenty miles south of Green Point, was a 10,000-acre “iron plantation” that began operation in 1742 and was a major iron producer for much of the 18th and early 19th century. However, like most cold-blast furnaces, it ceased operation when anthracite coal, which did not require the massive amount of land and labor as charcoal-making did, became the more economically sensible fuel for iron furnaces. Cornwall Iron Furnace “blew out” in
1883, meaning that Johns probably did not send his charcoal there. Most likely, he produced charcoal for the small iron forges in the area that persisted past the time when most large furnaces closed down or converted to hot-blast coal-powered furnaces (Hower 1992:10A). Francis Ditzler (2001) reports that Lickdale, a town a little over three miles from his hut (Figure 4), had a small iron furnace at this time, so it is possible Johns made charcoal for this furnace.

How much charcoal Johns produced is not known. According to Kemper (1987:18), charcoal pits varied greatly in size depending on the amount of wood to be coaled. Thus, Johns did not necessarily tend pits with forty-foot diameters, as colliers for large furnaces did. Each cord of wood produced 35-40 bushels of charcoal, and a forty-foot diameter pit could hold up to fifty cords (Kemper 1987:18; National Park Collection 1987). The remains of charcoal pits that are still visible today in the mountains around Johns' hut do not appear to be this large, meaning Johns was probably producing perhaps a few hundred bushels of charcoal at most. It is rumored that Johns had a mule for transporting his charcoal down from the mountain, but this appears to be based on the fact that a mule shoe was found at his hut several decades later.

JOHNS' DEATH AND FUNERAL

Johns died on 7 February 1906 in his hut on the Fahlers' land. According to his obituary: “He was breathing heavily when found and expired before medical aid could be summoned. It is thought that dropsical affections and old age caused his death” (Lebanon Daily News 1906b:3). Dropsical affections refer to congestive heart failure.

John Fahler arranged for Johns’ funeral, which took place on 10 February 1906 at Moonshine Church with Reverend Christian Wenger officiating (Lebanon Daily News
Friends and neighbors attended the funeral and donated money for the funeral expenses, including a tombstone, which were paid to an undertaker Shell (Wagner 1980:2). Irvin Donmoyer, Clayton Hower, Jacob Hower, Monroe Kreiser, Milton Fahler, and Harvey Fahler served as the pallbearers (Watts). Johns was buried in the cemetery across the street from Moonshine Church, his grave marked by a white marble tombstone (Figure 5) reading:

JOSEPH JOHNS
Born in Fauquier Co., Va.
Aged 112 Years.
He resided near John Fahler
north side of mountain west of
Swatara Gap Union Township
Lebanon Co., Pa.
CHAPTER THREE

Historical Context

Before the Emancipation Proclamation, Pennsylvania, a state with a reputation for sympathizing with oppressed people as a result of its Quaker roots, became a sought-after destination for escaped slaves. Due to the state’s proximity to the South, the Underground Railroad thrived in the southern counties of Pennsylvania, thus making it likely that Joseph Johns benefited from the liberal-minded Pennsylvanians in this area of the state. However, while Pennsylvania clearly was a refuge for runaway slaves, its reputation for being a beacon of hope and opportunity for African Americans was not without contradictions. The history of Pennsylvania’s approach to African Americans shows an aversion to slavery, yet an inconsistent and troubled treatment of its free African Americans. In the words of historian Edward Turner (1969:227), the African American in Pennsylvania “was the victim of violent prejudice at the same time that he received the liveliest sympathy and aid.” This chapter will discuss Pennsylvania’s contradictory attitude toward African Americans in the late 18th and 19th century and then hypothesize as to why Johns was able to lead a peaceful life in Lebanon County given the underlying racism toward free African Americans in Pennsylvania at the time.

THE TIMES

As early as 1688, Pennsylvania’s Quakers took a stance against the “peculiar institution” that was thriving in the South, and to a far lesser extent, in Pennsylvania. That year, at a monthly meeting of the Friends in Germantown, PA, Francis Daniel Pastorius, a Quaker lawyer and religious leader, issued the “Protest Against Slavery,”
condemning the institution of slavery and all those who practiced it (Blockson 1994:11). Some Friends, including William Penn, freed their slaves, but not many followed their example. By 1758, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends had voted to expel all members who continued to hold slaves, marking the Quakers' formal ideological break with slavery, which was not necessarily upheld by all Friends in the following years (Lapsansky 1990:2,5).

In 1780, Pennsylvania became the first state to outlaw slavery by passing a gradual emancipation law, meaning all citizens had to eventually relinquish their slaves. African Americans born to Pennsylvania slave-holders before March 1, 1780 would remain slaves until their deaths, but those born after that date would not be enslaved past the age of twenty-eight, providing for Pennsylvania's gradual transition to a free state.

The strong ideological concerns of some Pennsylvanian citizen at this time led to the formation of the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, which held its first meeting in Philadelphia in 1775 (Hopkins and Smith 1994:2). Its purpose was to protect freed slaves who were kidnapped back into slavery. This society, which expanded its mission after the Revolutionary War and became the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, reflected the emphasis in Pennsylvania then on protecting free African Americans and denouncing the institution of slavery (Lapsansky 1990:5).

Anti-slavery sentiments continued to thrive in Pennsylvania into the 19th century. In 1833 sixty women, both African American and white, organized the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. In 1837 the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society was formed in Harrisburg. In 1838 Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Hall, constructed to be a central meetinghouse for abolitionists, was completed. However, three days after its official opening, it was set afire by an angry mob while Philadelphia city police looked
on, signaling that although the state had made significant strides in opposing slavery, Pennsylvanians clearly were not united in their anti-slavery sentiments (Afro-American Historical and Museum Commission 1981:66).

Partly in response to the proliferation of northern anti-slavery societies at the time and to Pennsylvania's reputation for harboring fugitive slaves, the United States Congress passed a law in 1793 stipulating that fugitive slaves could be captured and returned to their owners so long as proof was provided before a court judge that the suspected runaway belonged to someone. Anyone who "obstructed pursuit, assisted a negro to escape, or harbored or concealed a fugitive" was fined $500 (Turner 1969:232). However, this law was met with such resistance in Pennsylvania that it was sometimes even dangerous for Southerners to retrieve their slaves, as the events of April 18, 1825 in Dauphin County demonstrated. On the day a Pennsylvania judge ruled by trial that a runaway Maryland slave, who had been captured and jailed in Dauphin County, must be returned to his owner, the master and his entourage was ambushed outside the courthouse by a violent mob attempting to rescue the African American (Blockson 1994:122).

Further compounding the ineffectiveness of the fugitive law of 1793 was the U.S. Supreme Court's 1842 ruling in the case of Prigg v. Pennsylvania that states were not necessarily obligated to assist slave-catchers. In 1847 Pennsylvania provided a final blow to its Southern neighbors by passing an act that banned any officer of the state from carrying out the law of 1793, meaning "it now became almost impossible for an owner to recover his slave" from Pennsylvania (Turner 1969:239).

Pennsylvania's flagrant disregard for the Federal law of 1793 led to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which stated that court and law enforcers everywhere in the United States were obligated to assist in apprehending and returning fugitive slaves.
The severity of this law prompted 487 of the 943 African Americans in Pennsylvania's Columbia and Lancaster Counties to relocate farther north after 1850 (Blockson 1994:23). However, even with the strong protection of the Federal law of 1850, it was still dangerous for Southerners to retrieve their slaves, as the famous "Christiana Riot" in Lancaster County in September of 1851 demonstrated. A posse of white men led by Maryland slave-owner Edward Gorsuch arrived in Christiana, looking to capture their fugitive slaves. When they arrived at the home of William Parker, who was suspected of harboring the runaways, nearly three-dozen black and white Christiana citizens rose in defense, killing Gorsuch and wounding his son (Lapsansky 1990:16-17).

Clearly, Pennsylvania was a choice destination for fugitive slaves, which makes Johns' decision to flee to the natural fortress of the Blue Mountains understandable in this historical context. The Underground Railroad was well established, especially in York County from 1820 to 1850, according to Blockson (1994:127), meaning Johns, who escaped during this time period through this county, followed a well-trodden path. The ineffectiveness of the Federal fugitive slave laws of 1793 and 1850 in Pennsylvania protected many runaways like Johns and may explain John Fahler's brazenness in confronting the Southern men who supposedly came searching for Johns before the end of the Civil War.

**REASONS FOR JOHNS' ACCEPTANCE IN GREEN POINT**

At the time of Johns' escape, which was roughly 1840, there were 1,724,033 people living in Pennsylvania, of which 47,918 were African American (Turner 1969:253). Though about a third of these African Americans lived in Philadelphia County, there were substantial settlements of African Americans throughout the state.
For example, "Freedom Road" in Mercer County, "Africa" in Franklin County, and "Hayti" in Chester County were several African-American communities that were established in the 19th century (Hopkins and Smith 1994:3). Lebanon County was an exception at the time in that not many African Americans settled there. Though the Blue Mountains—a common destination for escaped slaves then—are in the heart of Union Township, in northern Lebanon County, in 1870 the township was home to only fourteen African Americans out of a total population of 1,614 residents (Walker 1872:317).

This small population may have contributed to Johns' acceptance in the Green Point area. Greer Point was a tight-knit community that saw little gain in population over the years; as late as the 1940s most everyone knew each other by name (USBC 1880b; Ditzler 2002b). Residents probably did not feel threatened by the small African American population in Green Point as opposed to places with larger African American settlements like Philadelphia, where racial strife continually plagued the city.

Johns' settlement in Union Township was probably more palatable in light of the racism of the time given his personality also. Johns, once described in a newspaper article as "a near-perfect prototype for the Uncle Remus character later brought to life in Walt Disney creations," by all accounts was an amiable and honest person (Elia 1956:1). He was remembered as a "hard-working, soft-spoken man" who prayed for local people and was "very polite in talking" (Elia 1956:20; Gilara 1964). Apparently Johns could read and write, and he kept a well-thumbed Bible in his hut, thus giving the people in the mainly Christian community of Green Point yet one more reason to accept Johns.
CHAPTER FOUR

Post-1906: What Became of Johns' Possessions and the Site

JOHNS' POSSESSIONS

After Joseph Johns passed away on February 7, 1906 and was buried at Moonshine Church, the Fahlers arranged a public auction to sell Johns' possessions. Though it is not known when or where this auction occurred, John Fahler used the auction money to help pay for the expenses of Johns' funeral service and tombstone, according to an article on Johns in the Middletown Press and Journal (Gilara 1964). In this article, a Mr. Jerry Reigel, whose wife had known Johns when she was a child, reports that he had heard many people were attracted to the auction to buy "Joe's jugs, buckets, beddings, guns and other items as mementoes."

This is the only account of what happened to Johns' few personal possessions at the time of his death. With the exception of Johns' guns, it is not known who bought the other auction items or what became of them. Evelyn Isele (2002) reports that a thimble made out of deer hide that Johns had used for sewing was passed on to one of her aunts who had lived in the Green Point area, but her aunt probably acquired this memento before Johns died, rather than at the auction.

Johns had owned three guns: a Kentucky Rifle, a pistol, and a shotgun. The Kentucky Rifle is what Johns is holding in the photograph, shown in Figure 1, taken of him one month before his death. Monroe Fake, who might have bought the Kentucky Rifle at the auction, sold the rifle to an antiques dealer at some point, according to John Ditzler (1994), who attempted before his death to trace the history of Johns' guns post-1906. Monroe Fake did not remember the name of the dealer to whom he sold the rifle.
The pistol, which was in the possession of Peter Fake as of 1964, is described in the *Press and Journal* article (Gilara 1964) as a double-barreled pistol with double hammers. It is over seven inches in length, with a smooth curved handle. Black powder grains and caps were used to set off the charge. Peter Fake had received the pistol from his cousin, unnamed in the article, who may have purchased the pistol at the auction in 1906. John Ditzler (1994) writes that it is a pepperbox pistol and that it was in the possession of either Moses Fake or John Fake at the time of his inquiry into what happened to Johns' guns. Moses was Peter Fake's son, so it is possible he inherited the pistol after his father's death. The current consensus is that the pistol is in a safe deposit box somewhere in Green Point (Forney 1997:1; Matterness 2001a:2).

Monroe Fake's brother, George Fake, who had lived near Johns, bought the shotgun at the auction in 1906 (Ditzler 1994). John Ditzler bought the shotgun from George Fake around 1937 and passed it on to his brother, Francis Ditzler, shortly before his death. Francis Ditzler had the shotgun mounted to an oak board and donated it to the Lebanon County Historical Society for his late brother and his brother's wife, Miriam Ditzler. The shotgun is now on display at the Historical Society, as shown in Figure 16.

The double-barrel walnut-stock shotgun is 49 inches long, with a 33.5 inch-long barrel. John Ditzler (1994) writes that it is early 1800 vintage. "C H Schindler" is inscribed on the left barrel and on the right side plate. Engraved on the right barrel and on the left side plate is the phrase, "In Zella ben Gothe," which is translated as, "Forever in the spirit of God" (Ditzler 1994). There are carvings of trees, acorns, and a fox in the silver around the trigger guard and the stock. The stock, or grip, is broken and has repair plates on both sides, as seen in Figure 17.
THE SITE

After Johns' death, his hut on the Fahler property was abandoned, and no mention of it resurfaces until a 1956 Lebanon Daily News article about the ex-slave. By that time, the Fahler property had been bought by John S. Bashore, a wealthy clothier and philanthropist from the city of Lebanon. In 1946, Bashore donated 250 acres of that land to the Boy Scouts of Lebanon County. The Boy Scouts formed the Bashore Scout Reservation in 1947, which today is a thriving camp covering 465 acres (Figure 18) and hosting two- to three-thousand visitors per year (Matterness 2001b).

Peter Silldorff, who was interviewed by the author, was on the camp's staff in its early days. He remembers there being rumors when Bashore Scout Reservation was founded that an ex-slave had lived as a hermit somewhere within the camp's boundaries. He recalls that in the late 1940s, the camp director at Bashore located an old man in Green Point who knew where the hut was located. Silldorff has memories of this old man, accompanied by another elderly gentleman and the camp director, walking up the mountain to find the remains of the hut. When Silldorff first saw the hut, he noticed that the uprights were made of chestnut wood and that there was a spring flowing nearby, which is still visible today (Figure 19).

In 1956, the Lebanon Daily News reported that "Boy Scouts have found the remains of what they believe was his hermit hut and are taking steps to preserve it. Wooden uprights remain on the site..." (Elia 1956:1). As seen in Figure 20, the parts of the hut believed to have belonged to Johns are still standing in that year. The Boy Scouts placed a fence around the remains and posted a sign reading, "Old Black Joe's Place." They also began to notice the still-visible charcoal pits, probably used by Johns, in the surrounding areas of the mountain.
The site of these remains has become the mecca of Camp Bashore. It is a tradition at the Reservation that first-year campers be required to make the half-mile hike up the mountain to the site. And each year many Scouts spend the night camping out near Johns’ former home (Forney 1997:1). Bashore Scout Reservation even used to have an “Old Black Joe” award that was granted to all Scouts that successfully hiked to and camped out on the mountain top site (Shay 1971:10; Forney 1994:3).

In 1969 a local Scout Troup 8 member named Michael Shay began preparing to rebuild Johns’ hut as part of his Eagle Scout service project. Shay spent 155 hours reconstructing the hut on its original site and clearing the surrounding area (Shay 1971:10). The project was completed in October of 1970. According to a Lebanon Daily News article (Shay 1971:10) about Shay’s project, “While working on the project old bottles, jugs, square nails, a metal plate and a homemade mule shoe were found in the remains of the old foundation.” Apparently, Shay—who declined an interview with the author—had searched the site with a metal detector during the course of his project (Matterness 2001a). According to David Matterness, the camp ranger at Bashore, Shay still has these artifacts in his possession.

In 1976 another Scout by the name of Merv Wagner began his Eagle Scout service project of researching the history of Joseph Johns and repairing the hut, which had fallen to the ground a few years after Shay had rebuilt it. Wagner, whom the author could not locate to interview, met with several old-timers in the Green Point area to learn the history of Joseph Johns, including Harry C. Mease, who had obtained his information on Johns from Katie Fahler, a granddaughter of John Fahler (Tables 1 and 8). According to Wagner’s short report on his findings, he spent 475 hours from September 1976 to the
spring of 1980 (with a hiatus to account for his service in the Air Force) gathering information and reconstructing the hut, which he hoped "would appear authentic and yet be sturdy and strong enough to last years" (Wagner 1980:2).

Matterness (2001b) reports that Wagner's reconstruction fell soon after it was built. Another reconstruction of the hut was built in the next decade, but this one did not remain upright for long either. In the early 1990s, a group rebuilt the hut that can be seen at Camp Bashore today. This group never finished the reconstruction, and they did not use durable wood, which is why the hut appears in need of repair presently. When the author visited the site in October 2001 and March 2002, this reconstructed hut had only a few remaining uprights, as seen in Figure 21. According to Matterness (2001b), a group of Scouts is interested in building yet another reconstruction of the hut with sturdier wood this coming summer.

On the Boy Scout Reservation still stand some of the buildings that had belonged to the Fahlers. Matterness lives in the former Fahler farmhouse (Figure 22), which he guesses was probably built in the 1870s (Matterness 2001b). The Fahler barn (Figure 23) has been converted into an office and lounge for the Boy Scouts, yet it has retained its outer structure. And a corncrib (Figure 24) with the date 1893 inscribed near its roof still stands southeast of the barn.

In the early 1990s, Francis Ditzler, a local historian and member of the Lebanon County Historical Society board, began to formulate plans to erect a marker to commemorate Joseph Johns. He initially contacted the State Historical and Museum Commission to see if it would agree to place one of its roadside markers at the Bashore Scout Reservation, but the Commission turned down his request, stating that Johns'
legend had no state or national historical significance (Forney 1993:15). He thus began to collect donations to purchase a marker, which cost between $600 and $700. In 1993, Ditzler received approval from the Lebanon-Lancaster Council of the Boy Scouts of America to write the following on the marker:

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
JOSEPH JOHNS

BORN INTO SLAVERY IN FAUQUIER
COUNTY, VIRGINIA 1794. ESCAPED
NORTH ABOUT 1844. CAME TO THE
GREEN POINT AREA AND LIVED ON
THIS FARM OWNED BY JOHN FAHLER.
JOE'S HOME WAS A HUT A HALF
MILE SOUTH OF THIS POINT.
DIED 7 FEBRUARY 1906
AT THE AGE OF 112.
HE IS BURIED IN
THE MOONSHINE CEMETARY.
THIS SITE MAINTAINED BY
THE BOY SCOUTS.

ERECTED BY THE LEBANON COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1993 IN
COOPERATION WITH THE
LANCASTER LEBANON COUNCIL B.S.A.

Ditzler (2001) had originally included the sentence, “He affectionately became known as “Old Black Joe,” but the Council made him remove it because the Boy Scouts “opted to avoid any possibility of a discrimination lawsuit, or some negative publicity, by divorcing itself from Johns’ more common nickname” (Lebanon Daily News 1994:4; Ditzler 2001).

In 1994, the Lebanon County Historical Society and the Lancaster-Lebanon Council of the Boy Scouts of America dedicated the stone marker, as seen in Figure 25, which was placed along Route 443 (Moonshine Road) beside the entrance to Camp Bashore (Figure 26). This is a fitting monument to the man whose legend holds such a prominent place at Camp Bashore and in the Green Point area. As Ditzler said, “We don’t have anything else in our community that compares to this story” (Forney 1993:15).
CHAPTER FIVE

The Site from an Archaeological Perspective

Historical archaeology, which is typically defined as the archaeology of the modern world (post-A.D. 1400), always involves the use of both archaeological and documentary data, thus enriching our understanding of recent history through these multiple sources. According to James Deetz (1996:32), “the combined use of archaeological and documentary materials should permit us to say something about the past that could not have been said using only one set of data.” Thus, in the case of Joseph Johns, historical archaeology has the potential to “fill in the gaps” in the documentary and oral accounts of his life history and to expand our understanding of his lifestyle.

This chapter examines some of the issues that perhaps archaeological excavations could address to enhance our understanding of Johns’ life. African American archaeology is a specialization within historical archaeology that seems to cover examinations of any sites formerly inhabited by African Americans, meaning an archaeological study on Johns would be considered a part of this subfield. A background on African American archaeology is thus included in this chapter also. Finally, reasons why Johns is distinctive from an archaeological perspective are given, along with what these peculiarities mean for a site within the field of historical archaeology and its subfield, African American archaeology.
WHAT ARCHAEOLOGY COULD CONTRIBUTE

There are several questions about Johns that perhaps could be answered through archaeological excavations. One of the most debated issues surrounding Johns is when he settled on the Fahler farm. It is relatively clear that he entered Lebanon County in the 1840s or 1850s, but it is uncertain when he took up residence in Blue Mountain on the Fahler property. Johns most likely lived in another hut before moving onto the Fahler property. As discussed in Chapter Two, by most estimates, Johns was definitely living on the Fahler property by about 1877, but possibly earlier if he had two huts contemporaneously or if the reported fire that destroyed a hut of his during this time period burned his hut on the Fahler property (rather than his original hut), prompting Johns to rebuild his hut on the same spot. Since the site of Johns’ final habitation is known, excavations could determine if there had been a fire on the site by the presence or absence of a burn layer. If a burn layer were found, then it would be likely that Johns settled on the Fahler property before 1877, supporting the common legend that Johns was living on the Fahlers’ property before the end of the Civil War.

Another controversial issue concerning Johns is the extent to which he lived as a self-sufficient hermit. According to the author’s research, Johns’ supposed reclusive life has been exaggerated somewhat for he apparently had a fair amount of interaction with local residents and local institutions, such as the general stores, the S. & S. Railroad, and the charcoal furnace. To what extent did he utilize these surrounding peoples and places to live his seemingly self-enforced secluded lifestyle? This is a more theoretical topic that would be interesting to look for in the archaeological record—via the amount and
quality of store-bought ceramics and other goods, for example—as an insight into how Johns perhaps negotiated his outsider status. Though Johns clearly was generally well-received and tolerated by the surrounding community, for reasons discussed in Chapter Three, it would be interesting to know more about how Johns saw himself and his relationship to the community.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY: A BACKGROUND**

Much attention in historical archaeology has been focused in the past few decades on “those of little note”—people like Johns whose histories are not well known due to the predominance of the male Euro-American perspective in this country’s documentary history (Scott 1994:3). Typically marginalized groups like ethnic minorities and the lower classes are less represented in the written record of the past, meaning they are sometimes overlooked and considered of less historical importance to researchers today. Through excavation, archaeology has the benefit of producing a “democratic” view of the past. Everyone, regardless of color, class, gender, education level, religion, or ethnicity unintentionally leaves physical reminders of their lives. Thus, “those of little note” in the past have the opportunity through historical archaeology to surface, especially now that some researchers in historical archaeology actually have begun to focus exclusively on studying historically marginalized groups of people and their relationship to the dominant culture at the time.

African American archaeology is one of these subdivisions of the field that has grown substantially since its modest beginnings. The field has its roots in the late 1960s at the University of Florida, which served as the hub for the field for over a decade.
(Ferguson 1992:xxxvi). Plantation studies in Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia were the primary areas of research in these early years, but the topics of study have expanded both geographically and temporally since then (Singleton and Bograd 1995:15). Since the late 1970s, when the first bibliography on African American archaeological studies was published with less than fifty entries, the field has rapidly grown; there were over 1,000 entries in the last published bibliography in 1994 (Singleton and Bograd 1995:1).

According to Theresa Singleton and Mark Bograd (1995:1), African American archaeology "involves the study of material culture to describe and interpret the diverse experiences of African Americans and the social processes that affected their lives." This all-encompassing definition makes it difficult to characterize the field. African American archaeology is over-represented by plantation-related studies, partly because U.S. slavery is a well-studied concept and plantations offer a discrete cultural and physical landscape for study (Singleton 1999:15). This focus on African American life during slavery provides plantation studies with a unifying theme, but its prominence in current research seems to associate the African American past solely with slavery, thereby overshadowing the lives of other African Americans in U.S. history. Even sites associated with notable African Americans like W.E.B. DuBois (Muller 1994:81-83) have been neglected until recently, contributing to the myth that African Americans were not important in the past outside of the labor they provided on plantations.

One topic unifying the diverse field of African American archaeology is the study of ethnicity (Singleton and Bograd 1995:24). The examination of the way African Americans maintained and negotiated their identity in relation to others, as expressed through material culture, is at the core of ethnicity studies in African American
archaeology. Many studies, such as Leland Ferguson’s (1992) examination of Colono Ware, have attempted to find “ethnic markers” in the material record, while others, like Vernon G. Baker’s (1980:29-37) excavations at Black Lucy’s Garden, have tried to determine characteristic artifact assemblage patterns for African American sites. The extent to which ethnicity is visible in the archaeological record remains a point of debate, however. According to Singleton (1999:6-7), who discusses the problematic relationship between material culture and cultural identity:

Archaeologists have approached this problem in African-American archaeology in two essential ways. The first approach relies upon making artifact identification with African cultures...In the second approach, types, quality, or percentages of artifacts (not associated with Africa) are used as a point of departure for making inferences to one of the following conditions: the social position African Americans held in white America (inexpensive ceramics, cheap cuts of meat); ethnic style (e.g. foodways, hair-care products); both social position and ethnic style.

It is this second approach that is most relevant for an archaeological study of Joseph Johns. Perhaps the key motivation for viewing Johns from an African American archaeological perspective is to examine how Johns adapted and negotiated his identity as a black man living alone in a nearly all-white northern context, and secondly, how this is expressed in the archaeological record.

WHY JOHNS IS DISTINCTIVE FROM AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Johns is distinctive from an archaeological perspective for several reasons. First, Johns was racially isolated in Green Point for the most part, making it tempting to examine how he negotiated this position with the surrounding community. As mentioned above, however, the relationship between material culture and ethnicity is debatable. The
archaeological case study most similar to Johns’—Vernon Baker’s *Archaeological Visibility of Afro-American Culture: An Example from Black Lucy’s Garden, Andover, Massachusetts*—reluctantly concludes that artifact assemblage patterns characteristic of African American settlements of limited economic means do not necessarily express ethnically peculiar traits. Vernon excavated the site where Lucy Foster, a freed African American woman, had lived during the early- to mid-19th century in solitude in a house in Andover, MA. The excavations yielded a predominance of serving bowls in the category of tableware and of chopped bones in the sample of faunal remains. Vernon compared the percentages of serving bowls and chopped bones with artifacts patterns from two other sites: James Deetz’s study of four families of freed slaves at a late 18th and 19th century community in Plymouth, Massachusetts, called Plymouth Meeting, and John Otto’s excavations of slave cabins on Cannon’s Point Plantation in Georgia. He found tableware and faunal remains patterns at Lucy’s site to be similar to those at Parting Ways and Cannon’s Point Plantation; at all three sites, serving bowls accounted for more than 40 percent of all tableware and chopped bones approached 100 percent of all faunal remains (Baker 1980:34). All three sites had in common impoverished residents, however, leading Vernon to conclude that perhaps “the patterns visible in the archaeological record may be reflecting poverty and not the presence of Afro-Americans” (Baker 1980:35). Joseph Johns lived under limited economic means also, so it would be wise to keep Vernon’s conclusion in mind if excavations were undertaken on the site of Johns’ former residence. While it may be tempting to look for ethnic traits at a site like Johns’, archaeologists must be careful not to ascribe reasons for peculiar artifacts patterns
to functions of ethnicity before examining other variables, like poverty, as may be the case with Johns.

Secondly, Johns lived a relatively solitary existence, as did Lucy Foster, but at a geographically remote location in a rudimentary dwelling, a rare site description for most historical archaeological studies; excavated prospector’s sites in the American West are a notable exception. When historical archaeological excavations are undertaken on once-remote locations, such as Western frontiers sites like Silver Reef (Schuyler 1988), usually communities are examined. And when sites once inhabited by only one person are excavated, they are often part of a larger archaeological investigation in a neighborhood or community, for example. Furthermore, these excavations usually occur where a formal house or other more substantial structure once stood, contrasting greatly to John’s log-and-mud hut, which might not have high visibility in the archaeological record. These considerations would make excavations on sites like Johns’ former residence uncommon in the field of historical archaeology.

Finally, Johns lived in his rudimentary mountaintop hut for possibly half a century and his hut was abandoned for more than another half-century until the Boy Scouts found its remains, making the site temporally discrete. This is significant because the duration of his occupation—no less than twenty-five years by most estimates—would have allowed for a sizable accumulation of artifacts, which should be distinguishable from the physical remains of those who visited the site much later, such as Boy Scout campers and those building reconstructions of the hut. Often when historical archaeologists excavate a residential site, they must contend with artifact deposits from successive generations of inhabitants, but the site of Johns’ former home is unusual in that all household-related
deposits can be assumed to be associated only with Johns' occupation. Though the Boy Scouts have disturbed the site in the past half-century, meaning the assemblage associated with Johns' occupation is probably mixed up with the physical remains of campers and/or scattered by those who cleared the area to build reconstructions of the hut, a large part of this assemblage will nonetheless be identifiable as having belonged to Johns since the artifacts associated with it will be older and of a different type. For example, a sherd from a late 19th century ceramic vessel would almost certainly have belonged to Johns. This discrete artifact assemblage is likely to provide important data as to how Johns lived.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: The Problems and Potential for Archaeology

The legend of Joseph Johns clearly is important to residents in the Green Point area, the local historians, and the Boy Scouts who visit Camp Bashore each year. Over the years Johns has been commemorated with a roadside monument at Camp Bashore, "Old Black Joe" scout awards, traditional hikes to his hut, numerous reconstructions of his hut, occasional newspaper articles, and informal research on his life. Thus, the first issue to examine in order to determine what archaeology can contribute would be the point of such excavations, especially considering that the legends surrounding Johns seem to have sufficed thus far for the majority of those people who are interested in remembering Johns.

It is clear from this thesis that the history that people know of Johns is riddled with holes and ambiguities, yet Johns’ past has somehow achieved a legendary status that is difficult to deconstruct. However, this mythical history is more the result of a lack of concrete information on Johns than an unwillingness to consider the whole picture, which remains complicated, even with the comprehensive overview of Johns in Chapters Two and Three. Historical archaeology has the potential to complete this picture.

Whatever archaeology is able to reveal at the site will supply the first new data for reconstructing the life of Johns. Thus, one point of conducting excavations on the site of Johns’ former residence would be to do justice to the man who is so commemorated by at least clarifying some of the details of his life, such as when he settled on the Fahler property (possible through the presence or absence of a burn layer, as discussed in
Chapter Five), what his diet consisted of, what store-bought items he used—all data possibly recoverable through excavations.

There is also the more theoretical potential for archaeologically exploring the site. It is assumed by historical archaeologists that material remains provide some insight into how past people lived and thought about their world. This possibility makes archaeology an especially viable method for understanding the past lives of “those of little note.” As Deetz writes (1996:187), “If archaeology is a vital contributor to our understanding of all of America’s common folk, and what their life meant to them, it is doubly so in the case of our understanding of the black experience in America.” Thus, conducting archaeological excavations on the site of Johns’ former residence would be an interesting addition to African American archaeological case studies, one which would not only possibly provide us with a better understanding of how Johns negotiated his identity with the surrounding community, but one that could then be compared to other similar case studies, such as Vernon Baker’s Black Lucy’s Garden.

While the history of Johns’ life could certainly benefit from historical archaeology, there is another issue to explore. As described in Chapter Four, the site where Johns used to live has been substantially disturbed over the past century since Johns’ death. At least four reconstructions of Johns’ hut have been built, supposedly directly on top of the remains of Johns’ original hut; the Eagle Scout who completed the first reconstruction is said to have cleared the land around the site and even brought a metal detector up to the site to find artifacts. Boy Scouts have camped out in the vicinity of the hut for many years, thus contributing to disturbing the site also. The amount of disturbance will undoubtedly have an impact on the amount and type of artifacts to be
found, but to what extent is unknown at this point, especially since former Scouts who rebuilt the huts originally, like Michael Shay and Merv Wagner, were not available for interview. However, it is probable that any looting at the site was selective and that those artifacts taken were only whole and unusual ones, like the mule’s shoe, meaning the artifact assemblage from Johns’ occupation—albeit probably scrambled by the disturbance—is still useful. Furthermore, the history of the site since 1906 is interesting in its own right. The manipulation of the site, from its relative neglect in the early part of the 20th century to the various hut reconstructions by the Boy Scouts since Camp Bashore’s establishment and even up to the present proposed archaeological project, reflect changing attitudes toward this site throughout the century since Johns’ death.

Though the disturbance on the site will have an effect on the original occupation level of the hut, historical archaeology may yet prove very productive. In addition to having the potential to provide new details of Johns’ history and expand our understanding of his lifestyle, there is one final reason why excavations on this site are feasible. The advantage of having this site on a Boy Scout camp is that there is a large supply of enthusiasm for Johns, and incidentally, free labor! Boy Scouts have the option of obtaining an archaeology merit badge if they so choose. Of the eleven requirements for this merit badge, such as learning about the archaeological process and why it is important to protect archaeological sites, one requirement stipulates that the Scout must spend at least eight hours helping to excavate an archaeological site or analyze artifacts in a lab, both under the supervision of a qualified archaeologist (Boy Scouts of America 1998:2-4). If excavations were undertaken on the site of Johns’ former residence, Boy Scouts would have an excellent opportunity to complete their archaeology merit badges
while helping a supervising archaeologist excavate the site and study the artifacts. Furthermore, securing a permit would not be difficult. The site is on private land, meaning all that is required to conduct excavations is the Lancaster-Lebanon Boy Scout Council’s permission.

Ultimately, the decision to conduct archaeological excavation rests with the Boy Scouts. The location of Johns’ former residence is on their property and they now have the responsibility for maintaining the site. This thesis will be submitted to Camp Bashore for future consideration. Even without archaeological excavations, this project has nonetheless provided a comprehensive overview of Johns’ life and times, which should be of interest for the Boy Scouts, as well as for other local residents. It is hoped, however, that controlled archaeological exploration will also be undertaken.
Afro-American Historical and Museum Commission

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Bashore Scout Reservation
1992 Hand-drawn map of Bashore Scout Reservation. Property of David Matterness, Bashore Scout Reservation, Green Point, PA.

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Gilara, Minerva

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Figure 1: Photograph of Johns in front of his hut from 1906, copyrighted by S.J. Woelfly (courtesy of Dr. Patricia Gibble). Johns is holding his Kentucky Rifle, and his pet dog, which supposedly belonged to the Fahlers, is visible in the background.
Figure 2: Map of Pennsylvania. Lebanon County is located in the center of the southeast quadrant.

Figure 3: Map of Lebanon County showing its different township boundaries (after Clint 1974). Union Township is in the northern part of the county, bounded by Cold Spring on the north, Swatara on the east, and East Hanover on the west.
Figure 4: Topographical map of part of Union Township, Lebanon County, PA, including Green Point (after U.S. Department of the Interior 1977). The location of Johns' hut (N 40° 27.767'; W 76° 34.403') is marked. Highlighted areas include: Moonshine Church, where Johns attended church services and is buried; Bordnersville, the town that had a general store utilized by Johns; the entrance to Bashore Scout Reservation; and Lickdale, the town where Johns might have sent his charcoal.
Figure 5: Photograph of Joseph Johns' tombstone at Moonshine Church cemetery.
Figure 6: Map spanning Warrenton, VA, and Lebanon County, PA (after Visual Encyclopedia [2000]). The distance between them is about 130 miles. Chambersburg is seen southwest of Harrisburg.
Figure 7: 1860 map showing the owners of land in northern Union Township, Lebanon County, PA (after Lebanon County, PA, 1860: last page). John Fahler's name at his plot of land is shaded in gray. Visible also is the Blue Mountain range ("Blue Mountain" is the same as "First Mountain").
Figure 8: 1872 map of southeastern Pennsylvania (after Walling and Gray 1872:33). Lebanon County is shaded in gray. The Susquehanna and Schuylkill Railroad is seen to pass through the northern part of the county.
Figure 9: Map showing the Schuylkill & Susquehanna Railroad line through the northern part of Lebanon County, PA (after Rhoads and Heilman 2000:177). The tracks were laid from the west and construction was supposedly completed to Rausch Gap, seen in the center of the map, by 1843.
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<th>Acres Ac. Per.</th>
<th>Warrant Date</th>
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Figure 10: Chart showing a compilation of all persons who applied for land in what became Union Township (after Warrant, Patent & Survey Records – Union Township). The highlighted row shows that John Failer applied for 18.40 acres of land on May 3, 1815. The land was surveyed on August 26, 1817.
Figure 11: Map of plots of land that were surveyed for warrantees in Union Township (Warrant Patent & Survey Records – Union Township). John Failor's 18.40 acres in the north-central portion of the township are shaded in gray.
Figure 12: 1875 map of northern Union Township, Lebanon County, PA (after Superintendence of F. W. Beers 1875:70). John Fahler's name at his plot of land is shaded in gray. Kreiser's School House (labeled "SCH.") is seen at the fork in the road southwest of Fahler's land.
Figure 13: Photograph of a typical collier’s hut (after Kemper 1987:4).
Figure 14: Photograph of wood-stacked charcoal pit before its final layer of leaves and dust (after Kemper 1987:17).

Figure 15: Photograph of colliers placing the final layer of leaves and dust on the charcoal pit before it is fired (after Kemper 1987:19).
Figure 16: Photograph of Johns’ shotgun, now part of an exhibit at the Lebanon County Historical Society in Lebanon, PA.
Figure 17: Photograph of the ornate trigger guard and the broken stock (with repair plate) on Johns’ shotgun.
Figure 18: Map of Bashore Scout Reservation (after Bashore Scout Reservation 1992).
Figure 19: Photograph of the spring near Johns' hut.
Figure 20: Photograph from 1956 showing the remains of Johns' hut forty years after his death (after Elia 1956).
Figure 21: Photograph of the present reconstructed hut.
Figure 22: Photograph of the Fahler farmhouse.

Figure 23: Photograph of the Fahler barn.
Figure 24: Photograph of the Fahler corncrib, dating to 1893.
Figure 25: Photograph of the monument to Joseph Johns, located at the entrance of Bashore Scout Reservation in Green Point, PA.
Figure 26: Entrance to Bashore Scout Reservation, looking south. First Mountain, where Johns’ hut was located, is visible in the background. The monument to Johns is seen on the right.
Table 1: **1880 Census** (after United States Bureau of the Census [USBC] 1880a).

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<th>Failure</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Keeping house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Works at farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elvina</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Daughter-in-law</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>At home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gdaughter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvey</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td></td>
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Table 2: **1870 Census** (after USBC 1870).

<table>
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<th>John</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Keeping house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John H. (A.?)</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Farm labourer</td>
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Table 3: **1860 Census** (after USBC 1860).

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<th>John</th>
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<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td></td>
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FAHLER GENEROLOGY
(continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fehler</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Labourer</th>
<th>Born in PA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catharine</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adam</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Lydia Mease</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fehler</th>
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<td>F</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Born in PA</td>
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Table 4: 1850 Census (after USBC 1850).

Head of Household: John Failor

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 10 and under 15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 15 and under 20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 60 and under 70</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Of 50 and under 60</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are three residents involved with agriculture.
There is one resident who is deaf and dumb age 25 and up.
There is one resident over age 20 who cannot read or write.

Table 5: 1840 Census (after USBC 1840).
Head of Household: *John Failer*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Under 5</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 5 and under 10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 10 and under 15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 15 and under 20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 20 and under 30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 50 and under 60</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Of 5 and under 10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 15 and under 20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of 30 and under 40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is one resident who is deaf and dumb age 25 and up.

Table 6: **1830 Census** (after USBC 1830).

Head of Household: *John Fauhier* (last name slightly illegible)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free white males under 10 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free white males of 26 and under 45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free white females under 10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free white females of 26 and under 45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is one resident engaged in agriculture.

Table 7: **1820 Census** (after USBC 1820).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>BORN</th>
<th>DIED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Fahler</td>
<td>28 January 1828</td>
<td>18 October 1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate, wife of John Fahler</td>
<td>13 February 1828</td>
<td>8 November 1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John A. Fahler</td>
<td>30 January 1849</td>
<td>23 July 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilhelmina C. Fahler, nee. Shriver</td>
<td>3 April 1844</td>
<td>30 January 1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvey Fahler</td>
<td>24 October 1876</td>
<td>1 October 1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie Fahler</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>1939</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Fahlers buried at Sattazahn’s Lutheran Church cemetery (after Weaver 1975).