

*Dr. Thomas Bayne, Surgeon Dentist in freedom,
Samuel Nixon in slavery*

Samuel Nixon was born into slavery in North Carolina. References give his birth year as 1821 or 1824. It is known that he made his first attempt to escape slavery in 1844. Unfortunately, he was caught and jailed as a runaway in North Carolina. He was held in jail until a Norfolk, VA dentist named Charles F. Martin purchased him. After Samuel was purchased, Dr. Martin brought him back to Virginia.

It was said that Dr. Martin was impressed with Sam's intellect and taught him not only to read and write but also began training him in the practice of dentistry. He was described to be "a man of medium size, and about as purely colored, as could readily be found, with a full share of self-esteem and pluck." Sam's skills became so great that the doctor had him keep the books of his business and personal affairs. He also trained him to tend to patients and sent him out to do house calls. Sam estimated that Dr. Martin's business earned about \$3000 a year. Of that \$3000, \$1000 of it came from Sam's work. He was not paid for his contributions to the practice. Sam married another slave named Edna with whom he had a daughter named Elizabeth. They were owned by E.P. Tabb, Esq who was a hardware merchant in Norfolk. There is no record of either slave owner, Martin or Tabb, treating Sam or Edna with any maltreatment.

However, the freedom Sam had of coming and going about Norfolk put him in contact with many people in the city. He began acting as an Underground Railroad agent helping to arrange transportation with ship captains and other abolitionists to get fugitives from slavery out of Norfolk.

In 1855, Sam received an anonymous letter warning him that his activities as an agent for the Underground Railroad might have been exposed. He is quoted as saying if he had been captured in Norfolk, he "would have been up to (his) eyes in hot water." He knew he had to leave and leave quickly, leaving his family behind. He left Norfolk by sea under a blanket of darkness with two other men. Their plan was to arrive in Philadelphia. Due to what has been described anywhere from bad weather to unknown

circumstances, the ship could only bring the fugitives near Cape Island, New Jersey. Once there, the group made their way to Salem, New Jersey.

Once in Salem, strangers and other fugitives directed them to the home a Quaker woman and abolitionist, Abigail Goodwin. She was devoted to the cause of freedom for all and was "one of the most liberal and faithful friends of the Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia." Goodwin welcomed in Samuel and the others. She knew right away that Sam was not a "run of the mill" fugitive! He spoke of reading, bookkeeping and nearly unbelievably being a dentist. This information raised her suspicion and thought he could be a "shrewd imposter" and a "braggart." She wrote to William Still at the Vigilance Committee in Philadelphia. Her letter follows.

SALEM, 3 mo., 25, '55.

DRAR FRIEND:-Thine of the 22d came to hand yesterday noon.

****** * * I do not believe that any of them are the ones thee wrote about, who wanted Dr. Lundy to come for them, and promised they would pay his expense's. They had no money, the minister said, but were pretty well off for clothes. I gave him all I had and more, but it seemed very little for four travelers-only a dollar for each-but they will meet with friends and helpers on the way. He said they expected to go away to-morrow. I am afraid, it's so cold, and one of them had a sore foot, they will not get away-it's dangerous staying here. There has been a slave-hunter here lately, I was told yesterday, in search of a woman; he tracked her to our Alms-house-she had lately been confined and was not able to go-he will come back for her and his infant-and will not wait long I expect. I want much to get her away first-and if one had a C. C. Torney here no doubt it would be done; but she will be well guarded. How much I wish the poor thing could be secreted in some safe place till she is able to travel Northward; but where that could be it's not easy to see. I presume the Carolina freed people have arrived ere now. I hope they will meet many friends, and be well provided for. Mary Davis will be then paid- her cousins have sent her twenty-four dollars, as it was not wanted for the purchase money -it was to be kept for them when they arrive. I am glad thee did keep the ten for the fugitives.*

Samuel Nixon is now here, just come-a smart young man-they will be after him soon. I advise him to hurry on to Canada; he will leave here to-morrow, but don't say that he will go straight to the city. I would send this by him if

he did. I am afraid he will loiter about and be taken-do make them go on fast-he has left. I could not hear much he said-some who did don't like him at all-think him an impostor-a great brag-said he was a dentist ten years. He was asked where he came from, but would not tell till he looked at the letter that lay on the table and that he had just brought back. I don't feel much confidence in him-don't believe he is the one thee alluded to. He was asked his name-he looked at the letter to find it out. Says nobody can make a better set of teeth than he can. He said they will go on to-morrow in the stage-he took down the number and street of the Anti-slavery office-you will be on your guard against imposition-he kept the letter thee sent from Norfolk. I had then no doubt of him, and had no objection to it. I now rather regret it. I would send it to thee if I had it, but perhaps it is of no importance.

He wanted the names taken down of nine more who expected to get off soon and might come here. He told us to send them to him, but did not seem to know where he was going to. He was well dressed in fine broad-cloth coat and overcoat, and has a very active tongue in his head. But I have said enough-don't want to prejudice thee against him, but only be on thy guard, and do not let him deceive thee, as I fear he has some of us here. With kind regards, A. GOODWIN

Comment [PZ1]: http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/ugm/recollection_bayne.html

After several days, the group made their way to Philadelphia. They were welcomed by the Vigilance Committee. The Committee recommended that Canada as the safest place for them to be. Sam had another idea. He wanted to go to New Bedford, Massachusetts. They tried to convince him that "other places were quite equal to New Bedford" but his mind was set. He wanted to go to New Bedford and set up his dental practice.

Once in New Bedford, Samuel met many of his old friends from Norfolk. It was here that he changed his name to Dr. Thomas Bayne. He began his practice. The 1859 New Bedford City Directory list Thomas Bayne as a Surgeon Dentist with his office being located at "22 Cheapside". (The is approximately where the New Bedford Public Library is currently located.) Dr. Bayne remained in contact with William Still and the Vigilance Committee. He also housed fugitive slaves. He thanked Stills for his, "Vigilance as a colored man helping a colored man to get such knowledge as will give the lie to our enemies."

Several of his letters to Still appear next.

NEW BEDFORD, June 23d, 1855.

W. STILL:-Sir-I write you this to inform you that I has received my things and that you need not say any thing to Bagnul about them-I see by the Paper that the under ground Rail Road is in operation. Since 2 weeks a go when Saless Party was betrayed by that Capt whom we in mass are so anxious to Learn his name-There was others started last Saturday night-They are all my old friends and we are waiting their arrival, we hope you will look out for them they may come by way of Salem, N. J. if they be not overtaken. They are from Norfolk-Times are very hard in Canada 2 of our old friends has left Canada and come to Bedford for a living. Every thing are so high and wages so low They cannot make a living (owing to the War) others are Expected shortly-let me hear from Sales and his Party. Get the Name of the Capt. That betrayed him let me know if Mrs. Goodwin of Salem are at the same place yet-John Austin are with us C. Lightfoot is well and remembers you and family. My business increases more since I has got an office. Send me a Norfolk Paper or any other to read when convenient.

*Let me hear from those People as soon as possible. They consist of woman and child 2 or 3 men belonging to Marsh Bottimore, L. Slosser and Herman & Co-and Turner-all of Norfolk, Va. Truly yours, THOS BAYNE.
Direct to Box No. 516, New Bedford, Mass. Don't direct my letters to my office. Di-rect them to my Box 516. My office is 66 1/2 William St. The same street the Post office is near the city market.*

Comment [PZ2]: http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/ugrr/recollection_bayne.html

Thomas Bayne knew he needed more resources to improve his practice. He applied himself to continue learning as much as he could to be a leader in the City. He devoted himself to learning to study, applied himself to medicine.

NEW BEDFORD, Jan., 1860. No. 22, Cheapside, opposite City Hall.

MY DEAR FRIEND:-Yours of the 3d inst, reached me safely in the midst of my mis-fortune. I suppose you have learned that my office and other buildings burned down during the recent fire. My loss is \$550, insured \$350. I would have written you before, but I have been to R. I. for some time and soon after I returned before I examined the books, the fire took place, and this accounts for my de- lay. In regard to the books I am under many obligations to you and all others for so great a piece of kindness, and shall ever feel indebted to you for the same. I shall esteem them very highly for two reasons, first, The way in which they come, that is through and by your Vigilance as a colored man helping a colored man to get such knowledge as will give the lie to our enemies. Secondly-their contents being just the thing I needed at this time. My indebtedness to you and all concerned for me in this direction is inexpressible. There are some books the Doctor says I must have, such as the Medical Dictionary, Physician's Dictionary, and a work on Anatomy. These I will have to get, but any work that may be of use to a student of anatomy or medicine will be thankfully received. You shall hear from me again soon. Truly Yours, THOS. BAYNE.

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NEW BEDFORD, March 18th, 1861. MR. WM. STILL:

--Dear Sir-Dr. Powell called to see me and informed me that you had a medical lexicon (Dictionary) for me. If you have such a book for me, it will be very thankfully received, and any other book that pertains to the medical or dental profession. I am quite limited in means as yet and in want of books to prosecute my studies. The books I need most at present is such as treat on midwifery, anatomy, &c. But any book or books in either of the above mentioned cases will be of use to me. You can send them by Express, or by any friend that may chance to come this way, but by Express will be the safest way to send them. Times are quite dull. This leaves me well and hope it may find you and family the same. My regards to your wife and all others. Yours, &c., THOMAS BAYNE, 22 Cheapside, opposite City Hall.

Comment [PZ4]: http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/ugrr/recollection_bayne.htm

Thomas Bayne became known for his speaking at abolitionist and temperance meetings in New Bedford. His reputation grew so that in 1860 he served on the New Bedford City Council, the legislative branch of the City's government.

Shortly after the end of the Civil War in 1865, Bayne decided to go back to Norfolk. He continued his political career and in May of 1865, "chaired a public meeting at which the participants passed eight civil rights resolutions under the title of *Equal Suffrage: Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Virginia to the People of the United States*. These resolutions pledged Virginia's loyalty to the Union, decried race discrimination as abhorrent to "patriotism, humanity, and religion," and demanded equal suffrage for black and white Americans. As a member of a committee that testified on behalf of rights for freedmen, Bayne appeared before O. O. Howard of the Freedmen's Bureau in December 1865." (Chandra M. Miller, "Bayne, Thomas," *American National Biography Online*, February 2000)

In 1867, he was elected as a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention. There, he was part of a delegation of both whites and blacks. Members of the delegation who were black pushed legislation that would provide "integrated, free public education." Some reports say that Bayne even "resorted to blackmailing some white delegates for support." However, the bill did not pass. Legislation for integration would have to wait until the next century. During the Reconstruction of the South, Bayne ran for a seat in Congress. He led an aggressive campaign and was found to be "a very difficult candidate to beat". At the first reports of the results, Bayne was found to be the winner. However, at a recount "proved him to be among the defeated by only a very slight majority."

Bayne remained active in medicine and as a minister until 1887. At the end of his life, Bayne was admitted to the Central State Lunatic Asylum in Petersburg, Virginia suffering from either "exhaustion or senility." According to historian John T. Kneebone, Dr. Thomas Bayne is noted for "being one of the most intriguing stories in the Virginian history."