

The First Black Grinnellian, Edward “Ned” Delaney (1786-1861)

Narrative for Grinnell Historical Museum
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Here is the story of a Grinnellian I have come to know.

Edward Delaney was not a name we were aware of at the start this summer. He popped up on a few census records, but seemed unrelated to the Renfrows and disappeared from our books after 1860. So for a time he stayed as that to us, a name in a book. It wasn't until we started mapping Hazelwood that he reappeared. But finding him here was not a reappearance. In fact, it was a statement - a reassertion of presence, of a belonging not recognized or even just known. But now we do know will thus share, the name and story of the first Black man to make Grinnell his home.

This is the story of Edward “Ned” Delaney.

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Edward “Ned” Delaney was born enslaved on a plantation in Carroll County, MD in 1786. The owner of the land, Daniel Dulaney sold young Ned to a man named Joseph Hays Sr. in 1790. Ned was only four years old when taken from his mother and physically moved to the Hays' plantation. The only tie that remained to his life with his mother was the name of his and her enslaver “Dulaney.” Which he would carry with him for the rest of his life.

Joseph Hays Sr. had purchased young Ned as a plaything for his eldest son, Tommy. Think for a minute about what the term ‘plaything’ implies about young Ned's position here. A toy, a fascination, some *thing* to be played with and eventually discarded by the Hays' eldest son. Again, at four years old, this was Ned's position.

His entire upbringing was spent in this position with the Hays. The crucial years in which he would learn of the world and become a person were done away from his mother and in a household in which his explicit purpose was servitude.

Ned is understood to have spent a great amount of time laboring in the Hays family home. Stories passed down in family histories recount “Ned” as a key figure in many the Hays childrens' upbringing, playing a direct role in raising the six children. Ned was only five years older than the oldest Hays and seventeen years older than the youngest, Deborah (1803-1887). Denied his own sense of boyhood, Ned was forced to raise and

take care of children his own age, of his own generation. Facilitating the childhoods of the family that legally owned him - before he was an adult, himself.

Aside from caring for the family's children, Ned was laboring outside the home as well.

Cut or Include for Time:

Throughout the War of 1812, he regularly hauled sacks of flour over 40 miles on foot from the local mill to Baltimore. His feet became caloused carrying 100 lbs sacks through woods and valleys with little infrastructure or roads. For reference, today, with modern infrastructure, this journey would be an 11.5 hour walk without accounting for the physical exertion of carrying the weight of the sacks. Upon reaching Baltimore, Ned delivered the sacks to a storehouse. As a young Black man alone in a slave state, safe room and board was difficult to find in the city, so Ned would drop off the flour, turn around, and immediately begin the 40 mile journey back to Carroll County on foot.

At the end of War in 1815, the war bond payments of Joseph Hays Sr. and three other Carroll Country farmers were stolen by the County Paymaster. In a state of financial ruin, with the government positioned to reclaim the Hays land, the question arose. What would happen to Ned? Common practice among slave owners at the time was to sell enslaved people 'Down South' when in financial hardship. A liquidation of assets, in their mind. As an able-bodied 30 year old man, Ned would have relieved a substantial portion of the family's debt had Joseph Sr. sold him on the auction block. However, instead of selling Ned 'Down South', Joseph Hays Sr. sold Ned to his son Joseph Jr. (1805-1899) for only \$5 (\$181.03 today).

Had he sold Ned 'Down South', Joseph Sr. would have likely gotten thousands of dollars with which to pay his debts, but for whatever reason- be it Ned's role in raising his children, the importance of Ned's labor, some sort of personal attachment, or a darker more stubborn reason - Joseph Sr. forgoed paying his debts in order to keep Ned with the family. This was not a stroke of pure kindness. Ned was still enslaved and laboring in the Hays home, but this decision kept him out of harsher conditions Down South and with the Hays family for the remainder of Joseph Sr.'s life.

It is important and curious to note that Ned and the Hays ended up staying in Carroll County due to the influence of Francis Scott Key (yes, *that* Francis Scott Key). Key was son of neighboring landowner and a childhood friend of Joseph Sr.. Keys was a prominent figure in Washington DC at the time and used his influence with Congress to secure the passage of a special act that allowed the Hays to keep their land until Joseph Sr.'s death, upon which it was relinquished to the government.

Due to this act, Ned remained enslaved in Maryland until Joseph Sr.'s death in 1850. The Hays family at this point was being led by the youngest two siblings, Deborah, head of the house, and Joseph Jr., the legal owner of Ned. The two held a family meeting in which they decided to move out West in search of affordable land. In their planning, one important question emerged: ***what would be the fate of a now 64 year old Ned?*** The family story, later published in newspaper accounts, states that they left this up to him, and that when they asked Ned if he wanted to stay or leave, he simply replied "I'll stick to Debbie" and prepared himself for the journey West.

Ned had known Debbie her entire life. He was seventeen when she was born and supposedly played a large role in caring for her as she grew up. As she reached adulthood, she remained unmarried and began keeping house in her father's home. She and Ned likely spent a great deal of time working together tending to the house of and caring for Joseph Sr. as he aged. Through this, Ned and Deborah seemed to have developed a sense of shared trust in one another, unique in nature compared to Ned's relationships with the rest of the Hays family. This sense of at least trust and at most kindness or friendship is likely a prominent reason for why Ned decided to travel hundreds of miles on stiff and swollen joints with Deborah rather than stay and risk re-capture in the slave state of Maryland.

Ned, along with 16 members of the family, packed up their belongings and set out for Illinois in 1852. En route, they travelled through Virginia and across the Ohio River. And on the other side of its rough waters, at age 66, Edward Delaney finally **became legally free.**

Ned and the rest of the Hays party reached Illinois, but found the land to be too expensive so they turned their sights further west to a newly-established abolitionist town called Grinnell. Though Ned was by this point free, he decided to stay with Debbie when the Hays moved again.

They arrived in Grinnell nine other members of the party in 1854 and are recorded as one of the first groups of people, aside from town founders, to settle in the town. Ned, among them, was the first Black man to establish permanent residency here.

Cut for Time if Need

Deborah Hays used some saved money to build a two-frame house on the east side of Main and Fifth, right around where McNallys is today. This house became the chosen home of Ned for the remainder of his life.

Not much is known of Ned's life once he settled in Grinnell. The 1860 census lists him as a servant in Deborah's house on Main Street. Other accounts, largely from the Hays family, place him in declining health, living his life under the care of Deborah.

Edward "Ned" Delaney died at age 75 in 1861. Upon his death, he was buried beneath a shady tree in the plot of the family that both enslaved him at age four and helped him seek freedom sixty years later. His companion, Deborah, stuck to him in death as he did to her in life, joining him in the Hays plot in 1887, her headstone right next to his.

Though Ned passed before the arrival of the Renfrows, his story is the first in what is now a legacy of Black towns members of Early Grinnell who chose and worked to make this town their home. Who found and forged lasting community here. You'll hear about a few more of them today.

Now, 162 years after his death, Edward Delaney's grave marker has outlasted the shady tree under which it was first installed. The engraved words 'A Freed Slave' are now only decipherable by tracing a finger over worn limestone. A worn but present and important marking of the extraordinary life of a man who traveled 952.7 miles to Grinnell at age 68 after a long life of enslavement to make a home here, as a free man.

The first Black Grinnellian, Edward Delaney.

Sources

- (1) Emmitsburg Historical Society (info on Ned Delaney's story, the Hays family in Maryland and the plantation Ned was born on)
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- (2) Daniel Dulany information
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- (3) Julia Chapman 1904 'List of people who arrived in Grinnell 1854-56'
<https://digital.grinnell.edu/islandora/object/grinnell%3A10186>
- (4) 1860 Census Record - has Edward (80) and Deborah (58) living together with Mary (42)
<https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/5722704:7667>
- (5) 1922 feature on the Hays family (lots of good info)
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- (6) Quarter Centennial Address of Chester - documents Hays family's contributions to the founding of the town (Deborah and Ned not mentioned)**
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- (7) (Thurs, March 19th, 1874) John, Sarah, and Deborah listed as initial members of the Baptist Church in Grinnell (est. 1858)**
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- (8) Deborah Hays death announcement/obituary (Fri, Dec 2nd, 1887)**
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- (9) Notice of Proof of Will of Deborah Hays (Tues, Nov. 29th, 1887)**
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- (10) Real Estate Transfer following Deborah Hays' death (Tues, May 18th, 1890)
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