

Essay Review:

African-Americans in York, Pennsylvania

By John Vincent Jezierski, *Enterprising Images: The Goodridge Brothers, African-American Photographers, 1847-1922*.

(Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000. Pp. 320. \$34.95)

By Jim Kalish, *The Story of Civil Rights in York, Pennsylvania: A 250-Year Interpretive History*.

(York: York County Audit of Human Rights, 2000. Pp. 264. \$24.00)

Founded in 1749, York County celebrated its 250th anniversary in 1999. This is an opportune time to take stock of two new books on York. Although they differ outwardly in topic and inwardly in purpose, these books by Jezierski and Kalish are similar in that each chronicles African-American history and has appeal to students of Pennsylvania history. Jezierski approaches York history by looking at the photography career of the Goodridge Brothers: Glenalvin, Wallace and William. They were the sons of Williams C. Goodridge, a free mulatto who lived at 123 East Philadelphia Street in York. The elder Goodridge was a pioneer businessman in York, operating a barbershop, selling animal hides, and owning real estate and railway cars. His eldest son, Glenalvin, who learned daguerrotyping and operated a photography studio from about 1847 to 1861, picked up this entrepreneur spirit. Jezierski says that Glenalvin Goodridge "was not York's first photographer, but he was the community's first native son to establish a studio that operated for more than a few weeks or months" (p. 24). Goodridge was primarily a teacher, however, and did not work at photography as a full-time job until January 1851. At that time, he moved his business from China Hall and the family home on East Philadelphia Street to the family's business block, Centre Hall on York's town square. The new gallery was nicknamed "Goodridge's Skylight Rooms." Glenalvin Goodridge's gallery was not as big as Mathew Brady's workplace in New York City, but it was just as successful. By catering to York's white elite, Goodridge

made a name for himself as a photographer. Some of these photos are of prominent early Yorkers now owned by the York Historical Society but many are in other institutions or in private hands. Jezierski has done excellent detective work in finding them.

The coming of the Civil War changed the Goodridge's family fortune. Glenalvin's business ran into financial difficulties and his father's Underground Railroad activity brought him notoriety. In 1862, Glenalvin was put on trial for an alleged rape of a white woman. He pleaded innocent. After a lengthy and controversial trial, he was found guilty and sentenced to five years in the Eastern State Penitentiary. While in prison, Glenalvin, contacted tuberculosis. Because of his son's poor health, William Goodridge sought to have him pardoned by Pennsylvania governor Andrew Curtin. Curtin issued a pardon on the condition that Glenalvin and his family could no longer live in their home in York. The Goodridge family left York in 1863 and resettled in East Saginaw, Michigan, where Glenalvin's sister Mary and brother-in-law lived. Glenalvin died in 1867 and his brothers Wallace and William carried on the family photography business. Most of Jezierski's book covers the Michigan years of the Goodridge Brothers, when they established a national and international reputation. Meticulously researched, Jezierski's book is of interest to Pennsylvania historians because of its intriguing look at a prominent York African-American middle-class family. *Enterprising Images* is a solid work of scholarship that adds to our knowledge of the history of photography in Pennsylvania and the United States.

The York City Human Relations Commission is the publisher of Jim Kadish's book, *The Story of Civil Rights in Pennsylvania*. The publication's purpose is to record the history of human rights in the region over a two hundred and fifty-year period. William Goodridge is mentioned in connection with the Underground Railroad but nothing is said of his sons' photography shop. Kadish is more at home telling the story of civil rights in York, and an amazing story of courage, confrontation, and compromise it is. His book has ten chapters but half of his chapters are devoted to the period of the 1970s through the 1990s. They explore how York deals with diverse groups such as gays, Hispanics, the elderly, the disabled, and hate groups. The roles of government, lobbying groups, and grassroots neighborhood organizations are well sketched here. Readers will revise their thinking about York history after reading this book.

A perusal of the footnotes and sources reveal a heavy reliance upon

contemporary newspaper articles, York civil rights reports, and original records of groups like United Way of York, York County Heritage Trust, and the York City Human Relations Commission. This topic would seem a natural for oral history accounts and indeed many people are quoted. But when one looks up the reference, instead of an oral history interview, the source is a newspaper story. This is surprising in that the author seems to focus upon the 1980s and 1990s and many contemporary witnesses are still alive. Like *Enterprising Images*, the main attraction of *The Story of Civil Rights in York, Pennsylvania* are the photographs. Here the York community comes alive for the reader. But Kadish's photographs pale beside those of Jezierski; the former has comparatively few black and white glossy prints and too many reproductions from newspapers. There are frequent sidebars and graphs calling the reader's attention to national and state events.

This is a book that tries to do too much. In a general way, it is a history of African-Americans in York just as *Enterprising Images* is. Yet Kadish has come up with a publication on local history that does a far better job of chronicling the history of the York Human Rights Commission than York black history. For instance, there is no mention of the landmark 1842 U.S. Supreme Court case *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*. The defendant in that case was a slave catcher, Edward Prigg. The African-American involved was Margaret Morgan, an ex-slave and resident of York, Pennsylvania. Prigg, who in turn was charged with kidnapping under Pennsylvania's personal liberty laws, seized Morgan and her children. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down Pennsylvania's law as unconstitutional, saying that pursuit of lost property [slaves] was a federal rather than state issue. Historians of Pennsylvania will want more information about Morgan and other kidnapped York blacks during the antebellum period.

As contemporary history Kadish's work is spellbinding and splendid. As solid historical narrative, it lacks consistency and depth. *Enterprising Images: The Goodridge Brothers, African-American Photographers 1847-1922* and *The Story of Civil Rights in York, Pennsylvania* are the two books that add York to the list of Pennsylvania communities that have chronicled black history in the last decade. Scholars, librarians, and the general public will want to read both of these interesting publications to enrich their knowledge of Pennsylvania history.

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