

## CHAPTER 2: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN SMITH (CA 1849 - 1924)

Glenview Plantation, owned by Judge Richard Johns Bowie, is the earliest location we have found for Benjamin Franklin Smith. Judge Bowie, was an attorney from a wealthy Georgetown family. His father, Colonel Washington Bowie, was well connected, being the namesake and godson of George Washington. *“Col. Bowie was described by the Annapolis Gazette in 1810 as ‘one of the wealthiest and most public spirited citizens of Georgetown.’ But this merchant prince lost five of his ships and cargoes during the War of 1812, resulting in financial ruin. Col. Bowie retired to his country estate ‘Oatlands’ when Richard was 14.”*<sup>1</sup> Oatlands was a 2000 acre plantation located two miles south of Olney.



(Figure 1)

Glenview Plantation Today

Richard completed his education at Brookeville Academy and Georgetown Law School. He was subsequently admitted to the Maryland Bar in 1828. Shortly afterwards he purchased three tracts of land to form a property that he called ‘Glen View’. Five years later, he married Catherine L. Williams of Hagerstown, Maryland. According to the 1860 Agricultural Census of Montgomery County, Glenview plantation contained 508 acres of land, 368 of which were developed. The house was built between 1836 and 1838 and was described as a “four-bay stone building. . . . The grounds probably included a barn, summer kitchen, smokehouse, privy and sheds . . . . Large estates like Glenview also included slave quarters.”<sup>2</sup> This land produced 750 bushels of corn, 200 bushels of wheat, 120 bushels of potatoes, 12 tons of hay, 30 bushels of rye, and 125 pounds of butter. His livestock included cows, horses, oxen, sheep, swine, and assets valued at \$1200<sup>3</sup> In 1850, Judge Bowie’s “inventory” also included 11 slaves who lived in two slave houses. By 1860 he had increased the number of slaves to 21 but he had not increased the number of slave houses. This increase in slaves paralleled the increase in his real estate and personal property from \$3800 in 1850 to \$26,000 in 1860.



(Figure 2)

Judge Richard Johns Bowie

From his estate at Glenview, Richard Bowie launched his career in local and national politics. In 1832 he was the prosecuting attorney for Montgomery County and by 1835 he was a member of the Maryland House of Delegates. In 1848, he began two terms in the House of Representatives. He declined a third term so he could run for Governor of Maryland, but his campaign was unsuccessful. In 1861 he was elected Chief Judge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit and he was subsequently appointed to the Court of Appeals in 1863. Politically, he started as a Whig, but in the heated pre-Civil War years he became a Unionist who opposed the Civil War and the secession of Maryland from the Union. He didn’t oppose slavery but

<sup>1</sup> Unnamed Peerless Historical Society papers; Survey No. M:26/17; Glenview/Civic Center; Attachment 8.1

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.rockvillemd.gov/tours/glenview/history/bowie.html>

<sup>3</sup> Richard Johns Bowie, source unknown beyond Peerless Historical Society

he did oppose secession. During the Civil War, Confederates under General J.E.B. Stuart's command captured him during a raid of Rockville, and held him for ransom before releasing him in Brookeville.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the Civil War, "he and his followers would become the Republican Party in Montgomery [County]."<sup>5</sup> In 1880 Judge Bowie donated five acres of his land for the creation of Rockville Cemetery. His wife, Catherine, donated an additional two acres in 1889. Judge Bowie died at Glenview on March 12, 1881 from stomach inflammation. His wife died in 1891. Both are buried in Rockville Cemetery.

Glen View Plantation still stands today and is known as the Rockville Civic Center. It is the center of many community activities, and is reported to be haunted.

This is the world where **BENJAMIN FRANKLIN SMITH** lived as one of Judge Bowie's slaves. The earliest record of Benjamin Franklin Smith is the 1850 U.S Federal Census – Slave Schedule dated June 1850. Benjamin is listed on that schedule as a "two year old male mulatto."<sup>6</sup> This date coincides with his birth

**SCHEDULE 2.—Slave Inhabitants in the South Rockville Union District in the County of Montgomery State of Maryland, enumerated by me, on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of June, 1850. Geo. W. Johnson Ass't Marshal**

| 1                      | 2                 | DESCRIPTION. |      |         | 6                         | 7                  | 8                                       | 1                      | 2                 | DESCRIPTION. |      |         | 6                         | 7                  | 8                                       |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------|------|---------|---------------------------|--------------------|---|------------------------|-------------------|--------------|------|---------|---------------------------|--------------------|---|
|                        |                   | 3            | 4    | 5       |                           |                    |   |                        |                   | 3            | 4    | 5       |                           |                    |   |
| NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS. | Number of Slaves. | Age.         | Sex. | Colour. | Fugitives from the State. | Number manumitted. | Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic. | NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS. | Number of Slaves. | Age.         | Sex. | Colour. | Fugitives from the State. | Number manumitted. | Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic. |
| 1                      | 1                 | 20           | M    | B       |                           |                    |   | 1                      | 1                 | 63           | M    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 50           | F    | M       |                           |                    |   | 2                      | 2                 | 17           | M    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 10           | F    | B       |                           |                    |   | 3                      | 3                 | 70           | F    | B       |                           |                    |   |
| 4                      | 1                 | 21           | M    | B       |                           |                    |   | 4                      | 4                 | 13           | F    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 12           | M    | B       |                           |                    |   | 5                      | 5                 | 9            | M    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 4            | M    | M       |                           |                    |   | 6                      | 6                 | 50           | M    | M       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 7            | M    | M       |                           |                    |   | 7                      | 7                 | 33           | M    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 6            | M    | B       |                           |                    |   | 8                      | 8                 | 50           | F    | M       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 7            | M    | M       |                           |                    |   | 9                      | 9                 | 8            | F    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 62           | F    | B       |                           |                    |   | 10                     | 10                | 6            | F    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 24           | F    | M       |                           |                    |   | 11                     | 11                | 55           | M    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 18           | F    | B       |                           |                    |   | 12                     | 12                | 45           | F    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 16           | F    | B       |                           |                    |   | 13                     | 13                | 25           | M    | B       |                           |                    |   |
|                        | 1                 | 8            | F    | B       |                           |                    |   | 14                     | 14                | 19           | M    | B       |                           |                    |   |

(Figure 3)

1850 Federal Census – Slave Schedule

<sup>4</sup> Unnamed Peerless Historical papers, Opt. cit

2 pr  
date of February 1849 recorded among family records. Among those rumored to have been Benjamin's father are Judge Bowie, a maternal uncle whose last name was Smith, and a member of the Bouic family. There is an abundance of speculation but nothing definitive has—or probably will—be found. Likewise, there is no information about his mother. Was she a slave at Glenview? At Oatland? At another local plantation? A picture of Judge Bowie that hangs above the fireplace in the parlour at the Rockville Civic Center (formerly Glenview Plantation) bears a striking resemblance to Benjamin's descendants. One of Benjamin's grandsons, Raymond Smith, described Benjamin as a light complexioned man who was very stout, weighing 230 – 240 pounds. He was bald-headed with a mustache and beard that was about four inches long.



(Figure 4)  
Benjamin Franklin Smith

How and when Benjamin acquired his freedom is unknown at this point. Was he freed by manumission or by the Maryland Constitution of 1864? Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not apply to Maryland, did Judge Bowie honor the spirit of the document and free his slaves? We know that Judge Bowie did not seek compensation for his slaves in 1868 when the registry of ownership of any slaves in 1864 was created.<sup>7</sup>

By 1870, Benjamin resided in the home of Ann Smith. It's not clear if he was there as a boarder, or as a suitor for Ann's daughter, Jane. Jane gave birth to their first child, Maggie, in 1870. Benjamin and Jane married April 1, 1875. By 1880, they had produced five additional children: Grant (November 16, 1872); Morris (1875); Simon (1877); Clarence (unknown); and Elizabeth (1879). Their household also included Jane's mother, Ann.



(Figure 5)

Sondra Stevenson, great-great-great granddaughter of Benjamin Smith sits on stoop of his two-story house.

During this period, Benjamin continued to work as a farm hand. His grandson, Raymond, recounted that "my grandfather was an ex-slave [who] worked on the farm where the Rockville Civic Center is now located, and worked a yoke of Oxen to till the soil and other farm work where needed."<sup>8</sup> Although he continued to work for other farmers in the area for wages, Benjamin became a landowner. "After the Civil War, Judge Bowie deeded a small piece of ground in the northeastern corner of the park, referred to as

the Smith property, to one of his former slaves. Today, the foundation and a hand-dug stone well survive. In the woods across Avery Road to the east of this property are the remnants of a family burial plot. On a 1917 city map, it is labeled "colored

<sup>7</sup> The Record of Slaves was created by the Maryland Legislature in 1867 and 1868 to compile records to establish slave ownership and the value of slave property. Former slave owners provided descriptive information on each slave for whom they claimed ownership in 1864.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, Raymond, A Wonderful Life, July 31, 1979

cemetery. "Parts of gravestones have been found on the site."<sup>9</sup> Judge Bowie bequeathed the one acre of land and the house in which Benjamin resided to him as part of the Judge's will. The deed was recorded in September, 1884 by Catherine Bowie, the judge's widow.

Historians at the Peerless Rockville Historical Society speculate that this grant of acreage reflects the high regard that the Bowie's had for Benjamin. No other slave was given land, despite their years of loyal service. Why was Benjamin held in such high regard? Could this lend additional support to the argument that Benjamin was the son of Judge Bowie or of a close relative? Unfortunately, we would need DNA testing to confirm this. Judge Bowie and his wife, Margaret, did not have any biological children. Instead they adopted several of their nieces and willed their property to them. Benjamin was the only other person to receive a bequeath of land.

Benjamin and Ann were among the organizers of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, later known as Clinton AME Zion Church, in Rockville. His grandson, Raymond, states that Benjamin served on the Trustees Board for many years until his health began to fail him. As a trustee, he was one of the borrowers of the \$500 construction loan for the church in 1891. His name and mark appear on the loan papers that were secured by the home of his brother-in-law, Dennis Smith.

Early in 1885, Jane died of unknown causes. She was buried in the Colored Cemetery on Avery Road.

On February 13, 1883, Benjamin married Mary Elizabeth (Betty/Bettie) Lucas and began a second family that included ten surviving children. Census records for the period 1900 – 1920 show the following offspring: James (December 1883); Beverley (April 1885); Josephine (March 1886); Sarah (September 1886); John E. (February 1890); Isaiah (February 1892); Charles (March 1894); Milton (September 1896); Maurice (January 1899); Theodore (1901); Elizabeth (1908); Helen (1909), Dorothy (unknown); and Emma (unknown). In his oral account, Raymond also mentioned a son named Brunson but that name does not appear in any census records. Bettie gave birth to eighteen children, 13 of whom survived. Between the first and second families, Benjamin was the father of 24 children, eight of whom did not survive infancy. We currently have identified 19 of these children.

Benjamin and Bettie valued education and saw that most of their children attended elementary school in Rockville nine months each year. By 1900 most of Benjamin's first family was grown and no longer in his household. Grant, his second oldest child, had married Clarisey Harris in 1894 and lived next door with his wife and five children. Joseph<sup>10</sup> and James<sup>11</sup> were both married by 1910 but they continued to reside with their parents.

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://rockvillemd.gov/tours/glenview/history/bowie.html> opt.cit

<sup>10</sup> The 1910 census lists a Joseph H, son, age 25, and married but he does not appear in the 1900 census. Josephine, who appears in 1900 as 12 years of age does not appear in 1910. She also does not appear in 1920. Is this a case of careless record-keeping by the census taker? Is Josephine married or residing in the home of her employer since she would have been aged 22? The census also makes no mention of Joseph's wife being in the household. Is she residing in the home of her employer?