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Hometown History

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The Three Free Black Settlements in Randolph County

“Before the Civil War, there were three large colored settlements in Randolph County; the Greenville Settlement, Northeast of Spartanburg, the Cabin Creek Settlement, near Unionport, and the Snow Hill Settlement in Washington Township.”¹ The earliest settlement was formed in 1822 and called Snow Hill, also known as the Washington Township, and the latest establishment, formed in 1846, was known as the Greenville Settlement, or the Greens Fork Township. The middle settlement was known as Cabin Creek, or Union Township, and was formed around 1825. All three of these settlements housed mainly African-American people. These fugitives and recently emancipated slaves came from all across the country but mainly came from North Carolina and South Carolina.

These three settlements were located from the northern side to the south side of Randolph County. The Northwest settlement was known as The Greenville Settlement, which was mainly on the Ohio side of the border, but there was a portion on the Indiana side. The Greenville Settlement was run by a man named Thornton Alexander, who moved to the 300 acre land property on the Randolph County side with his wife and her nine children around 1822. The Darke County side was owned by James Clemons. The Greenville Settlement once housed around 900 residents.

¹ E. Tucker, *History of Randolph County, Indiana: With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers: To Which Are Appended Maps of Its Several Townships* (Chicago, IL., IN: A.L. Kingman, 1882), pg133.

The most western settlement is the Snow Hill settlement. Snow Hill's first settler arrived in 1838, the man's name was Gabriel Moore. Two specific settlers, named Willan and Michael Benson, were both born into slavery in North Carolina. Both would end up moving into a Wayne County settlement before coming to Snow Hill. This settlement housed many African-Americans from the African-American Methodist Episcopal and Wesleyan Church. There was also an African-American Church in Modoc, Indiana relating to the early settlers.

The Southeast settlement was known as Cabin Creek Settlement, this settlement was with Nettle Creek, West River, and Stoney Creek Townships. Snow Hill was established in 1838 by a man named John Demory. This settlement's boundaries are not listed. The African American settlers that settled at the Cabin Creek Settlement founded the African American Methodist Church in 1822. "Colored people continued to come in until, by 1846, the settlement had been quite large."²

Along with the three settlements Snow Hill, Cabin Creek, and the Greenville Settlement, there was a school, called the Union Literary Institute (ULI), which was established by Rev. E. Tucker in 1845. Rev. E. Tucker was also the principal for the school at one time, but stepped down from principal to teach in 1878. He would go on to retire from the school in 1879. The ULI was the only school at the time that had no regards to rank or wealth before the Civil War which made the ULI at the time, "the most significant and successful experiment in Negro education' in Indiana."³ The ULI was a different type of school, for it used manual labor in a different way than most people used it: to pay for the students tuition. The ULI school board was comprised of

²E. Tucker, *History of Randolph County, Indiana: With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers: To Which Are Appended Maps of Its Several Townships* (Chicago, IL., IN: A.L. Kingman, 1882), pg133.

³ Georgia Cravey, "Early Black Settlements by County," *Indiana Historical Society*, January 26, 2018, <https://indianahistory.org/research/research-materials/early-black-settlements/early-black-settlements-by-county/>, pg173.

white and African-American individuals, and the board participated in the Underground Railroad.