

# Cyrus Bustill (1732-1804)

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*Baker, educator, entrepreneur, abolitionist, leader in the free African community in Philadelphia, and attender of Quaker meeting.*

Written By Vanessa Julye

Cyrus Bustill was born enslaved in Burlington, New Jersey, the son of European American attorney Samuel Bustill and one of his enslaved Africans. Samuel Bustill sold his son to Quaker Thomas Prior, a baker who taught Cyrus his trade. Prior liberated Bustill in 1769, making him one of the 104 enslaved Africans manumitted by Friends in Burlington Quarterly Meeting of Friends from 1763—1796.

As a freed enslaved African, Bustill successfully operated a baking business for many years. During the Revolutionary War he baked bread in Burlington for the Continental troops. Later he moved to Philadelphia, where he became a leader of that city's black community. In 1787, he became one of the founders of Philadelphia's Free African Society. He was one of the first to contribute funds for starting St. Thomas' African Episcopal Church in 1792. The Bustill family was also actively involved in the Underground Railroad in Philadelphia. In 1797 Bustill retired from his business and built a house at Third and Green Streets, where he opened a school for African American children in 1803. Under the care of Friends, Cyrus Bustill married Elizabeth Morey (sometimes spelled Morrey). Elizabeth Morey was the daughter of Satterthwait, a Delaware Indian, and Richard Morey, a European American and son of Quaker Humphrey Morrey, the first mayor of Philadelphia appointed by William Penn in 1691. Elizabeth Morey was a servant for several years in the home of Nicholas and Sarah Waln, influential Friends in Philadelphia. Cyrus Bustill and Elizabeth Morey Bustill had eight children together: Ruth, Grace, David, Rachael, Mary, Leah, Charles, and Cyrus, Jr.

Although no records show that Bustill or Morey became members of the Religious Society of Friends, they lived their lives in the manner of Friends and attended Quaker meeting at Arch Street in Philadelphia. Cyrus Bustill was buried by Quakers.

On April 29, 2000, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission dedicated a state historical marker on the site of Bustill's neighborhood at Third and Green to commemorate the Underground Railroad. The Bustill family continues to be one of the oldest African American families in the United States, and members of the family continue to live in Philadelphia. Well-known African American singer, actor, and activist Paul Robeson was the great-great grandson of Elizabeth and Cyrus, and grandson David Bustill Bowser was an abolitionist and an artist best known for his portraits of Abraham Lincoln and John Brown.

#### Resources on Cyrus Bustill:

- *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit*; By Jean R. Soderlund; (out of print, available at libraries)
- *Black Quakers, Brief Biographies*; By Kenneth Ives; (out of print, available at some libraries)
- “[Negro Membership in the Society of Friends](#)” •; By Henry J. Cadbury; The Journal of Negro History Vol. 21, No. 2. 1936
- “[The Bustill Family](#)” •; By Anna Bustill Smith; Journal of Negro History Vol. 10, # 4 1925
- [Tour Guide to African American Sites in Burlington County, New Jersey](#)

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