

Jim Stewart

Jim Stewart was one of several black people who lived on Gardiner's Island and worked for the Gardiners. He was born into slavery and, as a very small boy, had to stand behind his master during meals and wave a fan to keep the flies off.

Jim Stewart must have been a very kind and thoughtful person. Like many black people at the end of the 19th century, Jim Stewart was illiterate. However, my grandmother, Mrs. Hiram S. (Emma Louise Edwards) Miller taught him to read, write, and do arithmetic. As an expression of appreciation, Jim Stewart gave her a very pretty green glass iced tea set decorated with pink painted flowers and gold trim. Jim also found arrow tips on Gardiner's Island and had them made into pins, hat pins, etc. for Mrs. Miller. On occasion when Mr. Miller was ill or injured, Jim Stewart would come up and help with the milking and other chores. Sometimes he just came to visit.

There was also another black couple on Gardiner's Island. At times when Mrs. Miller was particularly busy with the "Gentlemen" as Mr. Schermerhorn and his guests were called, the black woman would come and help with the cooking. As she could not tell time, as soon as she was finished with cleaning up from one meal she would start preparing the next. She also chewed tobacco and, if no place else was readily available, would expectorate in the sleeve of her dress. She also was illiterate and Mrs. Miller would write letters to her family as she dictated them. Mrs. Miller also read the letters she recieved to her.

These stories and anecdotes were told to me by my mother, Anna Adele Miller Spencer, and my grandmother and grandfather, Mr. and Mrs. Hiram S. Miller.

*Adele Spencer*