



Born  
1819  
May 14th

Died  
1905  
Oct. 3rd

Was richly possessed of the sterling qualities of  
honesty, truth, and faithfulness - and industrious  
to a fault.

Adam Francis Plummer.  
—Centenary—

1863  
1819  
44 yrs a slave

1905  
1863  
42 yrs. a free man.

Married May 30th, 1841 - Emily Saunders Plummer.

The  
Life of  
Adam  
Francis  
Plummer

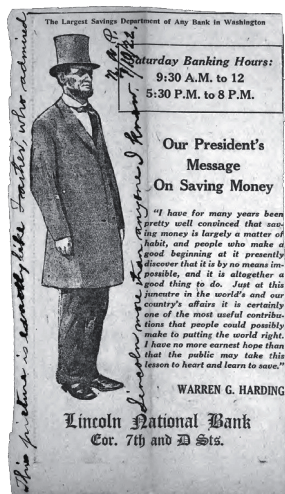


*"As a direct descendant of Adam Francis and Emily Saunders Plummer, I am honored to represent the Plummer family and all who labored here at Riversdale. We are fortunate to have accounts of life here, especially the story of Adam Francis Plummer. His story not only tells us about the plantation itself, but it also offers an inspiring account of one who unswervingly demonstrated faith, love, courage, steadfastness, loyalty, and devotion to family throughout his life. It is my prayer that those who visit Riversdale and its dependency will connect the past to the present, and find their own connections to this rich heritage."*

The Reverend L Jerome Fowler  
Great-great-grandson of Adam and Emily Plummer

## How We Learned About Adam's Life

Secretly taught to read and write by John Bowzer, an itinerant minister and former slave, Adam Francis Plummer kept a diary from his wedding day in 1841 until his death in 1905. Here he recorded deaths, financial transactions, receipts, and significant family events. Eventually his youngest daughter, Nellie Arnold Plummer, added copious notes, newspaper clippings, and programs. They expanded on Adam's entries and offered details about events beyond his lifetime.



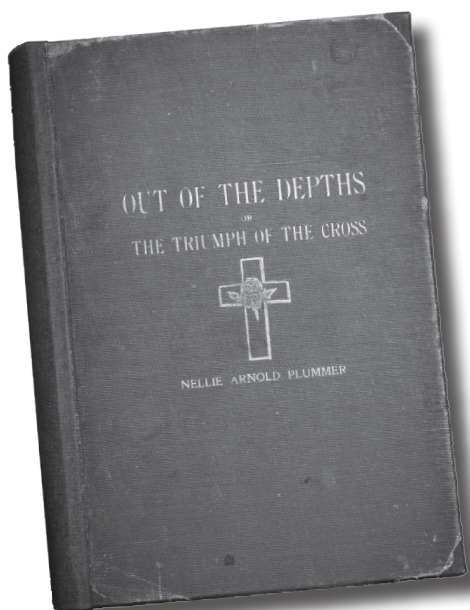
For many years, this diary was thought to be lost or destroyed. However, when Lucille Betty Tompkins-Davis, a family descendent, learned in 2001 that the family was seeking it, she contacted Jerome Fowler. Before her death, Nellie Arnold Plummer had entrusted the diary to Edward Arnold, a cousin on her mother's side.

*Newspaper clipping placed in the Diary of Adam Francis Plummer with note written by Adam's daughter Nellie comparing Adam Plummer and Abraham Lincoln. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.*

Eventually the diary passed to Ms. Tompkins-Davis, who, in consultation with the Plummer family, deeded it to the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum. The diary of Adam Francis Plummer has been conserved, transcribed, and digitized, and may be viewed on-line at [http://anacostia.si.edu/exhibits/Plummer/Plummer\\_Home.htm](http://anacostia.si.edu/exhibits/Plummer/Plummer_Home.htm)

A significant source of information is the spiritual memoir, *Out of the Depths or The Triumph of the Cross*, written by Adam's daughter Nellie Arnold Plummer. Here she recounts stories she heard as she grew up and events she witnessed as she grew older. Published in 1927 and reprinted in 1997, her book chronicles the story of the Adam Francis Plummer family from slavery to freedom. Originally, Nellie mortgaged her home for \$1,000 to publish her book, and she distributed copies to family members. Descendants today treasure this memoir and refer to it as THE BOOK. (Plummer, Nellie Arnold. *Out of the Depths, or The Triumph of the Cross*. New York, NY, G.K. Hall & Co., 1997. Introduction by Joanne M. Braxton. [Originally published Hyattsville, MD, 1927])

These rich resources and continuing research at The Prince George's County Historical Society Library, Maryland State Archives, and in a collection of papers from the Calvert family yield information that authenticates and elaborates on these accounts to form a more complete picture of the Plummer family.



*Out of the Depths, or The Triumph of the Cross by Nellie Arnold Plummer.*

*Courtesy of the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.*



# Adam's Early Life

The labor force at Riversdale included enslaved and free African Americans and indentured and hired white workers. One of those African Americans was Adam Francis Plummer (1819–1905).

Born at George Calvert's Mount Albion plantation in 1819, Adam was brought to Riversdale when he was ten years old. Property records show that Charles Benedict Calvert, second son of George and Rosalie Calvert, owned him.

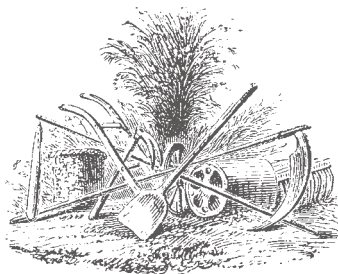
A photograph of a handwritten document in cursive script. The text is written on a piece of paper with a faint grid or lined pattern. The handwriting is dark ink on a light background.

*Personal property record from 1833 Third Election District of Prince George's County for Charles B. Calvert.  
Courtesy of the Maryland State Archives.*

According to Nellie Plummer, the two shared a passion for farming and enjoyed a relationship of mutual trust and respect. Nellie writes,

*In addition to doing general farm work, Adam was a skilled carpenter who could build a house, barn, or stable. Adam also made and mended shoes.*

The Calverts gave Adam several acres to plant or raise things for himself or to sell and provided a horse or mule for his ploughing or hauling. Upon his father's death in 1838, Charles Benedict Calvert assumed control of the estate and went on to participate in the beginnings of the US Department of Agriculture and the establishment of the Maryland Agricultural College (now the University of Maryland).





# Meeting and Marrying Emily

In 1839, Adam met Emily Saunders (born c. 1815). An enslaved cook at Three Sisters Plantation in Lanham, she came to Riversdale to visit a sick aunt. After a two-year courtship Adam and Emily were married at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC, on May 30, 1841, and Adam began his diary. For the next ten years, Adam was allowed to travel the eight miles from Riversdale to visit his wife and family at Three Sisters from Saturday evening until work began on Monday morning. He brought them food and other goods, kept their cabin in good repair, and made them furniture.



Emily Saunders  
Plummer.

Image from *Out of the Depths, or The Triumph of the Cross* by Nellie Arnold Plummer, 1927.

## Seeking Freedom

Adam and Emily made plans to escape to a free state or Canada in 1845 with their two young children, Miranda and Henry. Because it was unusual for a slave couple to have a legally recognized marriage, they were going to use their marriage license as “free papers” to prove they were not enslaved. When a relative of Emily’s betrayed their plans to Sarah Ogle Hilleary, mistress of Three Sisters, Emily was sent to work in the fields. As further punishment, Miss Hilleary put Emily and her four children up for sale in 1849. When Emily became ill, her sister Hennie was sold instead. For attempting an escape, Adam evidently received no punishment from his owner, Riversdale’s Charles Benedict Calvert.

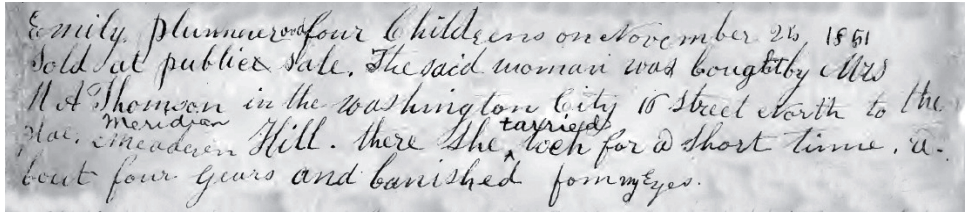
On the March 24 - 1849 Emily Plummer and four Child<sup>was</sup> were for sale but she being sick at the time, she <sup>was</sup> not her sister Hennie in her stead she been with Child, three woman and Children Jane Gutridge, Henry Brooks and Emily Plummer Henry Brooks and her Children were sold A fair form to Edmund Verreller to the year 1850 she was then go to live with her husband Henry Brooks at North Hamilton. at Mr Spriggs

From the Diary of Adam Francis Plummer, Adam's description of wife Emily and four children being put up for sale in 1849.

Courtesy of the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.

# Emily Is Sold

Upon Miss Hilleary's death in 1851, her heirs sold Emily and three of the Plummer children (Henry, Julia, and Saunders) to Mary Ann Tolley Thompson and her husband, Colonel Livingston Gilbert Thompson, of Meridian Hill in Washington, DC. The other two children (Miranda and Elias) remained at Three Sisters.



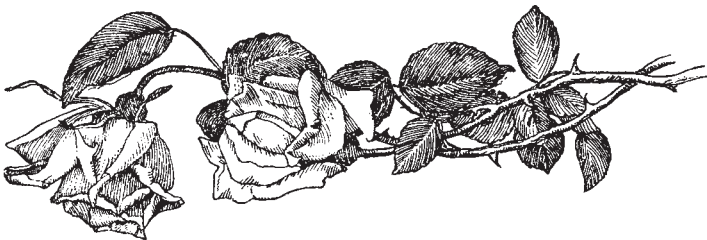
Emily, Plummer's four children on November 25, 1851  
sold at public sale. The said woman was bought by Mrs  
M A Thompson in the Washington City 10 Street North to the  
place, Meridian Hill. there she <sup>resided</sup> ~~lived~~ for a short time, a-  
bout four years and banished from eyes.

*From the Diary of Adam Francis Plummer, Adam's description of wife Emily and four children being sold in 1851.  
Courtesy of the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.*

In preparation for the move to Meridian Hill, Adam inventoried the contents of Emily's cabin at Three Sisters. Many of his entries reflect items far above the essentials one might expect in a slave cabin. Calvert allowed Adam to use a wagon to convey Emily's goods to Washington. Although the distance was now greater, Adam continued to visit his family every two weeks.

## The Sorrow of Separation

In 1855, Emily and her children (Henry, Julia, Saunders, and infant Margaret) were taken to Mount Hebron near Ellicott Mills in Howard County, Maryland, when the Thompsons moved there. Later, they all moved to nearby Woodlawn plantation. Adam wrote to his wife, "I am myself very much downhearted to see the children scattered abroad, and you and me far apart, to see the little children shed tears for the loss of their father."



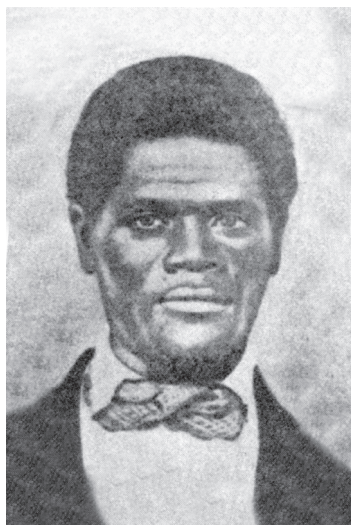
1852 Wooden ware six chairs and three tubs and three buckets  
 Two trundle bed steads and two 2 tables  
 4 flat irons [illegible] ware one tea kettle and pot used pot two  
 bucks  
 and stove and waffle iron and  
 two looking glass and four picture frames  
 and three glass lamps and one tin lamp  
 crock ware twelve Liverpool plates and  
 twelve stoneware plates and two stoneware  
 dishes and two pickle dishes and 15 inch  
 for every day plates eighteen and five  
 17 inch dishes for corn and six knives and  
 forks and six knives common day by day  
 six wine glasses twelve tumblers  
 two flowered gilded pitcher one blue flower  
 pitcher one white pitcher one pepper cruet glass  
 handled nutmeg grinder white cups and saucers six with  
 handles blue flower pitcher 25 flower cups and saucers six with  
 pitchers common by day every day 4  
 soup tureens two blue  
 soup dishes 12 two vegetable dishes blue one tureen is blue  
 white teapot and cream pot blue flowers  
 teapot and cream pot and tea canister  
 sugar pot white sugar pot blue  
 sugar pot blue cream pot blue  
 clock watch  
 teaspoons ten tea six  
 coffee mill lard pot two 1 gallon  
 washstand and wash basin pitcher

Partial transcription of the 1852 inventory of Emily's cabin at  
 Three Sisters from the Diary of Adam Francis Plummer.  
 Courtesy of the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.



# The Plummer

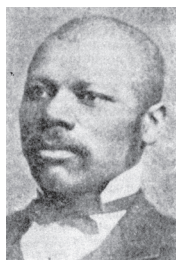
Adam  
Francis  
Plummer  
1819 – 1905



Sarah Miranda  
1842 – 1905  
Church  
founder, wife,  
and mother



Henry Vinton  
1844 – 1905  
Baptist  
minister, First  
African  
American  
U.S. Regular  
Army chaplain,  
husband, and  
father



Elias Cupid  
Quincy  
1846 – 1928  
School teacher,  
Methodist  
minister,  
husband, and  
father

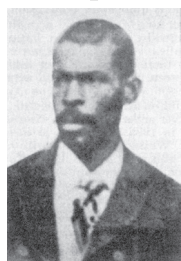


Julia Ann  
Caroline Maria  
1849 – 1929  
Seamstress,  
nurse, wife,  
and mother

# Plummer Family



Emily  
Saunders  
1816 – 1876



Nicholas  
Saunders  
1851 – 1911  
Coachman,  
farmer, church  
deacon,  
husband, and  
father



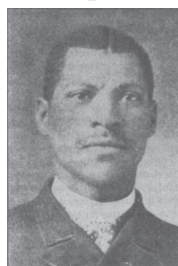
Marjory Ellen  
Rose  
1853 – 1854



Margaret Jane  
1854 – 1923  
Housekeeper  
for her father,  
wife, and  
mother



Nellie Arnold  
1860 – 1933  
School teacher  
and author



Robert Francis  
1860 – 1942  
Pharmacist,  
businessman,  
husband, and  
father

Now to see his wife, the ever-faithful Adam traveled by train with a pass from his master. Upon his departure, he once wrote to Emily,

*I saw you shed tears at the cars  
[train] for the last sight of your  
husband. I looked out of the car  
window and saw you as long as I  
could, very loath to part from you,  
but this is the way we must go.*

## Miranda, Their Eldest Daughter

Sarah Miranda, the Plummers' oldest daughter, was taken from Washington, DC, to Levi Hurdle's slave pen in Alexandria, Virginia, and sold to a master in New Orleans in 1860. From Louisiana she wrote to her family,

*My heart is full of sorrow. . . . I  
hope you will not grieve after me,  
but in the good Providence of God. I  
hope we will meet to part no more.*



*Sarah  
Miranda  
Plummer.  
Image from  
Out of the  
Depths, or  
The Triumph  
of the Cross  
by Nellie  
Arnold  
Plummer,  
1927.*





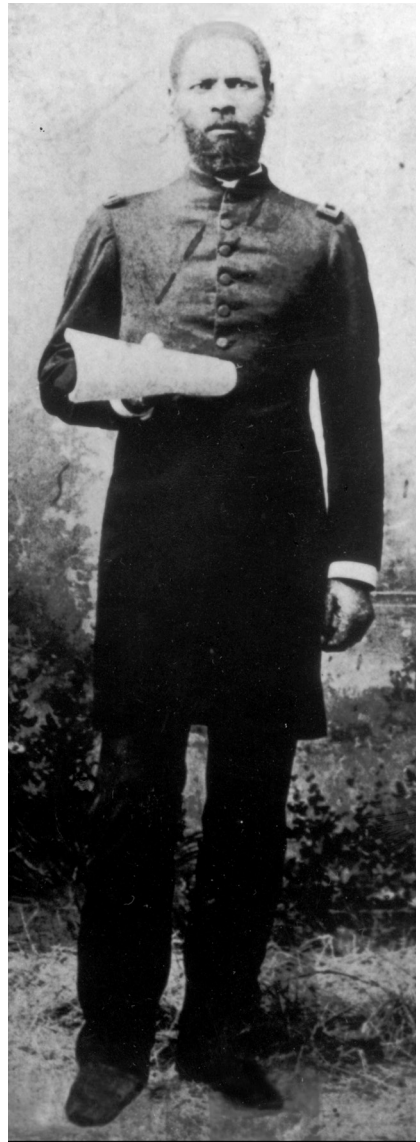
## Freedom for Some

When President Abraham Lincoln emancipated slaves in Washington, DC, in 1862, Henry escaped from Woodlawn to Adam's home at Riversdale. He then went to Washington, DC, and enlisted in the Union Navy. Likewise, Elias escaped from Three Sisters and made his way into Washington.

The following year, Emily fled with her remaining children from Woodlawn. However, they were caught and jailed in Baltimore as runaways. Like many plantation owners, Colonel Thompson was likely cash poor, for he lacked the money to secure their release. The judge ordered them discharged from custody and Adam took them to Riversdale on December 9, 1863.

## Freedom for All

A new Maryland constitution adopted in 1864 meant that slavery was abolished and the family was finally free. By then Adam was already being paid as a foreman and Emily and the older children had secured jobs with wages.



*Henry Vinton Plummer.*

*Image from Out of the Depths, or The Triumph of the Cross by Nellie Arnold Plummer, 1927.*

# Reuniting the Family

After the Civil War, the family's eldest son Henry went to New Orleans to bring Miranda home. With her homecoming, the entire family was together for the first time. Nellie describes Miranda's return:

*Now the object of [Adam's] prayers and struggles was standing before his very eyes! Never to be again separated against their will! We never saw our father shed tears of joy except on two occasions. This was the first time! . . . His joy was too great for utterance.*



Adam's description of daughter Miranda's return,  
from the Diary of Adam Francis Plummer.

Courtesy of the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.

*Sarah Maranda Howard the Daughter of  
Adam F. Plummer she live in New Orleans La  
six years & Return to me againe her Brother Henry  
V. Plummer came after here, on oct 11<sup>th</sup> 1865  
She Returne home on the 19<sup>th</sup> Friday night*

## A Church Is Born

To give thanks for her safe return, Miranda founded St. Paul Baptist Church, which survives today:

*October 19, 1866! O that never to be forgotten day! The little Baptist Church that was born that Friday night was the Gift of the Holy Spirit poured into the hearts of these four grown people: father, mother, Miranda, and Henry Plummer. Their courage never failed, nor did their zeal and ardor wane, out of deep and abiding Gratitude to God for having united the entire family.*

*St. Paul's Baptist Church,  
Bladensburg, Maryland.  
Image from Out of the Depths,  
or The Triumph of the Cross by  
Nellie Arnold Plummer, 1927.*





# Mount Rose

While continuing to live in the Riversdale cabin, Adam bought ten acres of land which he named Mount Rose (after his favorite flower) in present-day Edmonston. In 1870, the family moved into their new four-room log house. Later, they built a larger house on the property. Sons Henry, Saunders, and Robert also built homes at Mount Rose. Emily Saunders Plummer died there in 1876 and Adam Francis Plummer died in 1905.



*The Old Homestead at Mount Rose.*

*Image from Out of the Depths, or The Triumph of the Cross by Nellie Arnold Plummer, 1927.*

*Right: Patriarch Adam Francis Plummer surrounded by his family outside his home, Mount Rose (1899). Standing left to right: Robert Francis, Nellie Arnold, Margaret Jane, Nicholas Saunders. Sitting, Sarah Miranda, Adam Francis, Henry Vinton, Nellie (Margaret's daughter).*

*Image from Out of the Depths, or The Triumph of the Cross by Nellie Arnold Plummer, 1927.*

This picture and poem represent my feelings and wishes toward our old homestead perfectly.

# Too Old to Transplant



more clearly before me.

**By Edgar A. Guest**

I'M tangled up with roses, and the roots of me are deep.  
Where the pansies are in blossom and the morning glories creep.  
I'm hedged about by fancies that have claimed me for their own,  
And I'm shackled and I'm fettered by the joys that I have known.

I have crept into the brickwork and the woodwork of the place,  
Till I'm part and parcel of it. Mine's a very curious case;  
I am tangled here in laughter and in all the bygone joy  
Of a certain little lady and a certain little boy.

**Decorated by Win Schmiedtger**

Oh, I couldn't be transplanted. I have loved the place too long;  
I have known too much of gladness and have heard too much of song.  
Now to turn my back upon it and to try to live away—  
It is here I've lived my finest, and it's here I want to stay.

It is here we live together; it is here we've romped and played;  
It is here the recollections that I treasured most were made.  
And there's not a battered panel nor a scar the eye can see,  
But is now the glorious symbol of a happy day to me.

I'm tangled up with roses, and the roots of me are curled  
Into every nook and corner of this little bit of world,  
And there's not a joy or sorrow that through all the years I've known,  
But has fastened me with shackles and has claimed me for its own.

(Copyrighted, 1909, by Edgar A. Guest)

*Newspaper clipping from the Diary of Adam Francis Plummer. The Plummer's youngest daughter Nellie writes on it: "This picture and poem represent my feelings and wishes toward our old homestead perfectly. My father loved it even more dearly before me."*

*Courtesy of the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.*







**Riversdale House Museum**

4811 Riverdale Road

Riverdale Park, MD 20737

301-864-0420

[riversdale@pgparks.com](mailto:riversdale@pgparks.com)

[history.pgparks.com](http://history.pgparks.com)

Riversdale thanks Dr. Leigh Ryan for her assistance with this booklet.

*On the cover: image of Adam Francis Plummer taken from a photograph; centenary card from the Diary of Adam Francis Plummer by Nellie Plummer to honor her father Adam; and (background) marblized paper from the back cover of the Diary of Adam Francis Plummer.*



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