

Brief Biography of John Day

Name _____ Class _____

Teacher _____ Date _____

John Day was born in the town of Hicksford, Greensville County, Virginia, in 1797. He was the son of a highly skilled free black cabinetmaker, John Day Sr., (b. 1766) and Mourning Stewart Day, a free black woman of the same age, whose father was a prominent medical practitioner, Dr. Thomas Stewart.

Day was trained in the cabinetmaking trade by his father, as was his younger brother Thomas Day, who would become a famous furniture maker of the Upper South. The boy was formally educated by tutors and when he reached 21 years of age, decided to study Baptist theology for several years, becoming a Baptist preacher. In 1830, Day, his wife Polly and their four children immigrated to the colony of Liberia on the west coast of Africa. Shortly after their arrival, Polly and all four children died of a fever that was likely malaria. Liberia was a colony established by the United States for recently freed slaves and African Americans. While initially the Liberian “colonization movement” had much support in the United States, it increasingly came to be seen by abolitionists as a scheme to rid the country of blacks. Yet several thousand African Americans chose to emigrate over the course of the 19th century.

After his family died, John Day put his “hand to the plough,” remarried, and started another family. At first Reverend Day worked as a cabinetmaker and sold some of his furniture to clients in the United States. In spite of hardship, John Day believed that Liberia was the best place on earth for all people of African ancestry to live and his enthusiasm for colonization never waned. At least in Liberia, black people had equality and freedom.

Day’s personal strength came from his strong Christian beliefs. He loved his new land and felt it was God’s will for him to be an “Americo-Liberian.” In the thirty years he lived abroad, he dedicated his life to Liberia’s citizens, natives as well as colonists. He became a famous preacher, statesman, teacher, and a founder of numerous schools. Even though he wore many hats, John Day saw his most important role as being a missionary. He spent the last year of his life as Superintendent of the Southern Baptist missions in Liberia, Central Africa, and Sierra Leone. Day is remembered as a founding father of modern Liberia and a signer of its declaration of independence, but he is most remembered for being one of the greatest Christian missionaries ever to serve on the continent of Africa.

Questions

1. According to the first paragraph, what might John Day have inherited from his parents and grandparents?
2. Based on the second paragraph, what was notable about Day’s education? Why?
3. According to the third paragraph, why did Day consider Liberia the best place on earth for people of African ancestry?
4. Based on the final paragraph, for what achievements is Day remembered?