

Elihu Embree

Essential Question: What impact did Elihu Embree have on the abolition movement?

Elihu Embree was born in Pennsylvania and moved to Greene County, Tennessee in 1790. Embree and his brother took over the family's successful ironworks when his father moved to Ohio. Though raised a Quaker, as a young man Embree was a deist and slave owner. However, in 1812 Embree returned to his Quaker faith and became a leader in the anti-slavery movement. Embree freed the slaves he still owned and went so far as to repurchase members of a family who had been separated when he sold them. Embree then freed the family. According to Tennessee law, underage slaves could not be emancipated, so Embree was forced to retain ownership of a slave named Nancy and her four children until they were old enough to be freed. He set aside money in his will to educate the children. He also became a member of Tennessee's first antislavery society, The Tennessee Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves. The society was founded in 1815 by Charles Osborn at the Lost Creek Meetinghouse in Jefferson County. Manumission is the act of a slaveholder freeing his or her own slaves. Abolition refers to changing laws so that slavery is no longer legal.

The crisis over Missouri statehood prompted Embree and the Manumission society to begin publishing a newspaper to help spread the word about the anti-slavery movement. Embree edited and financed the *Manumission Intelligencer*, but the Society had final control over the publication. The financial Panic of 1819 hurt the paper, but Embree pressed on. Following the passage of the Missouri Compromise in 1820, Embree decided to launch his own paper over which he would have full control. The *Emancipator* served as a clearinghouse for information on antislavery meetings and publications throughout the country. Embree began with only six subscribers, but in six months the paper was serving 2,500 subscribers.

Embree's paper faced a number of challenges including Southern postmasters who refused to deliver the papers. Embree's finances had been badly damaged by the Panic of 1819 and an unsuccessful business arrangement. The publication costs of the *Manumission Intelligencer* had hurt his finances further. In his personal life, Embree was forced to deal with the death of his second wife just months after he began the newspaper. Embree was left with seven children to care for. The strain took its toll on Embree who died on December 4, 1820. He had only published seven issues of the *Emancipator*. After his death, Benjamin Lundy, a fellow Quaker and publisher, moved to Greeneville and began to publish his own anti-slavery newspaper. It would be followed ten years later by William Lloyd Garrison's famous *Liberator*. Embree recognized the need for anti-slavery groups throughout the country to share information

and created the *Emancipator* to fill that need. Embree's newspaper revolutionized the anti-slavery movement.

Sources: Biggers, Jeff. *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2006. Print.

“Elihu Embree.” Tennessee *Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. 1st edition. 1998. Print.

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Use the information in the text to answer the questions below.

1. How did Elihu Embree show his dislike for slavery after he returned to the Quaker faith in 1812? _____

2. Why did Embree create the *Manumission Intelligencer*? _____

3. What challenges did the newspaper face? _____

4. What lessons can you learn from Embree's life? _____
