



# **Born at the Battlefield of Gettysburg: An African-American Family Saga**

*Harriette C. Rinaldi*

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The lives of Victor Chambers—who was born on the battlefield at Gettysburg to a runaway slave and later became an artist in Providence—and his mother are chronicled in this book based on letters that Chambers wrote to Rinaldi's great-grandfather, a Civil War veteran, in 1931. The story Rinaldi relates is emblematic of the fate of countless others whose lives were shaped by the scourge of slavery. Chambers' mother, a daughter of free blacks in Philadelphia, was kidnapped from her parents by slave catchers, who most likely included the notorious Lucretia (Patty) Cannon. After the kidnapping, Chambers' mother was enslaved on a Virginia tobacco plantation for 37 years before she made her escape to Gettysburg on the night before the historic Civil War battle erupted. She was nine months pregnant with Chambers—and determined that her child would not be born a slave. Gettysburg was a key stop on the Underground Railroad. Harriette Rinaldi retraced the path of Victor's mother from Philadelphia to Virginia and back, and her research gives the readers a vivid portrait of the life of an African-American family from the late eighteenth to early twentieth century. This riveting chronicle provides background information about the tactics and routes used by slave catchers in abducting free blacks, especially children; the atmosphere in slave markets; the role of religion as a means of control by owners, as well as a means of self-expression by slaves; the treatment of slave children; physical and psychological measures used by masters and overseers to control slaves; sexual abuse by masters; and the Underground Railroad as a clandestine operation.

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