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### Prologue

Young Lucy Watson was ironing at home on October 1, 1851, when she heard church bells toll the alarm. A member of Syracuse's African American community, Watson set out for downtown when a man called out, "Tell your people there's a fugitive arrested." Watson soon discovered that the quarry was William or "Jerry" Henry, an escapee from Missouri who had been working in a local cooper shop. Under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, agents were attempting to capture him. With the aid of members of Syracuse's Vigilance Committee and other citizens angered by the intrusion of federal marshals, Jerry broke out of the office of Commissioner Joseph F. Sabine. He was recaptured, placed in leg irons, and taken to the Police Office. Jerry's supporters, many of them well-known abolitionists, secretly met to discuss a plan of action. Soon after Sabine reconvened Jerry's hearing at 5:30 p.m., protestors stormed the Police Office and liberated Jerry. Many years later, Lucy Watson recalled that the rescuers, led by William Thomson, brought Jerry to her home and that she and her sister Frances "made a queen's chair like the children make with their hands and we carried him into the house that way, Thomson steadying him." Using a hammer and a flatiron, the sisters got the leg irons off the bruised, bleeding, and "awfully frightened Jerry," but they had to get Peter Lilly, an African American abolitionist blacksmith, to come and file off Jerry's handcuffs. Jerry was then disguised in women's clothes and taken into the back yard, where, Lucy Watson tells us, she and the others "boosted him over the back fence, and that was the last we saw of him."<sup>1</sup>

William Henry's dramatic rescue, which is today memorialized in Clinton Square in downtown Syracuse by the "Jerry Rescue" monument, was not yet over. Approximately four days after Lucy Watson last saw him, Jerry lay hidden in the bottom of meat wagon as its driver, Caleb Davis, a local butcher who had harbored him, sped toward Cicero to the north of Syracuse along the plank road. Jerry found refuge in Mexico where he was aided by Orson Ames and hidden in a barn belonging to Amos Beebe. Then it was on towards Oswego with help from Sidney Clarke, who secreted Jerry at his farmstead located in Scriba. Some days later Clarke led Jerry down to the Oswego harbor, signaling the way by tapping the iron ferule of his heavy hickory cane on the sidewalk. Jerry was given food and a small amount of money and put on a vessel bound for Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Syracuse in particular, and Central New York more generally, had hosted freedom seekers in the decades prior to the deliverance of William "Jerry" Henry, but a retelling the story of what happened on October 1, 1851, became a staple at rallies and celebrations for many years, even after the Civil War. Speakers such as Gerrit Smith reminded Jerry rescue celebrants of the history of the growth of abolitionist sentiment in the region and of the sacrifices friends of freedom had made, most dramatically by giving of their purse and opening their homes to

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Watson's statement, first published in 1894, is reproduced in Earl E. Sperry, *The Jerry Rescue* (Syracuse: Onondaga Historical Association, 1924), 42.

<sup>2</sup> The Sperry volume cites contemporary newspapers and eyewitness testimonies. Additional details regarding the Jerry Rescue and its aftermath can be found in W. Freeman Galpin, "The Jerry Rescue," *New York History* 26 (January 1945), 19-34, and Jayme Sokolow, "The Jerry McHenry Rescue and the Growth of Northern Anti-Slavery Sentiment during the 1850s," *Journal of American Studies* 16 (December 1982), 427-45. For testimonials regarding the aid rendered Henry in Mexico and Oswego, see Elizabeth Simpson, *Mexico, Mother of Towns* (Buffalo, N.Y.:J.W. Clement Co., 1949), 352-53.

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runaways in violation of law.<sup>3</sup> Though we will never know precisely their number, thousands of African Americans passed through the region we are calling Central New York on their way to Canada or, as William Henry did, they sought refuge in a community in Central New York sufficiently sympathetic to allow them a place to stay and the right to earn a livelihood.

This narrative provides historical context for understanding the development and nature of Freedom Trail or underground railroad activity in a region comprised of twenty-two counties in central New York. These counties form a corridor, based on the Pennsylvania line and capped by the Canadian border. Central New York was important to the Freedom Trail for three reasons:

1. It was a highway to Canada. As a highway, central New York channeled freedom seekers from South to North and also from East to West.
2. It was a haven for freedom seekers who chose to settle in the U.S. As a haven, central New York communities provided homes for hundreds (and perhaps thousands) of freedom seekers who chose to remain on the U.S. side of the border. Some writers called Syracuse the "Canada of the United States."
3. It was a major center of abolitionist activity. As an abolitionist center, central New York generated the earliest organized state anti-slavery organization, the earliest anti-slavery petitions, and the earliest discussion of political abolitionism.

As our summary account of the "Jerry Rescue" suggests, Central New York abolitionists formed networks or "intimate circles" as they advanced the emancipation crusade. African American Freedom Seekers benefited from these associational ties, but they also moved across the landscape more independently, risking much as they tested the willingness of whites and blacks alike to help them. There is much that we do not know about the runaway experience in Central New York, but there is sufficient information to begin to construct scenarios or possible scenarios about the operation of the Freedom Trail.

While the following statement uses the term "underground railroad," African Americans made attempts to escape bondage long before locomotives tracked across the landscape. Thus it is helpful to think of the concept of a "freedom trail" in the following way: "The Freedom Trail comprised the efforts of peoples of African descent held as slaves to escape, with or without assistance, from the earliest decades of the colonial New York experience until the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, prohibiting slavery in the United States, in 1865."

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<sup>3</sup> Five thousand people attended the first anniversary celebration on October 1, 1852. Present were abolitionist stalwarts from across the country, such as William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and Lucretia Mott. Gerrit Smith delivered the principal "Jerry Rescue" address. He did so at annual anniversary observances until 1859, when he urged discontinuance of the celebration because of despair over the failure of abolitionist rhetoric to move the nation. Despite the gloomy prospects of the freedom cause, the Jerry Rescue celebration was held and the Rev. Michael Strieby of Syracuse's Congregational Church replaced Smith as the orator of the day. *Douglass' Monthly*, 2, 5 (October 1859), 148.

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### I. Pre-1827: Before Freedom Came

Africans were held as slaves by colonial Dutch and English settlers long before the American Revolution. Those who escaped did so with little or no organized assistance, though a few found refuge among the Native American groups and some may have gone as far as the French-controlled parts of Canada. Most of Colonial New York's black population was concentrated in the Lower Hudson Valley and in New York City and environs.<sup>4</sup> After the American Revolution, some liberal-minded patriots yoked Enlightenment ideas of individual rights with Christian beliefs about the equality of souls to form the New York Manumission Society in 1785. The Society attempted to thwart the illegal importation and exportation of slaves for sale, assisted free blacks illegally held in bondage, promoted boycotts of merchants who profited from the trade in African slaves, and established schools for black children and adults.<sup>5</sup> The Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers, also remonstrated against the persistence of slavery. By 1781 all New York Quakers "in good standing" had freed their slaves.<sup>6</sup> In 1790, when the first federal census was taken, 21,329 individuals were categorized as "slave" in the State of New York. New York State had the highest percentage of slaves north of Maryland (12-15%). Central New York was then part of a large area called Ontario County, which had 1,075 white inhabitants and 16 African Americans, ten of whom were held as slaves.<sup>7</sup> White settlers ventured into the vast forests beyond New York State's 1790 white settlement line in increasing numbers in the next decades. Farm families from New England (Yankees) and migrants from lower New York State, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania (Yorkers) followed hunters, trappers, and traders. Land speculation fueled the influx, and by 1800 Central New York was dotted with growing communities and farms carved out of lands historically home to the Iroquois Confederacy.

Some African Americans settled central and western New York long before whites. The first post-Oneida settler in the Town of Paris, New York, for example, was a lone black man, who probably escaped from servitude with some officer. He took an Indian trail over the hill from the Mohawk River into the Sauquoit Valley. There, near a large elm west of the creek, he built himself a comfortable cabin, planted some corn, and began an apple orchard. Hardly had he settled in when a band of Indians attacked, destroyed his crops and burned his cabin. He himself escaped; all that remained at his cabin site was a large clump of apple tree sprouts. These grew unharmed and provided the first white settlers with trees large enough to transplant for their own orchards. They called this the "Jim Crow" nursery and remembered where it grew long after the trees themselves had disappeared.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Thomas J. Davis, "New York's Long Black Line: A Note on the Growing Slave Population, 1626-1790," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, II (January 1978), 41-59. David Kobrin, *The Black Minority in Early New York* (Albany, N.Y.: State Education Department, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> On the work of the New York Manumission Society, see Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), Chapters VIII and IX.

<sup>6</sup> Elias Hicks, a liberal Quaker residing on Long Island, was instrumental in getting New York State's gradual emancipation act of 1817 passed. Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950). Larry Gara, "Friends and the Underground Railroad." *Quaker History* 51 (Spring 1962), 3-19.

<sup>7</sup> To follow the decennial figures on "Free Coloured" and "Slave" in New York State counties for the period from 1790 to 1870, see the Ninth Census, Vol. I of *The Statistics of the Population of the United States for 1870* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 51-52.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Rogers, himself the son of a Paris pioneer, recorded this story in detail in 1881. He noted ironically that "it seems almost akin to sacrilege to do the work of verifying the facts of our early history so thoroughly as to necessitate the upsetting of all these many years . . . and it is a positive relief to think that as the name

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Henry Bakeman, perhaps born in New Jersey, was also one of the earliest post-Iroquois settlers of central New York. Henry enlisted in the Continental Army at Stone Arabia, New York, in 1781, when he was sixteen years old. He acted as a courier, eluding Tories and Native Americans in the Mohawk Valley until he went with his unit of 470 men (both black and white) on an unsuccessful attempt to capture Fort Ontario in February 1783. The cold was bitter. Slogging along the icy river, several soldiers froze their feet so badly that they remained crippled for the rest of their lives. Henry Bakeman was one of these. One black man was frozen to death. Another, reported an early source, "with his fiddle and his song, did much to keep up the spirits of the men, and to induce them to active exercise, by which they were saved from the fate of their comrade." After the war, Bakeman married Jane and together, they returned to the Oswego River Valley in the 1790s and set up a cooper shop (and perhaps a mill) in what is now Fulton, New York, where he died in 1835. Some of his descendants still remain in central New York.<sup>9</sup>

Even before the abolition of slavery in New York State, enslaved people had emancipated themselves. Austin Steward, born into slavery in the 1790s in Prince William County, Virginia, had been brought as a young man to Bath, New York. There he discovered that he and his family had some control over their fate. After lengthy legal battles, ending in physical violence, Steward managed to escape. He moved to Rochester, New York, and by the 1820s had established himself as a respected community leader.<sup>10</sup>

Thomas James, another Rochester settler, had been born into slavery in Canajoharie, New York, in 1804. At age seventeen, he was traded to a new master for a yoke of steers, a colt, and some other goods. In 1821, when this new owner tried to whip him, Thomas James left, followed the staked-out line of the as yet uncompleted Erie Canal west, crossed into Canada on the ferry at Youngstown, and was free. Three months later, he re-crossed the river and settled in Rochester, where he was ordained a minister in the AME Zion Church in 1833. He later served churches in Syracuse and Ithaca.<sup>11</sup>

Peter Wheeler, held as a slave in Ludlowville, Cayuga County, fled his master's grasp in 1806 and said of his emotions at that time, "I now began to feel somethin' like a man, and the dignity of a human being began to creep over me, and I enjoyed my liberty when I got it, I can tell you."<sup>12</sup>

By working as a lumberman and hostler, Peter Webb of the Town of Caroline, Tompkins County, purchased his freedom for three hundred and fifty dollars in 1818 and received the following affidavit from his former owner: "this is to certify that I have this day agreed to discharge my man, Peter, known by the name of Peter Webb, from all further servitude as a slave; that he is free to act for himself as a free man from this time forward."<sup>13</sup>

Most enslaved African Americans were not so fortunate. The federal census of 1820 enumerated 10,088 enslaved individuals in New York State. Their fate was dependent in part on the efforts of

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of the poor, black runaway-slave pioneer is lost and none of his descendants are likely to put in a claim, we can go on composedly reading our histories as they are written, only in the mind,' inserting the word 'white' before the words pioneer or first settler, wherever they occur." Rogers, *History of the Town of Paris and the Valley of the Sauquoit* (Utica, 1881), 14.

<sup>9</sup> "Henry and Jane Bakeman," at [www.oswego.edu](http://www.oswego.edu) --Oswego County Underground Railroad.

<sup>10</sup> James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 210.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas James, *Wonderful Eventful Life of Rev. Thomas James, By Himself* 3rd edition. Rochester, NY, Post-Express Printing Company, 1887). Republished in *Rochester History* 37 (October 1975), 21-32.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Wheeler, *Chains and Freedom; or, The Life and Adventures of Peter Wheeler, a Colored Man Yet Living, a Slave in Chains, a Sailor on the Deep, and a Sinner at the Cross* (New York: E. S. Arnold and Co., 1839)

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Sydney H. Gallwey, *Peter Webb: Slave-Freeman-Citizen of Tompkins County, New York* (Ithaca: DeWitt Historical Society, 1960), 3.

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antislavery advocates of gradual emancipation. The Gradual Emancipation Act of 1799 stipulated that African Americans born of a slave mother in New York State after July 4, 1799, were to be considered indentured servants. They were to serve their masters until the age of twenty-eight if male and twenty-five if female. They then became "free colored persons." In 1817 New York State enacted another gradual abolition law. It provided that slaves born before July 4, 1799, were to be freed on July 4, 1827.<sup>14</sup>

While slavery was yet legal in New York State, escape to Canada offered the promise of freedom. During the Revolutionary War, the British had offered freedom to any slaves who joined their forces. After the creation of Upper Canada in 1791, its Lieutenant Governor, John Graves Simcoe, worked for the abolition of slavery. Legislation passed in 1793 fell short of Simcoe's goal of a total ban, but it prohibited the importation of slaves into the province. In addition, any child born of a slave mother in Upper Canada was to become free at the age of 25. Because of Simcoe's efforts, slavery's hold gradually weakened in Upper Canada, as it did in Lower Canada when Chief Justice William Osgoode ruled in 1803 that slavery contradicted British law. Sir Peregrine Maitland, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada (1818-1828) repulsed efforts by American slave owners to recapture their property by backing the ruling of his Attorney General that any black refugee who crossed over into Canada was forever free. The British Imperial Act banned slavery in all of His Majesty's dominions in 1833, but by then there were few slaves left in Upper Canada.<sup>15</sup>

As the early national period (1789-1825) drew to a close, slavery enjoyed the protection of United States law. Antislavery sentiment was sublimated in support for the American Colonization Society, an organization formed in 1816 with the goal of returning African Americans to West Africa, specifically to Liberia. Gerrit Smith, who in 1819 took control of a fortune amassed by his father Peter Smith in the fur trade and land speculation, donated to the colonization effort, as did others who eventually converted to abolitionism.<sup>16</sup> The colonization scheme, like the various gradual emancipation proposals, was a poor surrogate for total emancipation as called for by African American leaders. Antislavery whites endorsed and supported ameliorative measures short of abolition by, for example, sponsoring schools for free blacks, mostly of a religious nature. Utica and Geneva had Sunday schools for blacks in 1815 and 1816.<sup>17</sup>

Generally speaking, free blacks struggled against racial barriers in almost every aspect of daily life. Economic opportunity was lacking, and after 1821 black males, in distinction to their white counterparts, were required to have a freehold worth at least \$250 in excess of all debts in order to vote. Analysis of a property-tax list from 1826 showed that only 298 of 39,999 African Americans in New York State were eligible to vote.<sup>18</sup> Given this lack of political and economic power, free blacks lived marginal

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<sup>14</sup> The law of 1827 retroactively provided uncompensated emancipation for approximately ten thousand individuals still counted as slaves. A few individuals are reckoned "slaves" in the census materials after 1827 because non-residents were still allowed to bring slaves into the state. An 1841 statute outlawed this practice. On the legislature history, see Carl Nordstrom, "The New York Slave Code," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 4 (January 1980), 7-25; Edgar J. McManus, "Antislavery Legislation in New York," *Journal of Negro History* 46 (October 1961), 207-15; and Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 213.

<sup>15</sup> Robin Winks, *Blacks in Canada: A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971), Chapter 4.

<sup>16</sup> On Smith and colonization, see Ralph V. Harlow, *Gerrit Smith: Philanthropist and Reformer* (1939; reprint New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 62-65.

<sup>17</sup> Carleton Mabee. *Black Education in New York State: From Colonial to Modern Times* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> Thomas J. Davis, "Three Dark Centuries around Albany: A Survey of Black Life in New York's Capital City Area Before World War I," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 7 (January 1983), 10-11. McManus, *Negro Slavery in New York*, 187-88.

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lives. Though called free people, they were still subject to the racism that undergirded the American system of slavery. Though the arrival of July 4, 1827, marked the end of slavery in New York State, African Americans still faced legalized discrimination in many aspects of their daily lives.

Festivities to celebrate statewide emancipation centered in Albany, where, according to the *Albany Argus & City Gazette*, "African bands and marshals" led a procession of state officers and other notables to the Second Baptist Church.<sup>19</sup> There they heard the Reverend Nathaniel Paul reflect on the meaning of the hour. "Under the Almighty," Paul declared, "we are enabled to recognize the fourth day of the present month, as the day in which the cause of justice and humanity have triumphed over tyranny and oppression, and slavery is forever banished from the state of New York."<sup>20</sup> African Americans and other supporters of the freedom cause outside of Albany held festivals of their own. Still the old specter of racism showed in the reactions of some New York State residents. The *Ithaca Chronicle* editorialized that because blacks had taken a holiday to observe emancipation, "Every man must be his own servant for the day; and many fair hands are constrained to engage in culinary and household matters."<sup>21</sup> Racism, it seemed, was yet alive.

The fate of African Americans in the post-1827 period was tied to the development of the social and cultural character of regions where they lived. The central and western parts of the State experienced an economic boom fueled by the completion of the Erie Canal (October 1825) and a transformation from a culture centered on subsistence farming to one increasingly focused on production of farm and factory goods for the market. Industrial production, centered on fast-running streams near Utica, Seneca Falls, and elsewhere, accompanied urbanization and increased migration from western Europe. New England culture still dominated many towns and villages of upstate New York, however, and some thought of the region as "New England Extended." Although railroads eventually challenged the Erie Canal as a commercial artery, DeWitt Clinton's celebrated ditch was still hailed one of the wonders of the world.<sup>22</sup>

As important as canals and railroads were to developing the character of upstate New York, cultural factors, especially in matters of religion, also played an important role. Charles G. Finney's conversion in the autumn of 1821 had primed the consciences of Christians to expect a call to demonstrate their convictions through acts of disinterested benevolence. Finney, formerly a lawyer practicing in Utica, broke with traditional Calvinist doctrine of original sin, which was pessimistic about

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<sup>19</sup> *Albany Argues & City Gazette*, July 6, 1827. Cited from A. J. Williams-Myers, "The Arduous Journey: The African American Presence in the Hudson-Mohawk Region," in *The African American Presence in New York State History: Four Regional Surveys*, edited by Monroe Fordham (Albany, N.Y.: The New York African American Institute, 1989), 28.

<sup>20</sup> Cited from Nathaniel Paul, *An Address, Delivered on the Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery, in the State of New York, July 5, 1827* (Albany, N.Y.: John B. Van Steenbergh, 1827), as reprinted in Milton C. Sernett, ed., *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 192.

<sup>21</sup> *Ithaca Chronicle*, July 1, 1827, as quoted by Field Horne, "Ithaca's Black Community," Cara Sutherland, ed., *A Heritage Uncovered: The Black Experience in Upstate New York, 1800-1925* (Elmira, N.Y.: Chemung County Historical Society, 1988), 19.

<sup>22</sup> James W. Darlington, "Peopling the Post-revolutionary New York Frontier," *New York History* 74 (October 1993), 341-81. The classic formulation of the Yankee-Yorker typology is by Dixon Ryan Fox, *Yankees and Yorkers* (New York: New York University Press, 1940). Donald W. Meinig, "New York and its Neighbors: Some Problems of Regional Interpretation," in *New Opportunities in a New Nation: The Development of New York after the Revolution*, edited by Manfred Jones and Robert V. Wells (Schenectady, N.Y.: Union College Press, 1982), 84. On the transition from an agrarian to a town-based culture, see Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

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human nature. Finney emphasized free will, that is an individual's ability to choose good over evil.<sup>23</sup> By underscoring the power of moral agency, Finney fanned interest in social reform. Michael Barkun, a political scientist and close student of millenarian movements, explained that "as predestination reinforced the social hierarchy of the colonial village, so revivalists' conversions harmonized with the new Jacksonian social mobility. Increasingly, all things were deemed possible, including freeing the world from sin by the exercise of possible initiative."<sup>24</sup> During the twelve-year period from 1825-1837, upstate New York was so engulfed by religious revivals that it became known as "the burned-over district."<sup>25</sup> Finney believed that slavery was a sin, but he did not interject himself into abolitionist politics and believed that his most important work was to summon America to a great religious revival. By so doing, he would empower others to take up the cause of the slave.<sup>26</sup> When the new abolitionist crusade took root in Central New York, it grew and flourished because Finney and his disciples had prepared the ground.

By the end of the 1820s, New York State had abolished slavery. Upstate regions were experiencing both economic growth and a post-frontier culture of maturing communities. Perhaps the citizens of the Central New York corridor, where no gangs of slaves hoed cotton, might be forgiven the thought that slavery was the South's problem. Yet the inland waterway which helped promote economic prosperity and regional integration also linked upstate New York to a wider world, especially to New England where radical voices such as that of William Lloyd Garrison sought to stir the nation's conscience regarding the "peculiar institution."

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<sup>23</sup> Charles G. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text* (1875), edited by Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1989). Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 41-43.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned-Over District of New York in the 1840s* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 24.

<sup>25</sup> The pioneering construction of the concept is by Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1950). On the influence of Cross's interpretation, see Judith Wellman, "Crossing over Cross: Whitney Cross's Burned-over District as Social History," *Reviews in American History* 17 (March 1989), 159-74.

<sup>26</sup> In *Lectures to Professing Christians*, published in 1837, Finney avowed, "It can be demonstrated absolutely, that slavery is unlawful, and ought to be repented of, and given up, like any other sin." Concerning those who continued to hold slaves, Finney said, "they are condemned before God, and we may be sure their sin will find them out, and God will let them know how He regards it." What of those who were convicted of slavery's wrong but continued to hold slaves for fear of the consequences of emancipating them? Here Finney reasoned that they must seek the truth and meanwhile educate their slaves in order to "put them in a state where they can be set at liberty." Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians* (London: Milner and Company, 1837), 36-37. For an analysis of the evolution of Finney's stance on abolitionism, see James David Essig, "The Lord's Free Man: Charles G. Finney and His Abolitionism," *Civil War History* 24 (March 1978), 25-45.

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## II. 1827-1839: Immediate Abolition—Moral Suasion and Local Action

After New York State abolished slavery in 1827, African Americans and some whites began to organize against slavery throughout the nation. While blacks and whites tended to organize separately, they found inspiration from common political and religious ideals. One sustaining motivation came from the Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," it read, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Such American ideals allowed no place for slavery, abolitionists argued. Christianity provided other arguments, and abolitionists found support from several favorite biblical references. "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female," they quoted. "Let us remember those in bonds as bound with them."

Newspapers and pamphlets became major forces for change. In 1827, Samuel Cornish began to publish *Freedom's Journal* in New York City. Although Cornish's paper lasted only two years, it became what historians James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton called "the national voice of African America."<sup>27</sup> In 1829, David Walker, a Boston tailor and agent for *Freedom's Journal*, published his famous *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, calling for complete equality and complete citizenship rights, defended if necessary by violence. Hidden in the clothing of black sailors, this *Appeal* reached southern ports, probably inspiring some blacks and certainly terrifying some whites. Walker died under mysterious circumstances shortly afterwards.

Much of the debate among African Americans in the 1820s centered on the question of emigration to Africa. In the early nineteenth century, influential African American leaders such as merchant and ship owner Paul Cuffe had advocated African American re-settlement in Sierra Leone, a British colony on Africa's west coast. Many African Americans agreed with him. By the 1820s, however, three things changed the nature of the debate. First, experiments in emigration both to West Africa and to Haiti had not attracted large numbers. Second, in 1816, white slaveholders had organized the American Colonization Society, setting up the colony of Liberia with its capital of Monrovia, named after James Monroe, President of the ACS as well as President of the U.S. What had seemed attractive as an initiative to increase the economic power and freedom of African Americans was much less attractive when it appeared to be a forced removal. Third, and probably most important, the 1820s were, as Horton and Horton noted, "a watershed in black identity." African Americans born in Africa were almost all gone. For the majority of African Americans who had been born and raised entirely in the U.S., "Africa was more their heritage than their home."<sup>28</sup>

From 1830-35, African Americans also organized annual national black conventions. Delegates debated issues relating to free people of color (including education, economic independence, and civil rights), as well as antislavery. While they opposed the American Colonization Society, they supported African American emigration to Canada as one way of acquiring farms and establishing independence. Indeed, Canada (especially Upper Canada, now the province of Ontario) seemed a safe haven. No slaves had been imported into Canada since 1793, and slavery itself was abolished throughout the British Empire, including Canada, in 1833.

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<sup>27</sup> Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 197.

<sup>28</sup> Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 191.

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Most importantly, Canadian courts refused to return fugitives from slavery in the U.S. One advocate of Canadian emigration was Austin Steward, Vice-President of the 1830 convention, who moved his family to a Canadian settlement called the Wilberforce colony from 1831-1836.<sup>29</sup>

Black organizations took the lead in the late 1820s, focusing not only on the abolition of slavery but also on the needs of free people color. White-dominated abolitionist groups soon followed. In January 1831, a young white printer in Boston named William Lloyd Garrison began to publish a new abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*. Like Samuel Cornish, Garrison rejected colonization. Quoting the Declaration of Independence, he advocated not gradual but immediate emancipation. His first editorial set the tone.

Assenting to the "self-evident truth" maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights—among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population. . . . I *will be* as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. . . . I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.<sup>30</sup>

In August 1831, in Southampton County, Virginia, Nat Turner led the largest rebellion of enslaved people in American history. More than one hundred people were killed. Garrison saw this as the fulfillment of his prophecy. "Woe to this guilty land," he raged. "The blood of millions of her sons cries aloud for redress! IMMEDIATE EMANCIPATION can alone save her from the vengeance of Heaven, and cancel the debt of ages!"<sup>31</sup>

Garrison continued to publish the *Liberator* until 1865. Black and white abolitionists across the Northeast subscribed to it, including many from central New York.

Other abolitionist newspapers followed. Among them were the *Colored American* (1836-41), edited by Samuel Cornish and Charles R. Ray. The American Anti-Slavery Society published the *Emancipator* and then the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. The New York State Anti-slavery Society supported the *Friend of Man* (1836-42), edited by William Goodell in Utica, succeeded by *The Liberty Press* (1842-49). Beginning in 1847, Frederick Douglass published the *North Star* in Rochester.

In January 1832, abolitionists in Boston organized the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery, specifically designed to promote immediate abolition. By January 1833, three more societies had been organized, two in Massachusetts and one in Ohio. Central New York abolitionists were not far behind. Utica abolitionists organized the earliest groups in New York State. In April 1833, they formed the Utica Juvenile ASS and the Utica Female Juvenile ASS. Two months later, students and faculty at Beriah Green's Oneida Institute, a bi-racial manual labor school, organized the third local abolitionist group.<sup>32</sup>

In December 1833, in the context of black abolitionist activity, the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, and the organization of local anti-slavery societies, male abolitionists (mostly white, with a few African Americans) from local groups centered in Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia met in Philadelphia to form the American Anti-Slavery Society. Several delegates

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<sup>29</sup> Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 208-10.

<sup>30</sup> *Liberator*, January 1, 1831, quoted in George M. Frederickson, ed, *William Lloyd Garrison* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 23.

<sup>31</sup> *Liberator*, September 3, 1831, quoted in Frederickson, ed., 26.

<sup>32</sup> Elizur Wright (secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society), "Auxiliaries to the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1836," manuscript in Wright Papers, Library of Congress.

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from central New York attended this meeting. Central New York abolitionists would continue to be represented at the annual May meetings of the AASS. They would also attend the three national women's anti-slavery meetings held in 1837, 1838, and 1839.

Embracing immediate emancipation, the AASS rejected violent means. Instead, it published tracts to appeal to the conscience of slaveholders. When southern whites burned abolitionist tracts, the AASS sent out agents to convert the country. In December 1836, they held a training session in New York City for a group they called "the Seventy." Among these were Theodore Dwight Weld, born and raised in Manlius, New York, and Henry Brewster Stanton, born in Connecticut. Both were converts to evangelical religion. Both had led abolitionist debates while students at Lane Seminary in Ohio. Both were powerful orators. And both would carry their evangelical abolitionist crusade to cities, towns, and villages all across the Northeast.

Everywhere, these agents were greeted with mob violence. Theodore Weld was called "the most mobbed man in America." Henry Brewster Stanton was a close second. When Stanton tried to organize an anti-slavery society in Lima, New York, opponents burned the church down around him. Anti-abolitionists in Fulton threw bricks against church windows. Elsewhere, they created havoc by throwing greased pigs into the meetings or building smoky fires in stoves.<sup>33</sup>

In Rochester, in the early summer of 1833, fugitive abolitionist minister Thomas James participated in the first anti-slavery meetings in Rochester. When opponents turned out the lights to disrupt the meeting, abolitionists re-grouped in a locked room, organized an anti-slavery society, and raised money for a paper, *The Rights of Man*. James toured surrounding towns to find subscribers and lecture against slavery. At LeRoy, he was mobbed. Welcomed in Perry and Warsaw, he was arrested and given a mock trial in Pike. Palmyra refused him a place to meet at all.<sup>34</sup>

Some local abolitionist societies emerged without the help of outside agents. Mexico, New York, provides a case study of this pattern. Spurred by Alfred Wells, known locally as "Quaker" Wells, residents of Mexico held their first abolitionist meeting in 1834 or 1835. Ministers, politicians, and local citizens gathered at the Baptist Church in Colosse to debate this controversial issue. Unable to persuade the group to support abolitionism, Wells asked James C. Jackson, a local farmer, and Algernon Savage, a school teacher, for support. For six nights, they argued for the proposition "that American slavery is a sin and that it ought to be immediately abolished." They had no trouble getting the audience to agree that slavery was a sin. Abolitionism, however, was another matter. It took the deciding vote of the chair, supposedly a pro-slavery Baptist minister, to sway the meeting to support the abolitionist movement.<sup>35</sup>

With these debates, Savage and Jackson launched their speaking careers. Local ministers objected to holding abolitionist meetings on Sundays, so Savage and Jackson, with the help of two other local men, staged a rebuttal. For several hours, they debated an audience of five hundred people. As one local historian described it, "They 'pushed these men from Genesis

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<sup>33</sup> *Friend of Man*, August 22, 1838.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas James, *Wonderful Eventful Life of Rev. Thomas James, by Himself* (1886), excerpted in *Rochester Times-Union*, April 10, 1982.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Simpson, "Two Famous Abolitionists of Oswego County," *Fourth Publication of the Oswego Historical Society*, XII (1940), 81-91. For more details, see Judith Wellman, Chapter Six, "Abolitionism in the Three Townships," *Grassroots Reform in the Burned-over District of Upstate New York* (New York: Garland Press, 2001).

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to Revelation and crowded them back again,' insisting upon the New Testament teaching that there was 'neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free."<sup>36</sup>

Although local supporters rather than outside agents first converted Mexico citizens to abolitionism, the movement in Mexico progressed much as it would in other central New York townships. Attracted to the movement by religious beliefs, abolitionists quickly confronted attacks from conservative religious leaders. Recognizing the limits of organizing within specific denominations, they began to develop community-based campaigns. Emphasizing their responsibilities as citizens for personal commitment and individual action, they joined state and national organizations, signed petitions, and organized political action. In the process, they created alliances between blacks and whites and raised new questions about the roles of women and men.

In spite of frequent mob violence, AASS agents and local citizens set up hundreds of anti-slavery societies across the northeastern U.S. in 1835-36. In New York State, many of these included both black and white men, but race and gender also separated many. Utica, for example, had not only the Oneida Institute ASS and two juvenile Anti-Slavery Societies (one for boys and one for girls) but also a Utica ASS (for men), a Utica Female ASS, and a Utica Young Men's ASS. Rochester had three societies: Rochester City, Rochester Female Colored, and Rochester Female. Across the state, eighteen female anti-slavery societies were organized, including nine in central New York (two each in Rochester and Utica and one each in Sherburne, Sauquoit, Whitesboro, Farmington, and Pompey).<sup>37</sup>

On October 21, 1835, more than four hundred representatives from local societies, many of them (including James C. Jackson from Mexico) from central New York, met at the Blecker Street Presbyterian Church in Utica to form the New York State Anti-Slavery Society. They were motivated by both the ideals of the Declaration of Independence (that "all men are created equal") and their beliefs as Christians. Nothing less than the future of the country was at stake, they believed. "Upon the issue of the present conflict," they emphasized, "depend both the destinies of human liberty and the blessings of our holy religion."<sup>38</sup>

But the meeting did not go as planned. Perhaps reflecting the influence of outraged southern politicians, a group of "gentlemen of property and standing," burst into the church, ran onto the speakers' platform and threatened violence unless the meeting disbanded. Among the rioters was Samuel Beardsley, future judge of the New York State Supreme Court.<sup>39</sup>

In the audience were Gerrit and Ann Smith, from Peterboro, New York. Gerrit Smith had inherited thousands of acres of land in central and northern New York, much of it once controlled entirely by the Oneida Indians. In 1827, he augmented his inheritance by the astute purchase of port facilities in Oswego, New York. By 1860, these properties would bring him one million dollars a year. His marriage to Ann Carroll Fitzhugh allied him with one of Maryland's pre-eminent slaveholding families. Throughout their lives, both Gerrit and Ann were committed to living out

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<sup>36</sup> Simpson, "Two Famous Abolitionists," 84.

<sup>37</sup> Elizur Wright (secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society), "Auxiliaries to the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1836," manuscript in Wright Papers, Library of Congress

<sup>38</sup> *Proceedings of the New York Anti-Slavery Convention, Held at Utica, October 21, and at Peterboro, October 22, 1835* (Utica: Standard and Democrat, 1835), 3.

<sup>39</sup> For a fuller account of the riot, see Howard Alexander Morrison, "Gentlemen of Proper Understanding: A Closer Look at Utica's Anti-Abolitionist Mob," *New York History* 62 (January 1983), 61-82.

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basic Christian values. Following his spiritual leadings, Gerrit would organize non-denominational "free" (Christian Union) churches, keep the seventh day as Sabbath, and become a vegetarian.<sup>40</sup>

By 1835, Nancy Smith had become an abolitionist. Gerrit, however, retained his commitment to the American Colonization Society. Outraged by the anti-abolitionist attack at the Utica meeting, however, Gerrit Smith sprang to his feet and did what he could do best to protect the right to free speech: he invited everyone to reconvene the meeting in Peterboro. Nearly four hundred people came to the Peterboro gathering, and not incidentally, the experience convinced Gerrit to commit his considerable resources to the anti-slavery cause. By 1838, recalled Smith's cousin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Every member of their household is an abolitionist even to the coachman."<sup>41</sup>

At their organizational meeting, delegates to the New York State Anti-Slavery Society affirmed their belief that moral arguments alone, based on Christian beliefs, would abolish slavery. They would not need to use physical force, because "moral suasion," based on truth and love, were "more powerful than the edge of the sword."<sup>42</sup>

To carry out their moral campaign, the New York State Anti-Slavery Society, dominated by whites, used several non-violent techniques to influence primarily white audiences. First, in 1836, they established a newspaper, the *Friend of Man* (edited by William I. Chaplin), to report on abolitionist activities throughout the state. Second, they employed agents, "to visit every township and school district in regular succession, to circulate our publications--to converse with individuals--to lecture as opportunity offers--to circulate petitions--to organize auxiliaries--and thus carry the knowledge of our principles and the adoption of our measures into every portion of that state." Third, they initiated a program of regular quarterly subscriptions to raise money. Fourth, they developed anti-slavery libraries for each school district. And fifth, they initiated an anti-slavery petition campaign.<sup>43</sup>

Such work should focus not only on cities and villages, they argued, but also on farmers and country people. Instead of trying to convert "a pro-slavery aristocracy and the rum-babble they never fail to drag at their heels," abolitionists should work with "that portion of the community who are our natural allies, the plain unsophisticated yeomanry of the country, who though scattered in their habitations, and less easy of access, are nevertheless the vast majority of the people, and hold the destinies of the nation in their hands." Such a focus on ordinary people would be reflected in the buildings that survive as testament to abolitionist organizing and to underground railroad work. Most would be simple frame structures, built not be "aristocracy" but by "unsophisticated yeomanry."<sup>44</sup>

Abolitionists emphasized the importance of individual commitment and of local action. "Local work," they argued, "cannot be done by the great central committees, whether State or National, whether located at Utica or New York. Yet the nation is made up of localities; and local

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<sup>40</sup> Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Gerrit Smith: A Biography* (1878, rpt., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 39-40. .

<sup>41</sup> ECS to Peter Smith, January 27, [1835-37], Smith Papers, Syracuse University. The Gerrit Smith Estate and Land Office are listed on the National Register.

<sup>42</sup> *Proceedings of the New York Anti-Slavery Convention*, 22, 38.

<sup>43</sup> Second Annual Report, *Friend of Man*, September 27, 1837. For further discussion of the work of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society, see Wellman, Chapter Five, "Abolitionism in Central New York," in *Grassroots Reform*.

<sup>44</sup> "Fourth Annual Report of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society," *Friend of Man*, October 2, 1839.

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effort everywhere existing, is the whole work we wish and need to have accomplished."<sup>45</sup> Individuals, they believed, held the real key to success or failure. National societies are not "self-moved and self-moving machines," explained the executive committee of the NYSASS. National, state, county, town, and village societies all depended on the efforts of individuals. It should never be forgotten that all these societies "are nothing more or less than associations of single individuals--that the societies can possess no more knowledge, nor vigilance, nor energy, nor zeal, nor efficiency than is possessed by the INDIVIDUALS of which they are composed and can exist only by the INDIVIDUALS self-denial and labor."<sup>46</sup>

The New York State Anti-Slavery Society gave specific directions for individual and local action. Town organizations should appoint two agents, a man and a woman, for each school district. These agents should visit every family and every person over eighteen years of age, talking to them about abolitionism and selling them a copy of the anti-slavery almanac. If they could not sell the almanac, they should give it away, for "these unpretending messengers of truth would be the means, if systematically distributed, of converting thousands of our countrymen to the first principles of our institutions, as well as the cause of humanity." In addition, the NYSASS suggested that each agent should circulate anti-slavery petitions, collect money for anti-slavery societies, solicit subscriptions to anti-slavery newspapers, and hold local monthly meetings. They also recommended that each school district purchase a library of anti-slavery literature to be circulated among parents and children in the area. Let this system be implemented, predicted the NYASS, "and it would do more good, in the State of New York, than 100 lecturers. For the fact is, the people must be their own instructors, or the reformation will never be conducted to final success."<sup>47</sup>

Abolitionist emphasis on individual action reflected a philosophical commitment. As Christians and as citizens, abolitionists had a responsibility to put their personal beliefs into action, to make a difference in their communities. But individual action also saved money. And in the late 1830s, the anti-slavery movement, like every other movement, desperately needed money. By 1837, financial resources had virtually disappeared. A nationwide recession in that year left thousands of people bankrupt and thousands more unemployed. Even Gerrit and Ann Smith moved out of their mansion house and employed their daughter Elizabeth to clerk in her father's office.

In the context of extreme financial pressure, the anti-slavery petition campaign was an ideal vehicle for activism. It was cost effective, relying on unpaid individual action. It offered a chance for abolitionists convert their neighbors to the cause. Petitioners could approach their neighbors as friends and Christians. It linked local people into a national movement. And it was totally non-violent, appealing to the moral sense of both signers and recipients. As moral rather than political documents, petitions doubled the number of possible participants because they relied on support from women as well as men.

Abolitionists took seriously the duty of collecting names on anti-slavery petitions. On November 3, 1836, for example, a letter to the *Friend of Man* signed "Junior" urged that a petition be presented to every family in Oneida County and then to every free man in the state. "For us, at this time, to be silent is treachery," argued Junior. "We should not only prove ourselves traitorous to the cause of the slave, but traitorous to our own dearest rights."

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<sup>45</sup> "Fourth Annual Report of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society," *Friend of Man*, October 2, 1839.

<sup>46</sup> Second Annual Report, *Friend of Man*, September 27, 1837.

<sup>47</sup> The *Friend of Man* reprinted these directions many times. See, for example, *Friend of Man*, April 25, 1838.

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"We will not be silent. We will say to the men in Congress, Our Government is a democracy. We, the farmers and mechanics, are the rulers. We are the governors--you, our servants. On February 1, 1837, "Liberty" urged every minister, every Christian, every abolitionist, and every "friend of man"--men and women both--to circulate petitions in each town. "If the prayers of five hundred. . . inhabitants will turn the scale in favor of liberty, the slave's Jubilee is at hand."<sup>48</sup>

Petitioners were careful to ask Congress only for what was constitutionally possible. They did not ask for the complete abolition of slavery in the U.S. Instead, they sought the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, the abolition of slavery in the territories, and the suppression of the inter-state slave trade. After 1837, they also petitioned against the admission of Texas to the Union and against the admission of any new slave states.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, African Americans in New York State initiated their own petition campaign for universal male suffrage. "Between 1837 and 1842," one historian noted, "the legislature receive equal suffrage petitions from blacks in New York, Albany, Oneida, Dutchess, Erie, Onondaga, Schenectady, Orange, Queens, and Rensselaer counties among others."<sup>50</sup>

The NYSASS supported this initiative. Over and over again, they asked for petitions to the New York State legislature emphasizing three points: 1) equal suffrage for free people of color in New York State; 2) repeal of laws that allowed slave owners to bring enslaved people into New York State for nine months or less; and 3) a jury trial for accused fugitives from slavery. In only one week in March 1838, abolitionists submitted seven petitions to the state legislature. Five of these were identified by place, and they were all from central New York (Aurelius, "for a repeal of laws making a distinction on account of colored;" ladies of Syracuse, "for the right of trial by jury for all persons claimed as fugitives;" citizens of Havellsville [Hornellsville?], "to extend the right of jury trial to persons claimed as slaves;" citizens of Camden, "for extension of the right of trial by jury;" and citizens of Vienna, for jury trials). In 1838, the Judiciary Committee received 9300 signatures on petitions for equal suffrage.<sup>51</sup>

Abolitionists argued that anti-slavery petitions were not political documents because they relied on moral rather than "carnal" authority. Opponents, however, did not agree. Congress, dominated by pro-slavery members, was outraged. On May 27, 1836, the House of Representatives adopted its first "gag law." They resolved "that all Petitions, Memorials, Resolutions and Propositions, relating in any way, or to any extent whatever, to the subject of Slavery, be laid on the table." The New York State legislature simply rejected petitions outright.<sup>52</sup>

Ironically, opposition to petitions helped spread the abolitionist movement. Abolitionism became a means not only of fighting slavery but also of defending the rights of free citizens, including white citizens. In 1837, the murder of abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy in Alton, Illinois, reinforced this interpretation. Abolitionists suddenly catapulted into position as the primary defenders of the First Amendment. They took full advantage of this change in public perception. An enterprising abolitionist pottery maker even sold china emblazoned with the First Amendment.

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<sup>48</sup> *Friend of Man*, November 3, 1836; February 1, 1837.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, *Proceedings of the New York Anti-Slavery Convention Held at Utica . . . 1835*, 5; *Friend of Man*, July 5, 1837, August 2, 1837.

<sup>50</sup> Phyllis F. Field, *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 45.

<sup>51</sup> *Friend of Man*, January 12, 1837; *Friend of Man*, March 21, 1838; Field, *Politics of Race*, 46.

<sup>52</sup> *Friend of Man*, July 7, 1836; January 12, 1837; July 12, 1837.

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Abolitionist efforts in central New York were remarkably successful. By May 1836, New York State had almost one-fifth of the total number of anti-slavery societies in the whole Northeast (104 out of 527), more than any other state except Ohio (which had 133). By April 1838, at least 287 county and local societies in New York State (and perhaps as many as 335) were affiliated with the American Anti-slavery Society. In central New York, these included at least eleven counties (Allegany, Cayuga, Cortland, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Monroe, Oneida, Oswego, Tompkins, and Yates) and one hundred townships. Twenty counties remained to be organized, including most of those in the southern tier and along the Hudson River. By 1839, at least forty-three counties had anti-slavery organizations. Twenty of these (Allegany, Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Jefferson, Lewis, Livingston, Madison, Monroe, Oneida, Onondaga, Ontario, Oswego, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, Wayne, Yates) were in central New York.<sup>53</sup>

By 1850 central New Yorkers had also sent hundreds of anti-slavery petitions to Congress. The number of petitions increased sharply in 1837-38, 1839-40, and 1843-44, paralleling abolitionist concern with Texas annexation. Oneida County had the largest total number of petitions, with 124. Oswego (78), Cayuga (61), Onondaga (52), and Chenango (44) followed. Two townships were especially active. Paris, in Oneida County, generated seventeen petitions, more than any other township in upstate New York. Waterloo, in Seneca County, had fourteen. Nationally, so many abolitionists sent petitions to Congress that, by 1838, they filled to the ceiling a room twenty feet wide by thirty feet long. Outside of formal party politics, this petition campaign became the largest grassroots social movement since the American Revolution.<sup>54</sup>

Anti-slavery petition signers in central New York were mostly European American in background, reflecting the population as a whole. Both men and women signed petitions. In 1837, for example, men and women both signed the same petitions, in separate columns, from Amboy in Oswego County and DeRuyter in Madison County. Many petitions contained only women's names, such as the one from Cayuga County in 1837, which included the signatures of 860 women. Another large list, from 895 "Women of the State," was not divided into geographic areas. In 1838-9, seventy percent of petitions from upstate New York carried women's names, either alone or with men.<sup>55</sup>

Although many African Americans signed anti-slavery petitions and joined local and state anti-slavery societies, they continued to face racism, even within the anti-slavery movement. Abolitionists often associated attacks on African Americans with colonizationists. At a meeting held in the Congregational Church of Danby on April 30, 1839, supporters of the American Colonization Society in Tompkins County were powerful enough to pass a resolution declaring

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<sup>53</sup> Elizur Wright (secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society), "Auxiliaries to the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1836," manuscript in Wright Papers, Library of Congress; *Annual Report of the American Antislavery Society*, 1838; *Friend of Man*, September 26, 1838; Henderson, "The History of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1963), 389-91.

<sup>54</sup> For number of petitions by 1838, see *New York American*, March 13, 1838, reprinted in *Friend of Man*, April 11, 1838. For further discussion of the petition campaign in New York State, see Wellman, *Grassroots Reform*.

<sup>55</sup> Committee records. House of Representatives. National Archives. HR2SA-HI.1; Dated January 30 HR2SA-HI.1; 1837. Committee Reports. House of Representatives. National Archives. HR24A-HI.3. Committee records. House of Representatives. National Archives. Dated January 30, 1837. Committee Reports. House of Representatives. National Archives. HR24A-HI.3; Wellman, "We Do Respectfully Pray," *Clio Was a Woman* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980).

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"American slavery, in all relations, and in all circumstances, not to be a sin." W. O. Duvall, abolitionist agent, noted that the main proponent of this resolution was a well-educated and prominent teacher of a Bible class. "This same man," Duvall wrote to the *Friend of Man*, "left the church abruptly, Sabbath before last, because a colored man, (who is said to be a minister of the Methodist church in Ithica [sic]), arose to speak in behalf of his colored brethren, who needed aid in furnishing their house of worship."<sup>56</sup>

In the context of abolitionist organizing, the underground railroad in central New York began to assume a clearer identity. Fugitives from slavery began to make their own way to and through central New York. Local abolitionists, both white and black, began to work individually and as organized groups to assist them. By 1838, some central New York communities (including, for example, many in Oswego County) had organized Vigilance Committees, with the explicit goal of helping African Americans flee from slavery and from attempts to kidnap freed people. They were modeled after the first of these committees, established by free African Americans in New York City in 1835. By 1837, David Ruggles, secretary of this New York Committee of Vigilance, reported that it had already assisted 335 persons.<sup>57</sup>

African Americans who arrived in central New York by the 1830s would often prove to be particularly dynamic influences on the emerging abolitionist movement. Tudor Grant, who "once had been a chattel but now considered himself to be a man," reported the *Friend of Man* in 1838, arrived in Utica from Maryland by 1827, although we cannot be sure whether he was a fugitive or a freed person. About 1832, Grant moved to Oswego, New York. He became a barber and cloth dyer by trade, as well as a singing master, community leader, and outspoken abolitionist orator, author, and underground railroad supporter. He wrote resolutions, signed petitions, acted as agent for the *Colored American*, worked against segregated schools, and was a member of the Oswego Vigilance Committee.<sup>58</sup>

Jermain Loguen, born about 1813 in Tennessee, fled to Canada in 1834, where he had a farm near Hamilton, Ontario. In 1837, he came to Rochester, where he worked as a hotel waiter and porter until he went to Beriah Greene's Oneida Institute for two years. He married Caroline Storum from Busti, Chautauqua County before becoming a schoolteacher and later minister in the AME Zion Church. Loguen lived in Syracuse before he was called to serve a racially mixed congregation in Bath, New York. From there he went to a black congregation in Ithaca, then back to Syracuse, then to Troy, and eventually (after flight to Canada) back to Syracuse, where the Loguens acted as the main agents in the underground railroad.<sup>59</sup>

In February 1838, the *Friend of Man* printed a letter to the editor from Mexico, New York (probably written by Starr Clark, white abolitionist and owner of a tinshop) about a freedom seeker known only as George. George's story offers specific clues about how the underground railroad operated in central New York by late 1830s. In October 1837, at the invitation of a ship captain, George had left from an unnamed southern port, sailed to Maryland, and then traveled, mostly at night, into Pennsylvania. To earn money to continue his journey, he worked for several

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<sup>56</sup> *Friend of Man*, December 12, 1838.

<sup>57</sup> Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1961, repr. 1996), 101.

<sup>58</sup> See information on Tudor and Marie Grant at [www.oswego.edu](http://www.oswego.edu), Oswego County Underground Railroad.

<sup>59</sup> Milton Sernett, "A Citizen of No Mean City": Jermain W. Loguen and the Antislavery Reputation of Syracuse," *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier*, XXII:2 (Fall 1987), 33-55; Carol Hunter, *To Set the Captive Free: Reverend Jermain Wesley Loguen and the Struggle for Freedom in Central New York 1835-1872* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993).

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days at a home whose owner said that he was not an abolitionist but agreed with their ideas. When George tried to leave, these people attempted to handcuff him, perhaps to return him to slavery, but he fought them off and escaped, entering New York State at Binghamton and making his way by late November to Syracuse. There he met Asa Wing, another Mexico abolitionist, who sent him to Deacon Hiram Gilbert in Gilbert's Mills in Oswego County, who directed him to Starr Clark in Mexico. There, he told his story at public meetings and profoundly affected everyone who heard him.<sup>60</sup>

George's suspicion of abolitionists was well founded. "He says the slaves, where he came from," wrote Starr Clark, "are taught to believe that abolitionists are cannibals; that there is a man in New York, immensely rich, by the name of Tappan, who is a tanner and makes over-shoes; that he has ten thousand agents throughout the country, kidnapping negroes [sic] and scalping them, and that he makes over-shoes of the scalps, turning the woolly part in; and this is the way he has made his money."

People in Mexico were especially impressed with George's Christian beliefs.

I think he is one of the most humble Christians I ever knew," wrote Clark. "Though I have never seen any person who gave better evidence of being a genuine Christian, still he said he had never communed with the church he belonged to. He had been a professor ten years, & is 33 years old. The reason he could not commune was, that his own brother was sold to purchase the communion furniture, and supply the bread and wine, and he felt that it would be drinking his brother's blood to commune. His master owned 170 slaves, and 3000 acres of land. He had been offered \$1400 for George. He never was whipped for fault; but once a fortnight he had to take twenty lashes to stir up his ideas. He has seen his own mother whipped on the bare back often. My little son said, "Did you not want to take the whip out of his hand and put it on him?" "O, no," was the answer. "I would willingly have been whipped in her stead.

Although offered a job in Mexico, George wanted to go on immediately to Canada. Clark hosted a farewell gathering for him. "My house was full of abolitionists to see him, men and women," noted Clark.

One of the brethren prayed, then George followed, and prayed as though he was filled with the Holy Ghost. Never did I witness such a breaking down among Christians, such sighing and weeping; the tears ran freely down each cheek. He ceased, and took each one by the hand, but his heart was too full for utterance. He mounted a horse provided for him, with a young man, who went with him. I gave him letters to Kingston, and to our friends along the road, and he was soon out of sight.

This story illustrates many themes that emerged in popular descriptions of the underground railroad. It also challenges popular lore. George chose freedom on his own initiative, for example, but he received help in central New York almost by chance. Fear rather than confidence governed his actions. Yet a shared Christian culture created a bond between black and white, freedom seeker and free. George's willingness to relate his story helped expand and sustain white abolitionist sentiment in central New York.

George's story also casts some light on the issue of secrecy. If participation in the underground railroad was so dangerous, how could abolitionists in Mexico have held public meetings about it? In fact, this story suggests that underground railroad activity was more

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<sup>60</sup> Starr Clark to *Emancipator and Friend of Man*, December 5, 1837, printed in *Friend of Man*, February 28, 1838,

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dangerous in some times and places than in others. The *Friend of Man* delayed the publication of Clark's letter, "fearing that some of the particulars therein stated might endanger the safety of some of the persons mentioned, or render less secure the escape of others who might hereafter follow on the same route." The *Friend of Man* published the letter only after the *Emancipator* had already printed it, "in a form somewhat more guarded" than the original, almost three months after George's escape to Canada.

Tudor Grant, Jermain Loguen, and George helped initiate what would become one of the most powerful contributions that fugitives made to the growing abolitionist movement, and that was to share their personal story with a public audience. As Horton and Horton noted, "By the early 1840s, abolitionists discovered that their most effective antislavery weapon was the testimony of slaves and former slaves."<sup>61</sup>

The escape of Harriet Powell in October 1839 offered significant variations on these themes. Not only was Harriet a woman. She was a house servant not a laborer, and she had escaped directly from Syracuse, New York, rather than from a southern plantation. Her story also makes clear the assistance she received from both African Americans and whites.

Harriet Powell had been sold in the New Orleans slave market when she was fourteen years old. She had arrived at a Syracuse hotel with her owners, Mr. and Mrs. J. Davenport of Mississippi. With a white complexion, earrings, gold rings on her fingers, and expensive clothes, she did not look enslaved. When she escaped, she had disguised herself with a man's coat and hat. Tom Leonard, an African American waiter in the hotel, convinced her to escape, dressed her in a man's coat and hat, and helped by two white abolitionists, brought her to the Smith home in Peterboro. In a handbill offering \$200 for her return, the Davenports asserted that they had refused offers of \$2500 for her purchase because they did not want to separate her from other members of her family, particularly her mother and sister.<sup>62</sup>

Harriet Powell left the Smith house in the evening, but not before she had told her story to members and guests in the Smiths' household, including Smith's cousin, 24-year-old Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Dressed as a Quaker, Harriet Powell was driven to the shore of Lake Ontario, where she took a ship for Canada, probably from Cape Vincent. When Mr. Davenport, her owner, arrived the next day, Gerrit Smith let him search the house. After Harriet arrived in Canada, however, Smith published an open letter Davenport in the New York *Tribune*. Davenport, he noted, "would no doubt rejoice to know that his slave Harriet. . . was now a free woman, safe under the shadow of the British throne. I had the honor of entertaining her under my roof, sending her in my carriage to Lake Ontario, just eighteen hours before your arrival; hence my willingness to have you search my premises." Another letter from Smith, this time to the *Friend of Man*, gave more details. While in Peterboro, Harriet had received money and winter clothing, he reported, and now she was in Kingston, Ontario, where, Smith suggested, her former owner "may wish to pay her wages for the services she has faithfully rendered him."<sup>63</sup>

The most famous fugitive of this decade was, of course, Frederick Douglass. The circumstances of Douglass's escape from Baltimore, Maryland, in 1838 would remain secret for many years, but his experience was not unlike that of other successful fugitives. With a forged pass and the help of a free black woman named Anna, he had escaped from the shipyard where

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<sup>61</sup> Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 225.

<sup>62</sup> Barbara Sheklin Davis, *A History of the Black Community of Syracuse*, exhibit catalog for an exhibit of the same name at Onondaga Community College, October, 1980 (n.p., n.d.), 6.

<sup>63</sup> Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, (New York, 1898), 62-64; Davis, *Black Community of Syracuse*, 6; *Friend of Man*, November 6, 1839.

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he worked and had made his way to David Ruggles' house in New York City. There, he and Anna married. For the next three years, Douglass worked in the shipyards of New Bedford, Massachusetts. In 1841, Douglass told his story at an anti-slavery convention in New Bedford, Massachusetts. He so impressed his audience that the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society hired him full-time as an anti-slavery lecturer. Fearful of re-enslavement, Douglass went to England in 1845, where he earned enough money by lecturing and selling his autobiography to purchase himself. When he returned, he moved to Rochester, New York, and began to publish an abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*.

By the end of the 1830s, most of central New York (like most of New York State outside the southern tier, the Hudson Valley, and the North Country) had been highly organized to support the immediate abolition of slavery. State, county and township anti-slavery societies responded to national organizers. Both African Americans and whites drew inspiration from ideals of equality reflected in the Declaration of Independence and Christianity.

Specific organizations tended to be dominated either by blacks or by whites. At the national level, black organizations emphasized not only the abolition of slavery but also education, self-improvement, and general reform (often rooted in evangelical religious values) for free African Americans. Whites dominated many organizations specifically designed to abolish slavery, but African Americans (including many fugitives themselves) who joined these efforts had a profound impact on spreading opposition to slavery. They also helped whites understand that abolitionism must be tied to increased opportunities and respect for free people of color. In spite of mob violence in the 1830s, both white and black abolitionists gave money, published newspapers and pamphlets, sent out agents, participated in national and state conventions, organized local and county anti-slavery societies, and sent hundreds of petitions to Congress.

By the end of the 1830s, abolitionists had also begun to support the decision of increasing numbers of African Americans—both women and men--to emancipate themselves from slavery. Some assistance seemed haphazard and circumstantial. Increasingly, however, organized groups committed themselves to the cause. Responding to David Ruggles' initiative in New York City, some central New York communities organized vigilance committees.

At the end of the 1830s, both abolitionist organizing and underground railroad activity had made a profound impact on many central New Yorkers. Splits within the abolitionist movement in the late 1830s and early 1840s would change the nature of abolitionist activity, but they would not affect the desire of many African Americans to leave slavery or the commitment of many abolitionists--black and white, women and men--to help them.

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### III. 1840-1850: Abolitionism in Politics and Religion

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, three important changes occurred in the abolitionist movement: 1) a shift toward political action; 2) a debate about the position of women within abolitionism; and 3) the formation of new anti-slavery religious groups. While these developments were important throughout the Northeast, they were remarkably strong in New York State's burned-over district. Here antislavery religion and antislavery politics were intertwined and by the 1840s interdependent.

As early as 1837, some abolitionists in central New York, especially in Oneida and Oswego Counties, began to reconsider their commitment to moral suasion. They were among the earliest abolitionists in the nation to do so. Why should we vote for pro-slavery office-holders, they asked themselves, when such politicians simply reject all of our anti-slavery petitions and refuse to consider our moral arguments? Perhaps it was time to move from moral appeals alone to a tactic that politicians could more easily understand: the vote.

Central New York abolitionists believed that voting was not inconsistent with moral suasion. Rather, it was a way to make moral suasion more effective. "The American ballot-box is a mighty instrument of moral, not less than political power," concluded the Oneida County Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>i</sup> "Although abolitionists are precluded by their principles from organizing a distinct political party," wrote William L. Chaplin, corresponding secretary of the NYSASS, "yet, . . . they are most solemnly bound to exert their political as well as strictly moral influence in behalf of the crushed bondman . . . ."<sup>ii</sup> Their first efforts were very cautious. In an effort to influence political candidates without directly forming another political party, the New York Anti-Slavery Society in 1837 posed a series of questions to both Democratic and Whig candidates for the state legislature. None gave satisfactory answers.<sup>64</sup>

The following year, political abolitionists in Oneida and Oswego Counties made their position even clearer. Petitions alone were not enough, they decided. Voting for abolitionist candidates was itself a moral act. "Shall we present petitions by thousands to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and the slavetrade among the states," they asked, "and then vote for a Congressman who will lay these petitions unread, unprinted, unREFERRED, undebated, and unconsidered on the table? Would not God desert us for such hypocrisy?" By the end of October 1838, 342 voters from Oswego County and 846 from Oneida County had pledged "to vote for advocates of immediate emancipation if nominated in this congressional district, irrespective of parties."<sup>65</sup>

Although abolitionists won many votes in 1838, confusion and misinformation characterized much of the campaign. Determined to prevent a re-play, abolitionists in Oswego and Oneida Counties proposed an amendment to the constitutions of their county societies. In the future, the new clause read, abolitionists "will not give their suffrage at the general election for any man who does not give evidence of his regard for the principles of freedom."<sup>66</sup>

The New York State Anti-Slavery Society agreed. In September, they endorsed political action. Abolitionist voters and candidates should support the rights of free African Americans as well as the abolition of slavery. Authored by Gerrit Smith, the amendment read:

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<sup>64</sup> *Friend of Man*, November 8, 1837.

<sup>65</sup> *Friend of Man*, August 8, 1838.

<sup>66</sup> *Friend of Man*, March, 1839; *Friend of Man*, April 3, 1839.

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No member of this society shall cast his vote for any candidate for President or Vice President of the United States, or for Governor or Lieutenant Governor of this state, or for a seat in the national or state legislature, who shall be reasonably suspected of being opposed to the repeal of any law which makes complexion a ground of disfranchisement [sic] or disability, to any law which denies to persons threatened with the loss of personal liberty, the right of a trial by jury, or to any law which does in any wise, approvingly recognize the unnatural and sinful relation of slaveholders.<sup>iii</sup>

The movement from petitions to political action in central New York led directly into the second phase of political abolitionism: the formation of an abolitionist third party. First proposed by Oswego County abolitionists in New Haven on October 4, 1839, the idea of a third party emerged at the grassroots level about the same time in other parts of the state. Abolitionists from Genesee County, meeting in Warsaw in November 1839, for the first time nominated presidential and vice-presidential candidates. In January 1840, 800 abolitionists from the six western counties of New York State met at Arcade, Genesee County, and called for a national third party convention to meet in Albany in April. Although only 121 delegates attended the Albany meeting (all but seventeen from New York State), they nominated James G. Birney, a former Alabama slaveholder turned abolitionist, for President, and Thomas Earle of Pennsylvania for Vice-President.<sup>67</sup>

On August 5, 1840, the Freeman's State Convention met in Syracuse to nominate candidates for state offices and to ask each township to appoint its own correspondence committee to coordinate Liberty Party organization. "Voting for the slave is like the good tree," the convention declared, "which bringeth forth good fruit, but talking abolition and voting for the pirate power, is like the blasted blossom, and a tree full of leaves, but without fruit." A few days later, the Executive Committee of the NYSASS endorsed the Liberty Party ticket.<sup>68</sup>

Political abolitionists could be proud of their work in 1839-40. The Liberty Party gained 2,463 votes from New York State, including about 1300 from central New York. Oneida County cast 351 votes for the Liberty Party, more than any other county in the state. Madison County had 254 Liberty Party voters, compared to 179 from New York County, 152 from Ontario, and 151 from Oswego.<sup>69</sup>

In 1842, the Liberty Party almost tripled its statewide votes, counting more than 7000 voters. Again, Oneida County, with 621 Liberty Party votes, led the state. Madison County, with 574, was a close second. In central New York, Cayuga, Cortland, Jefferson, Monroe, Onondaga, Ontario, Oswego each contributed more than 200 Liberty Party votes. Downstate voters lagged behind. New York County had only 75 Liberty Party votes, while Putnam, Richmond, Queens, and Rockland County had none.<sup>70</sup>

As one scholar noted, the transition from moral suasion to political action was gradual, based on pragmatism as much as on principle. In fact, abolitionists in central New York had originally greeted the idea of political action with scorn. By 1838, the pressure of circumstances forced abolitionists to resort to a hastily conceived, poorly publicized embryo of a third party ticket. During the next two years,

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<sup>67</sup> Henderson, "New York State Anti-Slavery Society," Chapter VI, "The State Society Supports the Third Party: 1839-1840," 285-357; *Friend of Man*, September 25, 1839.

<sup>68</sup> *Friend of Man Extra*, July 23, 1840; July 29, 1840.

<sup>69</sup> *Friend of Man*, November 18 and 25, 1840. The November 18 issue indicates 393 Liberty Party votes from Oneida County.

<sup>70</sup> *Liberty Press*, December 6, 1842, quoted in Henderson, "New York State Anti-Slavery Society," 370.

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abolitionists grew increasingly reconciled to the need for a third party and developed an extensive rationale to support this pragmatic development. By 1840, aided by the unresponsiveness of either the Democrats or the Whigs, many abolitionists found the idea of a third party eminently reasonable. The Liberty Party thus grew quite naturally out of the circumstances first of state and local politics and then of national politics.<sup>71</sup>

Unlike many people at the national level, however, central New York abolitionists continued to emphasize continuity rather than conflict between moral suasion and political action. In January 1841, for example, the Oswego County Anti-Slavery Society resolved "that the distinction between moral and political action, in abolishing slavery or any other human law which conflicts with God's law, is but another name for the distinction between faith and works."<sup>72</sup>

Some abolitionists resisted the third party movement. Pockets of Whig abolitionists hoped to influence the Whig party, through Governor William Seward and others, to support abolitionism. Some abolitionists believed that voting itself was wrong. At the national level, William Lloyd Garrison was the best-known proponent of this policy of non-resistance or no human government, but many others, especially Quakers, agreed with him.

In upstate New York, the issue was thoroughly debated beginning in January 1841, at a meeting held in Leroy, Genesee County. More than 250 abolitionists participated. Some of them endorsed a third party. Others, including both those who thought that political participation itself was wrong and those who wanted to work within the Whig Party, opposed it. By a small margin, delegates resolved "that we disapprove the formation of the 'third party,' because we believe it retards the progress of the anti-slavery enterprise." The next day, opponents of a third party formed a Western Board, chaired by Quaker James C. Hathaway and assisted by James C. Jackson. Nothing ever came of their efforts to set up a new state society, although in 1842 and 1843, the AASS sent a contingent of lecturers, including both Abby Kelley and Frederick Douglass (who together made a regular "travelling seraglio," according to their opponents) to tour the state.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile, however, the NYSASS, recognizing its geographical limitations, organized a separate Western New York Anti-Slavery Society in the spring of 1840 to serve eighteen western counties. William Chaplin left his position as corresponding secretary and general agent of the NYSASS to serve in the same capacity in western New York; Rev. Samuel R. Ward, an African American agent for the NYSASS, began to work for the western group; and the *Friend of Man* became the official newspaper for both groups. The following year, an Eastern New York Anti-Slavery Society was formed, with headquarters in Albany.<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile, efforts to expand anti-slavery organizing into new towns met with hostility and mob violence reminiscent of 1835-36. At Ovid in Seneca County, abolitionists met in the court house, only to be harassed with stones thrown against the windows; loud noises from horns, tin pans, and shouts; and sulfur thrown into the stove. Burning sulfur made the audience wonder, said one agent, if "Hell was not very far from the surface in this place." When William Goodell, William Chaplin, and Gerrit Smith attempted to organize a Tioga County Anti-Slavery Society in

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<sup>71</sup> Wellman, *Grassroots Reform*, 154.

<sup>72</sup> *Friend of Man*, February 23, 1841.

<sup>73</sup> *Friend of Man*, February 12, 1840. Henderson, "New York State Anti-Slavery Society," 330-336. Letters appeared during the next few months; Henderson, 322-327. James Hathaway, J. C. Jackson, from Oswego and Madison Counties, and Henry Wright of Boston found themselves supporting non-resistance in opposition to Gerrit Smith, William Chaplin, William Goodell, Myron Holley, and others.

<sup>74</sup> Henderson, "New York State Anti-Slavery Society," 341-344.

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Owego, the local newspaper called them “hired bullies” and “foreigners” and threatened mob violence against them.<sup>75</sup>

Though political action encountered strong resistance both from non-resistants and from Whigs, many abolitionists in central and western New York State downplayed their differences. Confronting a national split between the American Anti-Slavery Society (representing the non-voters) and the new American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (representing political abolitionists), many upstate abolitionists chose a third way. Gerrit Smith set the tone. Although both national organizations asked him to serve as an officer, he refused to serve in either one. In 1840, he concluded, “Anti-Slavery Organization by perpetuating and aggravating the mutual quarrels of abolitionists, does more hurt than good to our cause.” In a letter to the *Friend of Man* in February 1841, he urged forbearance for both views. So did William Goodell, editor of the *Friend of Man*. The constitution of the new Western New York Anti-Slavery Society straddled the two positions. While it urged abolitionists to petition Congress and to vote for “friends of immediate emancipation,” it refused to endorse a resolution that voting in every election was “a duty they owe to God.” At its fifth annual meeting in September 1840, the NYSASS voted unanimously, without discussion, not to affiliate with either of the two national anti-slavery organizations. The *Friend of Man* continued to advocate political action, but not at the expense of the petition campaign. “True votes and right petitions should go hand in hand,” it asserted. In 1842, the *Liberty Party Press* outspokenly advocated third party abolitionism.<sup>76</sup>

Although they won no state or national elections, third party abolitionists did gain important victories. For years, abolitionists had sent petitions to the New York State legislature asking for certain legal protections for African Americans. Finally, in 1840 and 1841, fearful of losing abolitionist votes to the Liberty Party, Whigs in the state legislature pushed through three main abolitionist demands. First, in May 1840, a new law guaranteed the right of a jury trial to people accused of running away from slavery. Second, New York State agreed to pay for agents to bring back any state resident who had been kidnapped and taken out of state to be sold into slavery. And third, in May 1841, the state repealed a law allowing slaveholders to bring enslaved people into the state for nine months. Supporting these new laws was William Henry Seward, Whig Governor from Auburn, New York.<sup>77</sup>

African Americans needed these laws. Kidnapping, for example, remained a persistent problem. In December 1839, a young free African American man from Oswego County, James Watkins Seward, had been enslaved in New Orleans, Louisiana. Central New York abolitionists worked hard to ensure Governor William Seward's support for his freedom, but without success. James Watkins Seward's last letter, to Gerrit Smith in July 1840, revealed his dire circumstances. Kept in a cell eight feet underground, chained hand and foot, he thanked Smith for all of his help and then revealed that “I am reconciled to die. I am resigned to my fate. . . I have but 54 hours in this world. . . But in all my trials, troubles, & sorrows, I enjoy a comfort & pleasure by trusting in God. I feel today that I know that my Redeemer liveth and because he lives I shall live also. Adieu forever.” What could have led to James Seward's death sentence? Was he encouraging people to escape from slavery?<sup>78</sup>

To test the new law forbidding slave-holders to bring enslaved people into New York

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<sup>75</sup> Henderson, “New York State Anti-Slavery Society,” 349-350.

<sup>76</sup> *Friend of Man*, June 1, 1841.

<sup>77</sup> Henderson, “New York State Anti-Slavery Society,” 337-340.

<sup>78</sup> Starr Clark to William Henry Seward, April 15, 1840, Seward Papers, University of Rochester; James Watkins Seward to Gerrit Smith, July 7, 1840, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

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State, Edwin W. Clarke, a white abolitionist lawyer, tried to free a young woman whose owners brought her as a slave on a packet boat to Oswego, New York. Clarke informed both the young woman and her owners that, according to the laws of New York State, she was a free woman. Although she wanted to leave them, her owners whisked her away to a waiting lake steamer before Clarke could secure a writ of habeas corpus.<sup>79</sup>

In 1844, Liberty Party abolitionists again ran James G. Birney for President. This time, New York State produced so many Liberty Party votes that it threw the presidential election from Henry Clay, the moderate Whig candidate, to James K. Polk, an outspoken pro-slavery Democrat. The seven townships which cast the most votes for the Liberty Party were all in east central New York (Cazenovia in Madison County, 177 votes; Smithfield in Madison County, 174 votes; Volney in Oswego County, 141 votes; Sullivan in Madison County, 140 votes; Utica in Oneida County, 120 votes; Brookfield in Madison County, 116; and Cortlandville in Cortland County, 116 votes).<sup>80</sup>

Many African Americans were strong advocates of the Liberty Party. The *Colored American* endorsed Birney and Earle in 1840. Although the 1840 New York State Convention of African Americans failed to support it, in spite of many "warm friends," upstate African Americans spoke out publicly for the Liberty Party. In 1844, Liberty Party supporters credited Samuel R. Ward's efforts in central New York, beginning in Cortland, with doubling the number of Liberty Party votes there.<sup>81</sup>

At the national level, disagreement over political action was intertwined with conflict over the rights of women. But just as conflict over third party abolitionism was more complex in central New York than it appeared to be nationally, so debates about women's rights assumed a different form. Angelina and Sarah Grimke, two white women from a South Carolina slave-holding family precipitated the debate. They had moved to Philadelphia, become Quakers and abolitionists, and in 1836 began to lecture to public audiences. They were not the first women to lecture in public in the U.S. Frances Wright, Scottish-born reformer, attracted attention in the late 1820s with her advocacy of working people's rights, anti-slavery, and utopian communities. In Boston, Maria W. Stewart became not only the first black woman but also the first American-born woman to lecture to public audiences. In her last speech, in 1833, she raised issues of abolitionism and gender. "What if I am a woman?" she asked. "It is not the color of skin that makes the man or the woman, but the principle formed in the soul."<sup>82</sup>

Although the Grimke sisters were supposed to speak only to women, they soon found themselves addressing "promiscuous" audiences, perhaps first to a racially mixed group in Poughkeepsie, which included both women and men. In 1837, Angelina Grimke became the first woman to speak to the Massachusetts legislature. Horrified Congregational ministers published a "Pastoral Letter," criticizing women who stepped out of their proper sphere. In response, Sarah Grimke wrote *Letters on the Condition of Women and the Equality of the Sexes* (1837). "Whatever is right for man to do," she said, "is right for woman."

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<sup>79</sup> Clarke to the Editor, *Oswego Daily Palladium*, August 4, 1841, printed in the *Palladium*, August 11, 1841, quoted in Eleanor Cali, "Samuel B. Ludlow and the Underground Railroad," unpublished paper in Special Collections, Penfield Library, SUNY Oswego.

<sup>80</sup> From Appendix B in Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 181-86.

<sup>81</sup> Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 242.

<sup>82</sup> Marilyn Richardson, ed., *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1987), 68-9, quoted in Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 175.

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In 1838, Angelina Grimke married Theodore Dwight Weld, an abolitionist lecturer from Onondaga County, in an inter-racial ceremony in Philadelphia. Her marriage took her out of the public arena, but her legacy influenced others, including Abby Kelley, a young Quaker woman from Lynn, Massachusetts. Kelley's appointment to the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society in May 1840, in combination with differences over political abolition, precipitated a split in the national organization. Garrisonians and Quakers supported women's rights and opposed political action. New York City abolitionists, led by Lewis Tappan, opposed women's rights and supported political action.

Many central New Yorkers, however, fit neither mold. William Chaplin, the only central New York delegate at the May 1840 meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, supported both the right of women to speak in public and the need for political action. When abolitionists had debated the women's rights issue a year earlier, central New York delegates (including Gerrit Smith, Alvan Stewart, James C. Delong, John Cross, James C. Fuller, and William Chaplin) had voted for women's rights.<sup>83</sup>

At the same time, some Africans Americans attempted to remain neutral. Others joined the political abolitionists. Samuel Cornish and Charles B. Ray, editors of the *Colored American* in New York City, and Henry Highland Garnet, minister in Troy, New York, finally joined the Liberty Party and helped convince the national black convention in Buffalo in 1843 to support it.<sup>84</sup>

In general, local anti-slavery societies in upstate New York decided their own policy with regard to the public activities of women. Most societies included male members only; some were strictly for women; and sometimes, men and women attended the same meetings. The Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, for example, included women as officers from its beginning in 1840. Women's anti-slavery fairs, organized annually from 1843 by an inter-racial group of women in Rochester and surrounding counties, earned considerable sums of money for the abolitionist cause. In 1847, some of these women, part of the circle around Amy Post-- Quakers, abolitionists, and women's rights advocates--invited Frederick Douglass to come to Rochester to set up the *North Star*.<sup>85</sup>

One of the men who supported both political abolitionism and women's rights in 1840 was Henry B. Stanton, antislavery agent and political abolitionist. On May 1, 1840, Stanton married twenty-five-year-old Elizabeth Cady, Gerrit Smith's cousin and daughter of conservative Judge Daniel Cady. For their honeymoon, Henry took Elizabeth to the World Anti-Slavery convention in London. There Elizabeth found herself immersed in debates over women's rights and political action. She also found a new mentor, Lucretia Mott, a Quaker minister from Philadelphia. Ironically, male convention delegates spent the entire first day of the meeting debating whether or not to allow women delegates onto the floor. Although the majority voted against the women, Henry B. Stanton supported women's rights. White delegate William Lloyd Garrison and black delegate Charles Remond, both from New England, left the floor of the convention to sit with the women in protest. As for Elizabeth Cady Stanton, she learned the foundations of a lesson she would build upon eight years later at the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York: if women would not vote, they had no formal political

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<sup>83</sup> Henderson, "New York State Anti-Slavery Society," 277-78.

<sup>84</sup> Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 241, 246.

<sup>85</sup> On the formation of women's antislavery societies, with particular attention to Monroe County and the Rochester area, see Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

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power.<sup>86</sup>

Splits in political parties and debates over women's rights were not the only reflection of the movement's impact. Churches also split over abolitionism. In the late 1830s and early 1840s, abolitionists often left established churches to form new congregations. These often took the form of "Union" churches. Many of these found their core membership from whites who had formerly been members of "presbygationalist" churches (a combination of Congregationalists, primarily from New England, and Presbyterians, primarily from Pennsylvania, who shared common theological roots but different church structures). Historian Douglas M. Strong has counted thirty-four Union churches formed between 1836 and 1845 and another forty-five whole congregations that withdrew from their Presbyterian connections to form abolitionist churches. In 1839, Presbyterians nationally disavowed many of these upstate churches.<sup>87</sup>

In the 1840s, abolitionists withdrew from other mainstream churches to form new egalitarian abolitionist meetings. Free Baptists (1841), Anti-Slavery Baptists, Franckean Evangelical Lutheran Synod churches (1837), Wesleyan Methodists (1843), and Congregational Friends (1949) all organized separate groups. The Congregational Friends held Yearly Meetings in Waterloo, Seneca County, and Collins, Erie County. These churches were widely distributed through central New York, particularly in Monroe, Wayne, Ontario, Oswego, Onondaga, Madison, and Oneida Counties. Douglas M. Strong counted over three hundred abolition fellowships (both of the unionist and the comeouter variety) in existence by the mid-1840s.<sup>88</sup>

Wesleyan Methodists were particularly influential in carrying the banner of the abolition church in central New York. Organized in Utica, Wesleyan Methodists protested the refusal of the Methodist Episcopal Church to discuss the immorality of slaveholding. Wesleyans championed evangelical involvement in politics and were staunch Liberty Party voters.

These new churches spawned a whole new series of newspapers, including Luther Myrick's *Union Herald* (in Cazenovia, New York), William Goodell's *Christian Investigator*, John A. Lawyer's, *Lutheran Herald*, and Orange Scott's *True Wesleyan*. Just as the *Liberty Press* carried news about abolitionist churches, so these religious periodicals carried news of abolitionism. They were zealous in promoting the idea that Christians must enter politics despite the evils of existing political parties.

Union churches did not espouse William Lloyd Garrison's ideas of no human government, a kind of religious anarchy based on complete individual action. Rather, they believed that individuals needed to work together in democratic religious institutions, modeled after true biblical Christianity. They believed in liberty and freedom of conscience, but they also believed in order. As Douglas Strong has argued, this new "spiritual democracy" incorporated "doctrinal perfectionism, uncompromising abolitionism, and the radical overhaul of ecclesiastical structures."<sup>89</sup>

Many advocates carried out this balance between liberty and order not only in their churches but also in their politics. According to Strong, "in upstate New York, political abolitionism, as organized in the Liberty party, and ecclesiastical abolitionism, as organized in these independent antislavery congregations, were two expressions of the same religious

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<sup>86</sup> For a detailed analysis of the London convention and the impact it had on the 'woman question,' see Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 286-93.

<sup>87</sup> Strong, *Perfectionist Politics*, 183.

<sup>88</sup> Strong, *Perfectionist Politics*, 48-57.

<sup>89</sup> Strong, *Perfectionist Politics*, 187-88, 200.

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disposition. Both were nicknamed “the Abolition church.” Although a few of these groups, the Congregational Friends, for example, were not consistent supporters of political abolitionism, it is no surprise that Liberty Party advocates such as William Goodell and Gerrit Smith would also be proponents of this Christian Union movement.<sup>90</sup>

Since members of comeouter churches believed that slavery was the chief impediment to the Kingdom of God on earth, it is not surprising that they would be among the most consistent white supporters of the underground railroad. Every liberated slave was a victory for God’s rule. Quakers, for example, regularly hosted fugitives. Many of these Quakers belonged to meetings that were part of either Scipio or Farmington Quarterly Meeting. Farmington Hicksite Quaker meeting house, dating to the 1820s, still stands across the road from the post-Civil War Orthodox meeting house. In 1848, some of the Farmington Quakers withdrew from established meetings to form a new group of Congregational Friends, specifically designed to promote reform.

Slocum Howland, Quaker storekeeper in Sherwood, Cayuga County, New York, was one of these Quakers. In 1840 Howland received Thomas and James Hart, two “stalwart, vigorous, and young” fugitives from Maryland, with a note from John Mann: “I have mailed two passengers to thee, in the ‘shank’s horse diligence’: baggage free, and at the risk of the owners. 9<sup>th</sup> of 4<sup>th</sup> mo. 1840.” Mann’s style of writing the date suggests that he, too, was a Quaker. A few years later, W.O. Duvall, abolitionist agent then living in Port Byron, Cayuga County, New York, responded to Howland’s inquiry about a fugitive. He advised against sending the fugitive to Canada as winter approached. Rather, noted Duvall, “If he were to come to my place I would protect him to the last drop of blood in my veins, and I think that our location is such that it would be hard to get him. My own opinion is that he and his family will be safe here and I will give him employment.”<sup>91</sup>

In Rochester, Amy Post was a Congregational Friend who worked with Frederick Douglass and others to provide assistance to fugitives. She estimated that 150 fugitives passed through Rochester each year. One of these was Harriet Jacobs. In 1861, Jacobs published her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In it, she told of surviving in a small cramped space over her grandmother’s porch in Edenton, North Carolina, for seven years before escaping North. So amazing was her story that historians ignored it as fiction until Jean Fagan Yellin published an annotated edition.<sup>92</sup>

In Auburn, Quaker-born Martha Wright, Lucretia Mott’s sister, lived with her husband David, a law partner of William Seward. In 1843, Wright reported the story of a fugitive who had come to their house, slept in the kitchen, and gone on to James C. Fuller’s home in Skaneateles. Wright and Fuller, too, were Quakers.<sup>93</sup>

Other abolitionist churches supported both the Liberty Party and the underground railroad. Drawing support from Wesleyan Methodists, Congregationalists, and Christian Unionists, the Town of Volney gave the third largest Liberty Party vote in the state in 1840. In the 1830s and 1840s, both black and white members of the First Congregational Church of Volney at Bristol Hill, supported abolitionist and underground railroad activities. Some of them withdrew to join the Christian Union movement. In 1845, P.M. Way, Wesleyan Methodist minister, reported the arrival

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<sup>90</sup> Strong, *Perfectionist Politics*, Table 1, 114, and Map B, 178.

<sup>91</sup> Note from Mann to Howland in possession of Mildred Myers; W.O. Duvall to Slocum Howland, October 16, 1851, from James Driscoll, Queens Historical Society.

<sup>92</sup> Post, “The Underground Railroad,” in William Peck, *Semi-Centennial History of the City of Rochester* (Syracuse: Mason and Company, 1884), 458-462; Jean Fagan Yellin, ed. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>93</sup> Wright to Mott, January 11, 1843, Garrison Papers, Smith College.

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of nine fugitives from Maryland, two of them members of the Methodist Church, one of them a blacksmith. Fear of being sold South by Hope Slatter, notorious slave dealer, had impelled them to escape. In Syracuse, Samuel J. May helped make the Unitarian Church a center of abolitionist sentiment and underground railroad support.<sup>94</sup>

White-dominated abolitionist organizations grew in influence throughout the 1830s and 1840s. While some of these abolitionist groups (particularly those affiliated with Quakers) included African Americans; some did not. Rochester splits probably reflected similar patterns in central New York as a whole. As Horton and Horton have suggested, “although they were often dangerous for blacks and did not eradicate prejudices among white abolitionists, interracial efforts during the 1830s and 1840s did generate greater understanding and increased white reformers’ respect for African Americans’ abilities.”<sup>95</sup>

At the same time, national all-black conventions revived in the 1840s. Intertwined in their debates were several main themes: the abolition of slavery, the right of African Americans to vote, and the right of self-defense. More than most white abolitionists, African Americans articulated their right to defend themselves against slave-owners. As Samuel Cornish suggested in the *Colored American* in 1841, African Americans needed a movement for “universal emancipation and universal enfranchisement.” “Should we die,” wrote Cornish, “we will die virtuous martyrs in a holy cause.”<sup>96</sup>

When a national black convention finally met in Buffalo in 1843, the tone was militant. Henry Highland Garnet called for violent resistance. “You cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already,” he thundered. “Rather die freemen than live to be slaves.” The next year in Cortland, New York, Jermain Loguen echoed Garnet’s message: “Let blood flow without measure—until our rights are acknowledged or we [have] perished from the earth.” Later in the decade, delegates to national black conventions grew increasingly insistent on the right of violent self-defense.<sup>97</sup>

Even many formerly non-violent whites began to affirm the right of violent defense for fugitives. In 1851, William Duvall, underground railroad advocate in Port Byron, recommended that one fugitive keep a “good, loaded revolver” constantly in his pocket. “If he has not these weapons,” Duvall suggested, “let him sell his coat and get them forthwith, and then in case of an arrest let him defend himself like a man who loves freedom better than life even though the blood flows . . . .”<sup>98</sup>

For African Americans as well as for whites, political abolitionism was intimately connected to voting rights for African Americans, and the Liberty Party made universal suffrage a major issue. Under the terms of New York State’s first constitution, in 1777, all adult males had to meet certain property requirements before they could vote. When New York State created a new constitution in 1821, delegates granted voting rights to all adult white males, whether they owned property or not. They had, however, left property qualifications in place for African Americans.

In the next two decades, political party identities solidified around Democrats and Whigs. Only about 1000 African Americans throughout New York State could vote in 1840, and their power was negligible. The Liberty Party, however, was another matter. Its constituency, primarily

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<sup>94</sup> P.M.Way to *True Wesleyan*, July 15, 1845, printed in the *True Wesleyan*, July 19, 1845. Thanks to Christopher Densmore for finding this.

<sup>95</sup> 224.

<sup>96</sup> Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 246.

<sup>97</sup> Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 247-48.

<sup>98</sup> W.O. Duvall to Slocum Howland, October 16, 1851, from James Driscoll, Queens Historical Society.

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white, had the power to swing elections from Democrats to Whigs, or vice versa. It was therefore in the best interests of major party politicians to pay attention to Liberty Party demands. And the Liberty Party wanted black suffrage. Whigs especially wanted to bring anti-slavery voters into their party. "Thus," as historian Phyllis Field has suggested, "political concerns [rather than idealism] were destined to shape the struggle for equal suffrage in the 1840s."<sup>99</sup>

African Americans and white abolitionists saw their opportunity in 1846, when New York State called a new constitutional convention. At the convention, a majority of delegates opposed the old property qualification for black voters. Yet they wanted to solve the problem in two different ways: some wanted to exclude black voters entirely, while others wanted to include them without reservation.

The issue came before New York's voters at a referendum in 1846. In spite of active lobbying by African Americans and white abolitionists, voters overwhelmingly defeated the proposed change by 2.6 to 1. Only towns with strong Liberty Party support also strongly supported equal rights. Notably three counties in central New York (Madison, Oswego, and Cortland) gave more than fifty percent of their votes to equal suffrage.<sup>100</sup>

In 1848, the end of the Mexican War initiated a new phase of political abolitionism. Concerned about the future of slavery in the territories newly acquired from Mexico, many abolitionists joined yet another third party. The Free Soil Party drew adherents not only from former Liberty Party men but also from Whigs and some Democrats. Meeting in Buffalo in August 1848, Free Soil delegates nominated Martin Van Buren for President. Hoping to draw significant support across the Northeast, they broadened their party platform to accommodate not only abolitionists but also whites who wanted to keep African Americans out of the territories altogether. A splinter group followed Gerrit Smith into the new Liberty League, which endorsed universal suffrage (including women's suffrage) and land reform as well as abolitionism. From 1855 to 1860, proposals for equal suffrage reached the state legislature every session, and in 1860, voters faced another referendum on it. Once again, they rejected it, although by a smaller margin than in 1846. This time, several more counties in central New York supported the measure, including Madison, Oswego, Onondaga, Cortland, Cayuga, Wayne, Ontario, and Yates.<sup>101</sup>

By 1850, African Americans and white abolitionists were working mostly in separate groups but along parallel lines. They had demonstrated a remarkable capacity for organization. They had dealt with third party politics, women's rights, Christian democracy, nonviolence v. violence, and legal and political rights for African Americans. They had seen their local and regional efforts affect national political development.

In the context of public debate about abolitionism and the rights of free African Americans, fugitives continued to come to and through central New York. Eleven freedom seekers (six men and five women), for example, came through Syracuse on their way to Rochester in July 1847.<sup>102</sup>

They had also continued to develop more organized networks to help fugitives from slavery. By the beginning of the decade, this network had even acquired its popular name, the underground railroad. As Larry Gara has noted, there are at least four different versions of the

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<sup>99</sup> Field, *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 43.

<sup>100</sup> Field, *The Politics of Race in New York*, 61.

<sup>101</sup> Field, *The Politics of Race in New York*, 126-27.

<sup>102</sup> *Syracuse Daily Star*, July 21, 1847, quoted in Sernett, "Jermain Loguen," 41.

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origin of this term. They relate to Washington, D.C.; Ripley, Ohio; or Columbia, Pennsylvania. The first known printed reference to the underground railroad, however, comes from Oswego, New York, in 1842. As reported in the *Chicago Western Citizen*, December 23, 1842, a fugitive slave had escaped and then returned to the South. When tortured to reveal his whereabouts, he said "that the abolitionists had a railroad under ground and that he started for it; but when he got there the 'trap-door' was shut." Certainly, the term was in common usage in central New York by 1845, when abolitionists in Fulton reported that nine fugitives had been hidden for three days in the woods by the "agent for the 'under-ground rail-road'" and that local abolitionists would be forwarded by the 'under-ground rail-road."<sup>103</sup>

To help fugitives, many African Americans and white abolitionists focused in the 1840s on another concern, support for African Americans in Canada. While black settlements in Chatham and Buxton are well known, most fugitives settled in cities such as Toronto and Kingston. Hiram Wilson worked in Toronto, and abolitionists in the U.S. and Great Britain collected supplies and money for him and made frequent visits. In 1841, the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society took over the main burden of coordinating this flow of material. James Canning Fuller, a British-born Quaker abolitionist who maintained a way station for fugitives in Skaneateles, was one of Wilson's major supporters. In 1841, he raised \$800 to help purchase 200 acres of land on the Sydenham River, sold to three whites (all British citizens, including J. C. Fuller himself) and three African Canadians. There Wilson set up a school, the British American Institute of Science and Industry, open primarily to African Americans but also to whites and Indians.<sup>104</sup>

While many fugitives settled in Canada, many thousands also settled in the U.S. Some of them first spent time in Canada and then returned to live on the U.S. side of the border. As barbers, sailors, or hotel workers, many found themselves in particularly good positions to assist others. Charles Smith, for example, a fugitive from Maryland, worked as a sailor on Lake Ontario for several years before opening a barbershop in downtown Oswego. Nathan Green worked as a cook on a steamboat sailing from Oswego to Canada. Thomas James was a barber in Seneca Falls.<sup>105</sup>

Although state and federal censuses typically undercounted African Americans, they do suggest a way to find possible fugitives. The 1855 New York State printed census, for example, gives a quick overview of where African Americans in general lived. They were concentrated in urban areas such as Chenango township, now Binghamton (380), Rochester (371), Elmira (343), Syracuse (252), Auburn (183), Utica (170), Ithaca (167?), and Oswego (140), but they also lived in many smaller villages and rural townships.

Manuscript censuses for 1850, 1855, 1860, and 1865 list places of birth for each person. If an African American listed his or her birthplace as a slave state or Canada, we can assume that they were either free people of color or, as John Jacobs, a freedom seeker himself noted, "self-emancipated." Charles Smith, for example, listed his birthplace as Maryland. His obituary confirmed that he had been born enslaved. Nathan Green listed his birthplace as Pennsylvania, but his burial record noted that he was born in Virginia, and his wife, Clarissa, and their oldest

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<sup>103</sup> Gara, *Liberty Line*, 144, fn 1; *True Wesleyan*, July 19, 1845.

<sup>104</sup> Hiram Wilson to *Friend of Man*, December 28, 1841, printed in *Friend of Man*, January 11, 1842.

<sup>105</sup> Wellman, "This Side of the Border: Fugitives from Slavery in Three Central New York Communities Before 1855," *New York History* (October 1998).

See entries for Green and Smith at [www.oswego.edu:80/Acad\\_Dept/a\\_and\\_s/history/ugrr](http://www.oswego.edu:80/Acad_Dept/a_and_s/history/ugrr).

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child were born in Canada. Thomas James told the census taker that he did not know where he was born, but both his wife and daughter listed Canada as their birthplace.

Using this measure, many African Americans who settled in central New York were possible fugitives. In 1850 in Oswego, for example, 27.7% of the black population listed their birthplaces as a slave state, Canada, or, in one improbable case, Ireland. Two-thirds of Oswego's fifteen black families housed at least one possible fugitive. Almost half (43%) of these potential fugitives were women. In contrast, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, using advertisements for people who had run away from enslavement, found that only 19% of these runaways were women.<sup>106</sup>

Some of these fugitives had lived in central New York for many years, and some African American communities had reached a tenuous stability. In the fall of 1850, however, a new Fugitive Slave Law challenged the nation to use the power of the federal government to retrieve freedom seekers. Political action would shift toward resistance to this new law; resistance to slavery in the territories and new states of Kansas and Nebraska; and the development of an entirely new major party, the Republican Party. Underground railroad activities would become even more dangerous and even more important.

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<sup>106</sup> Wellman, "This Side of the Border: Fugitives from Slavery in Three Central New York Communities Before 1855," *New York History* (October 1998); Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 209-210; Sandra Long, "My Sister's Keeper: Fugitive Slave Women in Antebellum Oswego," May 2000, unpublished paper in Special Collections, State University of New York at Oswego.

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#### IV. 1850-1861: Sectionalism and the “Fugitive” Question

After the death of Zachary Taylor in July 1850, Vice-President Millard Fillmore (once from Aurora and then a lawyer in Buffalo) became President. He promoted the Compromise of 1850, which included the Fugitive Slave Law, as “a final settlement of the dangerous and exciting subjects which they embraced.”<sup>107</sup> The politics of compromise prevailed in the nation’s capital. The contest now was not about right and wrong and certainly not about black rights. It was about how to control hotheads in both North and South and cool down the flames of sectionalism. Proponents of the Compromise of 1850, personified in Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, hoped to keep the peace by promoting the federal statute as a Union-saving measure. But the new law had the opposite effect. It settled nothing. Historian Henry Mayer rightly argues that it was “not so much a remedy for the South’s chronic runaway problem as it was a deliberate condemnation of the abolitionist agitation that had unsettled traditional politics.”<sup>108</sup>

To protest the proposed new law, central New York abolitionists met in an apple orchard in Cazenovia, New York, in August 1850. The Edmonson sisters, recently rescued from slavery, personalized the impact of slavery on African Americans. The plight of New York State abolitionist editor William Chaplin was a graphic example of the power of pro-slavery forces to affect the fate of whites as well as blacks. While trying to spirit enslaved people out of Washington, D.C., Chaplin had been imprisoned in Maryland. Central New Yorkers collected money to pay his bail. A detailed daguerreotype brings to life the convention’s main speakers, including Frederick Douglass, Gerrit Smith, and Chaplin’s fiancée, Theodosia Gilbert.<sup>109</sup>

Incensed by the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law, Frederick Douglass went to Boston in October 1850 to speak on behalf “of a horror-stricken and suffering people.” Along the way he met terrified blacks fleeing to Canada. He had a close call himself. English friends had purchased Douglass’s freedom in 1846, for \$750 in British gold. His bill of sale meant little, however, to slave catchers. Douglass told his Boston audience, “While in Rochester, at my residence, a short time since, I was very agreeably surprised and alarmed on learning that a party of these man-hunters had really come to that place for the purpose of conveying my body, yes, carrying these flesh and bones back to the master from which [I] had escaped.”<sup>110</sup> Had the kidnappers laid hands on him, Douglass wrote in his autobiographical *Life and Times*, there would have been “blows to take as well as blows to give.”<sup>111</sup>

In December 1850, Douglass was back in Rochester, and on Sunday evenings he delivered a series of lectures in Corinthian Hall attacking the Fugitive Slave Law. “While this nation is guilty of the enslavement of three millions of innocent men and women,” Douglass intoned, “it is as idle to think of having a sound and lasting peace, as it is to think there is no God,

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<sup>107</sup> Cited in Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 233.

<sup>108</sup> Mayer, *All on Fire*, 407.

<sup>109</sup> Hugh C. Humphreys, “*Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!*” *The Great Fugitive Slave Law Convention and its Rare Daguerreotype* (Oneida, N.Y.: Madison County Historical Society, 1994).

<sup>110</sup> Douglass, “Do Not Send Back the Fugitive: An Address Delivered in Boston, Massachusetts, on 14 October 1850,” *Frederick Douglass Papers*, 246.

<sup>111</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* (1892; reprint, London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1962), 280.

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to take cognizance of the affairs of men."<sup>112</sup> As long as slavery existed and fugitives resolved to die rather than go back into captivity, there would be no peace in the streets of Rochester or any other northern city, in spite of what the politicians said or did. Passage of the Fugitive Slave Law foreshadowed a long and difficult struggle.

Some abolitionists continued the struggle to maintain a third party. In Oswego, delegates to the National Liberty Party convention met at the Market House to nominate Gerrit Smith for President and Samuel Ringgold Ward for Vice-President of the United States.<sup>113</sup>

After passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, fugitives in upstate New York who had not had trouble for years thought of taking the last leg of their journey to freedom. Henry Bibb reported from Canada via *The Voice of the Fugitive* on November 5, 1851, ". . . the road is doing better business this fall than usual. The Fugitive Slave Law has given it more vitality, more activity, more passengers and more opposition which invariably accelerates business."<sup>114</sup> Frederick Douglass, whose Rochester home and office were important stops on the underground railroad, testified to the impact of the Fugitive Slave Law:

Fugitive slaves who had lived for many years safely and securely in western New York and elsewhere, some of whom had by industry and economy saved money and bought little homes for themselves and their children, were suddenly alarmed and compelled to flee to Canada for safety as from an enemy's land--a doomed city and take up a dismal march to a new abode, empty handed among strangers. My old friend Ward [Samuel R. Ward], of whom I have just now spoken, found it necessary to give up the contest and flee to Canada, and thousands followed his example.<sup>115</sup>

Though known as a fearless opponent of the American spirit of caste and not a man to run from a fight, the Rev. Samuel Ward crossed over into Canada West in the wake of the furor caused by the rescue of William "Jerry" Henry. His feelings are captured in his remark that enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law gave black Americans "the right of revolution."<sup>116</sup>

Ward's move to Toronto put him in contact with other abolitionists schooled in the crucible of the Burned-over District of Upstate New York. He met Hiram Wilson, a Congregational missionary and graduate of the Oneida Institute who had been aiding freedom seekers in what is now southwestern Ontario, notably in Dawn Township.<sup>117</sup> Wilson worked with Josiah Henson, the black Baptist clergyman and escapee who claimed to be the "Uncle Tom" of Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel. They had established an agricultural settlement and school which was eventually known as the British and American Institute.

In 1839, Wilson wrote James C. Fuller of Skaneateles, Onondaga County, asking for help. A Quaker philanthropist and abolitionist, Fuller was already known as a friend of the fugitive.

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<sup>112</sup> Douglass, "Slavery and the Slave Power: An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York, on 1 December 1850," *Frederick Douglass Papers*, II:259.

<sup>113</sup> The Market House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>114</sup> *Voice of the Fugitive*, November 5, 1851.

<sup>115</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass. Written by Himself* (1892; reprint, London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1962), 2.

<sup>116</sup> Samuel R. Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States Canada and England* (1855; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968). The best critical study of Ward's life and thought is Ronald K. Burke, *Samuel Ringgold Ward: Christian Abolitionist* (New York: Garland, 1995).

<sup>117</sup> For an essay on Hiram Wilson's reform career, see William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, *Bound with Them in Chains: A Biographical History of the Antislavery Movement* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 115-39.

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He once placed a notice in the Skaneateles *Columbian* thanking "those friends who so kindly and voluntarily offered and persevering conducted him to this home, when surrounded by a tumultuous mob Third day evening last; and he sincerely trusts that the mud and missiles were abundantly showered on the occasion may make both himself and friends more determined in the good cause."<sup>118</sup> The imposing two-story Fuller residence still stands along Route 20 west of the Skaneateles village center. Fuller went to Upper Canada to learn of the needs of the black refugees and then traveled to England. Visiting members of the Society of Friends, he raised funds to help establish the Dawn colony and school. Fuller became one of the Board members of the British American Institute, Dawn's industrial and manual training school. He died in 1847.

When principals in the Dawn Settlement became embroiled in allegations of financial impropriety, Hiram Wilson turned his attention to fugitives who had settled in St. Catharines and vicinity, closer to the Niagara frontier. Here he met and sheltered Jermain Loguen. Shortly after participating in the Jerry Rescue, Loguen crossed over the 49th parallel in search of asylum because of accusations that he had assaulted an officer during the melee. In 1853, Wilson also hosted Samuel R. Ward, when Ward was on a six-week tour of fugitive slave settlements in Canada. Ward was impressed with the St. Catharines refugees and reported, "Our people in St. Catharines are not the poorest in the town, by a good deal. Many of them own little houses and lots, and enjoy a comfortable maintenance."<sup>119</sup>

Ward, who had served congregations in South Butler (1841-43) and Cortland (1846-1851), was a Liberty party activist, founder and editor of several reform newspapers (including the *True American* and the *Impartial Citizen*), and a member of the Syracuse Vigilance Committee. Unlike Loguen, who returned to Syracuse despite the refusal of New York State Governor Hunt to guarantee that he would not be arrested and tried, Ward stayed on in Canada and founded the *Provincial Freeman*, a newspaper meant to serve the refugee colonists.

William Wells Brown, who worked out of Buffalo to aid runaways, reported that by 1861 the black settlement at St. Catharines numbered nearly eight hundred and had one hundred houses and two churches. At the Zion Baptist Church, Brown heard Anthony Burns preach. Burns was an escapee from Virginia whose desire for liberty sparked a celebrated but failed rescue attempt in 1854 in Boston.<sup>120</sup>

Had Brown visited St. Catharines a few years earlier, he might have met Harriet Tubman. Indeed, some of St. Catharines' black residents undoubtedly were individuals whom the "Moses of her people" had guided along Freedom's Trail. Tubman, who escaped in 1849 and soon after started conducting others out of the house of bondage, said that enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law forced her to take her charges as far as Canada for fear they might be recaptured in the States. She is generally credited with having made as many as nineteen trips into slavery's domain and with bringing out an estimated three hundred individuals. Eleven of these trips took place between 1850 and 1857 when Tubman was using St. Catharines as a place of rest and

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<sup>118</sup> Skaneateles *Columbian*, August 18, 1839. Fuller obituary notice, Skaneateles *Columbian* December 2, 1847.

<sup>119</sup> ~Report by Samuel Ringgold Ward, " *Provincial Freeman* (Windsor, Canada West), March 24, 1853.

<sup>120</sup> William Wells Brown, "The Colored People of Canada," first appeared in the *Pine and Palm* (Boston, Mass.), the journal of James Redpath's Haytian Emigration Bureau. The section on St. Catharines is reprinted in C. Peter Ripley, editor, *Canada, 1830-1865*, Vol. 11, *The Black Abolitionist Papers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 107.

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refuge.<sup>121</sup>

On November 29, 1856, William E. Abbott, treasurer of Syracuse's Fugitive Aid Society (organized in January 1856) wrote to Maria Porter of Rochester regarding Tubman's operations:

The woman who accompanies the party on their way to Freedom is well known to us for her untiring devotion to the cause of the enslaved. She is herself an escaped bondswoman and this is the second company that she has brought forth out of the land of servitude at great risk to herself. It has been our custom to forward all directly on to the Bridge [at Niagara Falls]. But now our funds fail us & we are obliged to send them forward to the different halfway houses that are on their route.<sup>122</sup>

Abbott's letter of introduction suggests something of the network of friends of the fugitive which developed more structure because of regional opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law.

Tubman also received aid from Gerrit Smith, whose Madison County household welcomed her whenever she passed through. Smith publicly called upon abolitionists to assist fugitives as early as 1839 and was himself involved in numerous efforts to purchase the freedom of individuals and to help them along Freedom's Trail. In 1841, Smith purchased the freedom of the Russell family, who at one time were owned by his first wife's relatives. Smith commissioned James Canning Fuller to go South and conduct the negotiations. Smith paid Samuel Worthington, a Mississippi planter who summered in Kentucky and had come into possession of the Russell family, \$3500. Samuel and Harriet Russell and their three daughters were brought to Peterboro. When the last Russell boy was born, Smith suggested that he be named Freeborn, but the Russells named him Gerrit Smith Russell after their benefactor.<sup>123</sup>

When Smith was ready to direct fugitives further on, he frequently forwarded them to Oswego and other points on Lake Ontario from which boats departed for Canada. John B. Edwards, Smith's business agent in Oswego, kept his employer informed on local operations and his efforts to find jobs for runaways or aid in their safe passage to Canada. On July 20, 1852, Edwards wrote Smith, "I was not before aware that you were expecting 40 to 50 colored people from New Orleans. I will do the best I can to get them employment." Edwards added, "The fugitive slave, Dorsey, came to me today with your letter. I have put him aboard of a vessel bound for Canada and gave him \$1.00.~ On March 19, 1860, Edwards informed Smith, "The young colored man that was at your house last week arrived at my house last evening. I shall keep him a few days to recuperate." Because of its port and abolitionist reputation, Oswego received many fugitives. One of them, Tudor E. Grant, stayed and became a leader in the local African American community. He was a member of the local vigilance committee and helped organize a protest

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<sup>121</sup> The Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged in Auburn, New York, is operated by the AME Zion Church and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The standard sources on Harriet Tubman's life begin with Sara H. Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn, N.Y.: W. J. Moses, 1869) and an expanded second edition privately published in 1886 under the title *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People*. The best scholarly biography is that of Earl Conrad, *Harriet Tubman* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1943). Also, Earl Conrad, Harriet Tubman research materials, 1939-1941, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library. Available on microfilm, two reels, Scholarly Resources, Wilmington, Del., 1995.

<sup>122</sup> W.E. Abbott to Maria G. Porter, November 29, 1856, Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society Records, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

<sup>123</sup> *Friend of Man*, July 2, 839. Gerrit Smith to S. Worthington, Esq., August 25, 1841, Smith Papers, Syracuse University. Raymond P. Ernenwein, *The Borough of Peter* (Sherburne, N.Y.: Heritage Press, 1970). Donna Burdick, "Malvina Russell and Her Family," *Snippets* 2 (1995), 7.

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against the Fugitive Slave Law.<sup>124</sup>

Both Gerrit Smith and Harriet Tubman also sent freedom seekers to Jermain Loguen in Syracuse. Fellow underground railroad agent Eber M. Pettit testified that Syracuse was known as "the great central depot of the institution in this State." Of Loguen, Pettit wrote, "He is respected and beloved by all classes in Syracuse, where he has lived for many years, and no other man could have done so much for the U.G.R.R. as he did...." An African American Episcopal Zion clergyman and fugitive himself, from Tennessee, Loguen was as much abolitionist activist as he was a pastoral care giver. When the flow of fugitives in Syracuse grew too large for Samuel J. May, the Unitarian clergyman who served the Church of the Messiah, May asked Loguen for help. Loguen became the General Agent of Syracuse's Fugitive Aid Society in 1857, a full-time job, though he and his wife Caroline Storm Loguen from Busti, Chautauqua County, had been active in assisting runaways for many years. He drew on strong abolitionist sentiment in the region and placed a letter in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* affirming and thanking those in Syracuse who shepherded frightened fugitives his way: "When such as these leave their warm beds in the coldest nights of a winter like the past, to lead these shivering and stricken ones to the Underground railroad Depot, where I and my family are found, I am encouraged to believe that the prowling man-hunter better not dwell in or pass incog [sic] through our blessed little city."<sup>125</sup>

Loguen's home at 293 East Genesee Street (at the corner of present-day Pine and E. Genesee) was a lodestar for freedom seekers. Frederick Douglass gave his own testimonial to the sacrifices made by the Loguen family. In 1857, Douglass was returning to Rochester by train and stopped in Syracuse. He had scarcely disembarked when he encountered a group of nine fugitives who inquired where "one Mr. Loguen" lived. Douglass tells us,

The writer had some curiosity to see how these weary travelers, without money, and without friends, could be received by the family aroused from Sweet sleep, at this late hour of a stormy night. We had scarcely struck the door when the manly voice of Loguen reached our ear. He knew the meaning of the rap, and sung out "hold on." A light was struck in a moment, the door opened and the whole company, the writer included, were invited in. Candles were lighted in different parts of the house, fires kindled, and the whole company made perfectly at home. The reception was a whole souled and manly one, worthy of the noble reputation of Brother Loguen, and showed that he remembers his brethren in bonds as bound with them.<sup>126</sup>

Loguen's life story appeared in 1859 in Syracuse under the title, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen as a Slave and as a Freeman: A Narrative of Real Life*. Published to raise money to aid Loguen's work with fugitives, the book, written with the aid of John Thomas, a lawyer friend and fellow member of the Syracuse Vigilance Committee, claims that Loguen helped more than 1,500 fugitives during his many years as an agent of the underground

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<sup>124</sup> Edwards to Smith, July 20, 1852, April 22, 1852, and March 19, 1860, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University. On Tudor E. Grant, see Judith Weilman, "This Side of the Border: Fugitives from Slavery in Three Central New York Communities," *New York History* 79 (October 1998), 381-82; Frieda Schuelke, "Activities of the Underground railroad in Oswego County," *Fourth Publication of the Oswego Historical Society* (1940), 1-14.

<sup>125</sup> Eber N. Pettit, *Sketches in the History of the Underground Railroad* (Fredonia, N.Y.: W. McKinstry & Son, 1879, republished with introduction and notes by Paul Leone, Westfield, N.Y.: Chautauqua Region Press, 1999), 105; "Rev. J. W. Loguen's letter," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, June 8, 1855.

<sup>126</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times*

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railroad.<sup>127</sup>

Loguen's career was especially remarkable. Despite his status as a runaway, he boldly advertised his work with other fugitives. He placed notices in the local press calling attention to his work as General Agent of the Fugitive Aid Society, asking the general public "to take stock in this valuable and mysterious Railroad" and sought jobs for runaways in Syracuse's shops and on area farms. Beneficiaries were so thankful that in 1859 thirty of them gave a financial contribution to the Fugitive Aid Society and added personal gifts for Loguen and his wife Caroline, including a butter knife and an engraved sugar spoon. Loguen ran Syracuse's branch of the Freedom Trail like a business, giving account of income and expenses in the press. He received support from sources as far away as the Irish Ladies Antislavery Society, which sent him \$72.79 in February 1859. By that time the entire care of helping runaways who reached Syracuse had fallen to the Loguens, and as Jermain wrote for *Douglass' Monthly*, "It takes about all the time of myself and family to see after their wants; I mean the fugitives. We have so much to do in the night that some nights we get little or no sleep. They often come sick, and must be cared for forthwith."

Jermain Loguen helped foster the notion that Syracuse was the most openly abolitionist city in the nation. Some writers took to calling it "the Canada of the United States." Only once did Loguen suspend his untiring efforts to help escapees who had made their way into Central New York. In the aftermath of the Jerry Rescue, Loguen's friends urged him to seek asylum in Canada because he was liable to arrest and prosecution. Caroline Loguen's tears born of fear for the welfare of her husband added to Jermain's emotional turmoil. In the end he decided to leave Syracuse and went first to Skaneateles where he was sheltered by Lydia Fuller, the widow of James Canning Fuller, the Quaker abolitionist. After three or four days, Loguen left for Canada, leaving his horse in the care of the Fuller family. Sumner Fuller, son of Lydia and James, took Loguen to Rochester and the home of Samuel D. Porter. Porter immediately engaged a livery and escorted Loguen to a landing on Lake Ontario and a steamboat bound for Lewiston. At sunrise Loguen crossed the bridge from Lewiston into Canada at Queenston.

In central New York, Jermain Loguen, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass are the best-known African American operatives of the underground railroad. John Jones of Elmira deserves equal recognition. Jones escaped from the Elzey family of Leesburg, Virginia, family in 1850 and made his way as far north as Elmira. There he became sexton of the First Baptist Church and an agent of the underground railroad. He is credited with having assisted as many as 800 fugitives. Those who know Jones respected his personal integrity and bravery. We have this testimonial from the *Elmira Republican*:

John Jones is one of the most energetic coloured men in Southern New York. He is a hard fisted, hard-working, good natured, philanthropic man. He can do anything that any white man ever attempted to do in the shape of hard-labour. He is always ready to use his time or money in any benevolent enterprise, and pays no attention to the Fugitive Slavery Law, when it is necessary to rescue a fellow being from the shackles of Slavery.<sup>128</sup>

During the Civil War, Jones was hired to bury Confederate soldiers who had died at the Elmira camp for prisoners of war. John W. Jones' memorial stone at Woodlawn Cemetery in Elmira has this inscription: "He risked his life to escape bondage, then dedicated his

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<sup>127</sup> Jermain W. Loguen, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen. As a Slave and As a Freeman* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Truair & Co., 1859). Reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968. For a discussion of the authorship question, see Carol M. Hunter, *To Set the Captives Free: Reverend Jermain Wesley Loguen and the Struggle for Freedom in Central New York, 1835-1872* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), Chapter 1.

<sup>128</sup> As copied in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, August 27 1853.

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life to bury those who might enslave him."<sup>129</sup>

Given Jones' location in Elmira, it is possible that fugitives he harbored were sent up to Ithaca in Tompkins County. There they could find shelter with members of St. James African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Founded in 1836, the congregation drew on leadership from the Rev. Thomas James, who also worked with the Rochester AME Zion Church. For a brief period in the 1840s, Rev. Jermain Loguen also was pastor of this church.<sup>130</sup> During the 1850s, runaways may have been forwarded from Ithaca to Syracuse, Oswego, Rochester, the St. Lawrence River, or even to Gerrit Smith's place in Peterboro. Given the close association of the key figures we have thus far introduced, it is not improbable that a more formal Freedom Trail network came into existence after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, with key junctures at Elmira, Ithaca, Peterboro, Syracuse, Auburn, Mexico, Oswego, Sackett's Harbor, Cape Vincent, Rochester, and elsewhere.<sup>131</sup>

Rochester and Monroe County, Frederick Douglass's operational center, had many friends of the fugitive. When Wilbur H. Siebert compiled his pioneering history of the underground railroad, published in 1898, he still had access to individuals who were personally familiar with its operations or were but one generation removed. Siebert included a "Directory of the Names of Underground Railroad Operators" and organized the 3,200 entries by state and county. Of the twenty counties Siebert surveyed in New York State, Monroe County had thirty-six names of activists, while Wyoming County, its nearest rival, had thirteen.<sup>132</sup>

Rochester was critical to Monroe County's support. The city's first antislavery society was organized in 1838 with Lindley Mott Moore, a Quaker teacher, as president. Frederick Douglass attributed the growth of abolitionist sentiment in Rochester to the labors of Myron Holley, one of the founders of the Liberty party and publisher of the *Rochester Freeman*. Holley died in 1843, four years before Douglass settled in Rochester. Though technically beyond the reach of the slave catchers since his freedom had been purchased in 1846, Douglass put himself at risk by opening his home at No.4 Alexander Street (later 297 Alexander) just west of East Avenue to fugitives. Historian William McFeely wrote that for most slaves, "The route to liberation led due north, and Frederick Douglass chose the richest image of the resolute, hopeful trek of runaways to freedom when he named his new anti-slavery newspaper North Star." Douglass's ability to shelter fugitives improved in 1852 when he purchased a farm on South Avenue near present-day Highland Park, about two miles beyond Rochester's center. McFeely noted that

the farm's roadway connected with the dirt road leading into the city from the southeast, and soon the Douglass place became a reliable stop for fugitive slaves making their way to

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<sup>129</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "John W. Jones: Underground Railroad Station-Master," *Negro History Bulletin* 41(1978), 814-18. Abner C. Wright, "Underground Railroad Activities in Elmira," *The Chemung County Historical Journal* 14 (September 1968), 1755-58. Correspondence between Jones and William Still, the famous underground railroad agent who forwarded fugitives to Upstate New York, can be found in William Still, *The Underground Rail Road* (1872; reprint, Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), 554.

<sup>130</sup> St. James AME Zion Church in Ithaca is on the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>131</sup> Vincent V. Harlow, *History of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church* (Ithaca, N.Y.: A.M.E. Zion Church, 1986). Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: Underground Railroad Transit in Central New York," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 3 July 1979), 21. See also, Sidney Gallwey, *Underground Railroad in Tompkins County* (Ithaca, N.Y.: DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County, 1963).

<sup>132</sup>For list of "Underground Railroad Stops Documented by Eye Witnesses" in Monroe County, see Shirley Cox Husted, "Black & White Together!": Paths Towards Freedom on the Underground Railroad," in *Sweet Gift of Freedom: A Civil War Anthology*, 18; Siebert, *Underground Railroad*, 414-15.

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Canada. There, in the house or the barn, runaways could spend their last night in the slaveholding United States or wait to be taken by wagon down-town after dark, to be hidden in E.C. Williams' sail loft or Isaac Post's barn on Sophia Street.<sup>133</sup>

While critical to the underground railroad in Rochester, Frederick Douglass did not work alone. In his third and last autobiography, Douglass wrote, "The underground railroad had many branches, but that one with which I was connected had its main stations in Baltimore, Wilmington, Philadelphia, New York, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and St. Catharines (Canada). It is not necessary to tell who were the principal agents in Baltimore; Thomas Garret was the agent in Wilmington; Miller McKim, William Still, Robert Purvis, Edward M. Davis and others, did the work in Philadelphia; David Ruggles, Isaac T. Hopper, Napolian, and others, in New York City; the Misses Mott and Stephen Myers were forwarders from Albany; Revs. Samuel J. May and W. Loguen were the agents in Syracuse; and J. P. Morris and myself received and dispatched passengers from Rochester to Canada, where they were received by Rev. Hiram Wilson. When a party arrived in Rochester it was the business of Mr. Morris and myself to raise funds with which to pay their passage to St. Catharines, and it is due to truth to state that we seldom called in vain upon whig or democrat for help. Men were better than their theology, and truer to humanity than to their politics, or their offices."<sup>134</sup>

No fugitives were recaptured in the Flour City when Douglass was stationmaster. Curiously, William Still made no mention of Douglass in his 800-page plus account of the underground railroad, a classic published in 1872. Douglass wrote William H. Siebert in 1893 that Still "omitted to mention my name in his book, as one of the Conductors on the Underground railroad" because Douglass had criticized Still for "his conduct in taking from the fugitives who passed through his hands."<sup>135</sup>

Isaac Post, a Quaker druggist, and his wife Amy, who helped persuade Douglass to remove to Upstate New York, provided a helping hand to many refugees at their home on Plymouth Avenue in Rochester. Amy Post recalled that "the most we ever had at one time was twelve" and estimated that 150 fugitives passed through Rochester each year. Post testified, "many a time I have gone out to the barn after dark with a basket of food and frightened men crept out of the hay to it."<sup>136</sup>

In a retrospective account of the underground railroad, Amy Post wrote of the heroism and constant help rendered to fugitives by the African Americans living in Rochester: "They were always ready to fight for a fugitive slave, and, if they failed to rescue one here, they would form a company of stalwart men and follow the party, spy out where they were stopping for the night, and, generally finding they watchman asleep, they only failed once to return in triumph with their rescued brother or sister."<sup>137</sup>

In addition to the Posts, Douglass also had the assistance of Jacob P. Morris, operator of several barbershops, and of Williams S. Falls, production foreman for the *Daily Democrat*. It is

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<sup>133</sup> MeFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 146, 172.

<sup>134</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass Written by Himself* (1892; reprint, London: Collier-Macmillan Lt., 1962), 266-67.

<sup>135</sup> Douglass to Siebert, March 27, 1893, Letter in Siebert Collection, New York State Underground Railroad materials, microfilm, Syracuse University.

<sup>136</sup> Cited in Merrill, *The Underground Freedom's Road*, 50. Husted, "Black & White Together," 6.

<sup>137</sup> Post, "The Underground Railroad at Rochester," undated typescript in Siebert collection, New York State Underground Railroad Materials, 2-3.

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said that fugitives were taken to the foot of Buell Street and put on English steamboats bound for the Queen's dominion. When the ships were three miles out on Lake Ontario, they would hoist the British flag, a symbol that all on board were now beyond the reach of the American slave catchers.<sup>138</sup>

Other sites associated with the underground railroad in Rochester were the A.M.E. Zion Church at 42 Favor Street, where Douglass began publishing the *North Star* in 1847, George Avery's store at 12 Buffalo Street (now Main Street), and the barn of Samuel D. Porter on South Fitzhugh Street. Porter served as the secretary of Rochester's Anti-Slavery Society and was the Liberty party candidate for mayor." George Avery's store at 12 Buffalo St., the house of the portrait painter Grove S Gilbert, at 40 Grieg Street near Clarissa, the Clark house on Monroe Avenue, the Hargous house at 52 Main Street, and the Isaac Moore house at 1496 Culver Road are said to have had underground railroad connections.<sup>139</sup>

William C. Bloss, a temperance advocate, promoter of the free school law, and editor of the Rights of Man, was a well-known stationmaster in the Rochester area. Bloss's son, Joseph Blossom Bloss, recalled how during his boyhood runaways arrived during the night, were fed and clothed, and then taken on to another safe house. On one occasion, the elder Bloss led young Joseph to the woodshed on their property at East Avenue. There hid an escaped woman waiting safe passage to Canada. William Bloss asked his young son to lay his fingers in the deep whip-welts of the woman's back, and said, "I am subject to a fine of \$1,000 and an imprisonment of six months for giving this woman a crust of bread, a cup of water—for not arresting her, or for in any way aiding her to escape from her master. But I shall disobey this law, and when there is another law like this in the land, do you disobey it."<sup>140</sup>

The Thomas Warrant farm in nearby Brighton, now on West Henrietta Road, about a mile from the present-day University of Rochester campus, also belonged to a network of safe houses in the Rochester area. Warrant was a coppersmith, farmer, and devout Baptist. At night he would hide runaways under hay in a wagon and drive them to stations near Lake Ontario.<sup>141</sup>

When fugitives stayed out at Frederick Douglass's house on the outskirts of Rochester and he wanted to forward them to someone in town, he would send a note with one of his

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<sup>138</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times*, 266-7.

<sup>139</sup> In 1860 Anne Douglass, Frederick Douglass's ten-year old daughter, died. Samuel Porter had Anne buried in the Porter family plot in Mt. Hope Cemetery because her parents had no lot of their own.

<sup>140</sup> William Bloss kept a tavern at Brighton along the Erie Canal until his conversion to temperance. He lived from 1830 to 1860 in a brick house on East Avenue. The Bloss residence (moved to 636 Broadway in 1880) is described in as ~one of the few authenticated local stations of the Underground Railroad now in existence." Amy Hanmer-Croughton, "Anti-Slavery Days in Rochester," *Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series* 14 (1936), 120, 133. Hanmer-Croughton quotes Joseph B. Bloss's recollections from a paper Bloss gave in 1921 on "The Underground Railroad" before the William Clough Bloss Club.

<sup>141</sup> The farm of Asa Anthony on Rochester's outskirts is mentioned in Douglass's memoirs as a station. Douglass reported that a fugitive from Maryland was working on the Anthony farm when word came that his in master had filed papers with a United States commissioner charged with enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Warned in advance, the young man was "on the free waves of Lake Ontario, bound to Canada" before the papers could be served. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 267. Anthony was Susan B. Anthony's uncle. Arch Merrill concluded that there is no evidence that the famous woman's rights crusader participated directly in the Underground Railroad. Shirley Husted, however, says that the home of Lucy and Daniel Anthony on Brooks Avenue (formerly Rapids Street) was a "station." For more information on underground railroad Stations in Rochester and immediate vicinity, see Arch Merrill, *The Underground Freedom's Road* Chapter IX, and Husted's essay, "Black & White Together!" 1-24.

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children. "Two weary people here; need transportation in the morning." Sometimes the missive bore the initials "D.F."-- which was "a perfunctory effort at disguise," said Douglass's biographer McFeely. On his involvement with Freedom's Trail in Rochester, Douglass himself said:

On one occasion I had eleven fugitives at the same time under my roof, and it was necessary for them to remain with me until I could collect sufficient money to get them to Canada. It was the largest number I ever had at any one time, and I had some difficulty in providing so many with food and shelter, but, as may well be imagined, they were not very fastidious in either direction, and were well content with very plain food, and a strip of carpet on the floor for a bed, or a place on the straw in the barn.<sup>142</sup>

Fugitives also made their way directly to the office of the North Star on Buffalo Street in the Talman Building. Early morning arrivals could be found sitting on the steps until opening time. A historic marker in front of the Reynolds Arcade on Main Street (formerly Buffalo Street) calls attention to Douglass's office in downtown Rochester.<sup>143</sup>

Something of the interconnectedness of abolitionists in New York State's Burned-over District is also demonstrated in John Brown's associations. Brown met Smith for the first time in April 1848 when he came to Peterboro to learn about Smith's offer to give land to African Americans willing to resettle in the Adirondacks. Brown told Smith, "I will take one of your farms myself, clear it up and plant it, and show my colored neighbors how such work should be done; will give them work as I have occasion, look after them in all needful ways and be a kind of father to them." John Brown settled his large family on land he had purchased from Smith and took up residence in a plain cabin situated among black farmers in Essex County. With the purchase from Smith in 1854 of an additional 160 acres, Brown's Adirondack holdings increased to 244 acres. In the years prior to his fateful assault upon the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859, John Brown often left his wife and children to carry on as best they could in the forests of northern New York while he was waging war on proslavery forces in Kansas, attempting to shore up his failing business enterprises, or seeking recruits for the last great mission of his life. In June 1855, Brown was in Syracuse attending a Kansas Aid meeting sponsored by the Radical Abolition Party. He gave a fiery speech and appealed for aid to defeat "Satan and his legions" out in the Kansas Territory. Gerrit Smith was one of those who put a financial donation in Brown's pocket.<sup>144</sup>

As he drew closer to what was to be his final assault upon slavery's fortress, Brown came back to Upstate New York. On February 22, 1858, Brown met with several of his key supporters, later dubbed "the Secret Six," at Gerrit Smith's mansion in Peterboro. They discussed, as Brown told Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Rail Road business on a *somewhat extended scale*."<sup>145</sup>

On the third floor of Smith's mansion, Brown outlined his plans to "beat up a slave quarter," though he did not specify time and place. On July 26, 1858, Gerrit Smith confided to Franklin B. Sanborn, another member of "the Secret Six," "I have great faith in the wisdom, integrity, and bravery of Captain Brown. For several years I have frequently given him money toward sustaining him in his contests with the slave-power. Whenever he shall embark in another

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<sup>142</sup> McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, 172; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 329-30.

<sup>143</sup> Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 149.

<sup>144</sup> Cited from Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, ed., *The Life and Letters of John Brown. Liberator of Kansas. and Martyr of Virginia* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition; Concord, Mass.: F. B. Sanborn, 1910), 97; Harlow, *Gerrit Smith*, 339-41. John Browns home and gravesite near Lake Placid, New York, are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>145</sup> Brown to Higginson, February 12, 1858, Boston Public Library, as cited in Harlow, *Gerrit Smith*, 396.

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of these contests, I shall again stand ready to help him; and I will begin with giving him a hundred dollars. I do not wish to know Captain Brown's plans; I hope he will keep them to himself."<sup>146</sup>

Others may have known more about the Harpers Ferry plans. Jermain Loguen had met with Brown and Harriet Tubman in Chatham, Ontario. Tubman urged Brown to strike on the 4th of July, but Brown delayed. He gathered up his freedom fighters and brought them to Chatham where on May 8, 1858, he held an organizational convention. Twelve whites, including Brown, and thirty-four blacks attended. Jermain Loguen was not there ~ In response to Brown's plea that he come up from Syracuse, Loguen wrote, "As I think I cannot get to Chatham, I should like much to see you & your men before you go to the mountains. My wife & all unite in wishing you all the great success in your Glorious undertaken [sic]. May the Lord be with you is our prayer."<sup>147</sup>

Loguen was not with Brown when he went down to conduct reconnaissance. He met with Frederick Douglass in a stone quarry near Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Douglass declined to go with Brown because, as he would later write, Brown's plans seemed too risky. "My discretion or my cowardice," Douglass confessed, made me proof against the dear old man's eloquence-perhaps it was something of both which determined my course." Brown was still trying to enlist Loguen's support on May 17, 1859, writing, "I will just whisper in your private ear that I have no doubt you will soon have a call from God to minister at a different location." Perhaps the call did not come, or if it did, Loguen had reservations similar to those of Douglass. Neither man went to Harpers Ferry. Harriet Tubman wanted to go, but she was ill and in Boston when Brown's small "Army of Liberation" attacked the United States Armory and Arsenal on the night of October 16, 1859. When authorities searched Brown's carpetbag after his capture, they discovered letters and documents implicating Gerrit Smith. Smith suffered a nervous breakdown during the public hysteria and was committed to the New York State Insane Asylum at Utica on November 7, 1859.<sup>148</sup>

Abolitionists and their allies gathered in solemn assembly to commemorate Brown. On December 2, 1859, the day Brown was hung for the crime of treason, the Wesleyan Methodists of Syracuse held a prayer meeting in their chapel at 6 a.m. in the morning and invited all area Christians to join them in offering up prayers for John Brown. The church was an appropriate setting, for its members were well known for their abolitionist views. Debates over slavery disrupted northern Methodist connections in the 1840s, and Wesleyan Methodists withdrew to form an avowedly anti-slavery church. Established in 1843, Syracuse's Wesleyan Methodists were actively involved in the underground railroad.

Rev. Luther Lee served Syracuse's Wesleyan Methodists in 1843 and again in early 1850s. Of his personal involvement with the underground railroad, Lee recorded, "In the spring of 1852 I removed from the city of New York to the city of Syracuse, where, during a three years' pastorate, I did the largest work of my life on the Under-ground Rail-road. I passed as many as

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<sup>146</sup> Smith to Sanborn, July 26, 1858, in Sanborn, ed., *Life and Letters of John Brown*, 466. On Smith and Brown's five other key supporters, see Jeffery Rossbach, *Ambivalent Conspirators: John Brown, The Secret Six and a Theory of Slave Violence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), and Otto Scott, *The Secret Six: John Brown and the Abolition Movement* (New York: Time Books, 1979).

<sup>147</sup> Loguen to Brown, May 6, 1858, Kansas State Historical Society, reprinted in *Blacks on John Brown*, edited by Benjamin Quarles (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 6.

<sup>148</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times*, 320; Loguen, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen*, 451. On Smith's stay at the Utica asylum, see John R. McKivigan and Madeleine Leveille, "The 'Black Dream' of Gerrit Smith, New York Abolitionist," *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 20 (Fall 1985), 51-76. As noted in *The New York Times* December 1, 1859.

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thirty slaves through my hands in a month." In his 1882 autobiography, Lee incorporated the following from his journal regarding his reaction to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law:

I never would obey it. I had assisted thirty slaves to escape to Canada during the last month. If the authorities wanted any thing of me my residence was at 39 Onondaga-street [This was directly across from the site of the Wesleyan Methodist church.] I would admit that and they could take me and lock me up in the Penitentiary on the hill; but if they did such a foolish thing as that I had friends enough in Onondaga County to level it to the ground before the next morning.<sup>149</sup>

In the basement of the Wesleyan Church, "faces" were sculpted in the clay walls, perhaps by freedom seekers who found shelter there.<sup>150</sup>

In the aftermath of]Brown's raid, sectional tensions escalated. William Henry Seward characterized the struggle between slavery and freedom as "the irrepressible conflict" in a speech at Rochester on October 25, 1858. His words were prophetic. As 1860 began, moderate voices such as Seward's were drowned out by more strident ones. Frederick Douglass came to understand how John Brown's martyrdom had altered the national climate. Douglass knew instinctively that John Brown's hanging symbolized that something had gone wrong, deeply wrong, in the soul of America. He wrote of the Ol' Man, "His corpse was given up to his woe-stricken widow, and she assisted by anti-slavery friends, caused it to be borne to North Elba, Essex County, N.Y., and there dust reposes amid the silent, solemn, and snowy grandeurs of the Adirondacks. This raid upon Harpers Ferry was as the last straw to the camel's back. What in the tone of Southern sentiment had been fierce before, became furious and uncontrollable now."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Luther Lee, *Autobiography of the Rev. Luther Lee* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1882; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 331, 336.

<sup>150</sup> Douglas V. Armstrong and Louann Wurst, *Faces of the Past: Archaeology of an Underground Railroad Site in Syracuse, New York*, Syracuse University Archaeological Research Center Report 10 (January 1998).

<sup>151</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times*, 306.

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### V: The Freedom War and the Abolitionist Legacy: 1861-1870

When Yankee first met Reb in the early months of the Civil War, there was little talk of it being a battle to abolish slavery. Gerrit Smith was one of the few who foresaw the conflict as transforming America. "The war," he wrote in his journal on May 18, 1861, "will be short. It will establish Government beyond all hope of present and future traitors to overthrow it. It will free the slave; and then the North and South, freed forever from the only cause of their mutual alienation, will grow up together into that 'more perfect union' for which the Fathers ordained the constitution."<sup>152</sup>

Most Central New York abolitionists were not so optimistic. Beriah Green, for example, was so disgusted with Lincoln and the Republicans for their failure to wage a freedom war, that he declared "I am not a war-man" and once pointedly refused to "get up" an audience for a pro-Union speaker.<sup>153</sup> Conservatives condemned all abolitionists for having "agitated" the coming of civil war.

What Smith hoped for and Green believed would not happen did take place, but only after foot dragging by the federal government and much bloodshed. President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which took effect on January 1, 1863, was largely a military measure and did not free all of the slaves everywhere. Nevertheless, Frederick Douglass viewed it as "the turning-point in the conflict between freedom and slavery. A death-blow was given to the slaveholding rebellion."<sup>154</sup>

Douglass argued for another means of transforming the war to restore the union into a freedom war--the federal government must allow "sable arms" to help destroy the South's "peculiar institution." Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts led the way and authorized the formation of a black regiment, the famed 54th Massachusetts Voluntary Infantry which led in the assault upon Ft. Wagner. Frederick Douglass recruited more than one hundred men for the "Glory" regiment, two of whom were his own sons Lewis and Charles. On March 11, 1863, Douglass spoke from the pulpit of the A.M.E. Zion Church in Syracuse: "Who would be free themselves must strike the blow. I urge you to fly to arms and smite to death the power that would bury the government and your liberty in the same hopeless grave. This is your golden opportunity." Ten men signed up that night. When the 54th Massachusetts was fully formed, its ranks included scores of volunteers from our central New York corridor. They had been farmers, barbers, waiters, cooks, seamen, hostlers, and common laborers. Now they were soldiers in an army of liberation.<sup>155</sup>

The African Americans who joined the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts were the vanguard of

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<sup>152</sup> Smith, diary May 18, 1861, quoted in Harlow, *Gerrit Smith*, 429.

<sup>153</sup> Cited in Milton C. Sernett, *Abolition's Axe: Beriah Green. Oneida Institute. and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 144.

<sup>154</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times*, 351-52.

<sup>155</sup> Douglass, as cited in John Doherty, "Syracuse blacks fought to enlist in Union Army," *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, February 15, 1996, 1. This was language reminiscent of Douglass's famous essay, "Men of Color, To Arms," which appeared first in the *North Star*, March 2, 1863, and can be found in Douglass, *Life and Times*, 339-41. Luis F. Emilio, *History of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. 1863-1865* (1894, reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968). See also, Peter Burchard, *One Gallant Rush: Robert Gould Shaw and his Brave Black Regiment* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965), and Clifton Cox, *Undying Glory: The Story of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment* (New York: Scholastic Inc., 1991).

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approximately 179,000 black troops who fought in the Civil War. Of the black troops raised in the United States, 4,125 belonging to regiments formed in New York State, and 5,829 blacks served in regiments organized in other states. Three black regiments came from New York State—the 20th, the 26th, and the 31st United States Colored Troops.<sup>156</sup>

One of the African American freedom fighters was John Stewart, Harriet Tubman's brother. Tubman was herself a freedom fighter, though not in the regular military. She assisted federal forces as a spy and scout, providing valuable reconnaissance to Colonel James Montgomery of the all-black 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina Volunteers when his men, formerly held as slaves, were engaged in guerilla warfare along the Combahee River. Tubman witnessed the deadly assault by the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts upon Ft. Wagner. She left this moving description: "And then we saw the lightning and that was the guns; and then we heard the rain falling, and that was the drops of blood falling and when we came to get in the crops it was dead men that we reaped."<sup>157</sup>

The sacrifices Union troops made on the field along with those made by supporters on the home front eventually contributed to the federal victory over Confederate forces. African American as well as European American soldiers helped translate the Civil War into what some historians call the Second American Revolution. It was a war of liberation which intended to overcome the failure of those who wrote the Constitution to include African Americans as legal persons, with all the rights and protections of American citizens.

Fort Wagner and the other Civil War battlegrounds were a long way from central New York. But present-day Woodlawn National Cemetery in Elmira is a vivid reminder of how intimately activists on New York State's Freedom Trail were associated with the Civil War. Elmira had been the location of a camp for Confederate prisoners of war, established on July 6, 1865. John Jones, Elmira's chief underground railroad operator, was employed to bury in a field behind his farm (located on what is now College Avenue) Confederates who died during confinement. Jones died in 1900. In 1953 the City of Elmira honored him for his services as custodian of the prison cemetery and for his labors on behalf of those who had escaped from slavery along the underground railroad.<sup>158</sup>

The defeat of the Confederacy and the subsequent enactment of the 13th Amendment freeing the slaves put an end to traffic along the Freedom Trail. Some abolitionists, however, believed that helping those who had only recently emerged from the house of bondage was an extension of their underground railroad labors. They took an active interest in efforts to educate freed people and provide them with the means to protect their civil rights. Jermain Loguen went into the South to see for himself how freed people of color fared. As an agent of the American Missionary Association, he recommended a young African American woman by the name of Edmonia Highgate to the A.M.A. and supported her desire to become a teacher in the South. In

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<sup>156</sup> The New York State -based black regiments had 574 war-induced casualties. Frederick Phister *New York in the War of the Rebellion: 1861-1865* (Albany, N.Y.: J. B. Lyon, 1912), 22, 62, 91, 283, 305, 307. Harry Bradshaw Matthews, *Honoring New York's Forgotten Soldiers: African Americans of the Civil War* (Oneonta, N.Y.: Hartwick College, 1998), 2.

<sup>157</sup> Cited in Helene C. Phelen, *And Why Not Every Man?: An Account of Slavery, the Underground Railroad, and the Road to Freedom in New York's Southern Tier* (Interlaken, N.Y.: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1987), 202.

<sup>158</sup> Charles W. Barber, "Elmira as Civil War Depot and Prison Camp," *The Chemung Historical Journal* 6 (September 1960), 753-59. Tendai Mutunhu, "John W. Jones: Underground Railroad Station-Master," *Negro History Bulletin* 41 (March-April 1978), 814-18.

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January 1864, she wrote A.M.A. authorities, "I am about twenty years of age and strong and healthy. I know just what self-denial, self-discipline and domestic qualifications are needed for the work and modestly trust that with Cod's help I could labor advantageously in the field of my newly freed brethren . . ." Highgate taught in freedmen's schools in Norfolk, Virginia, Darlington, Maryland, and New Orleans, Louisiana, where she served as Principal of the Frederick Douglass School, installed in a former slave pen. Anti-Unionist rioters forced her out of the city into rural Lafayette Parish. In 1868 she moved to Enterprise, Mississippi. In February 1870 she spoke before the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, telling the veteran abolitionists that their work was "not yet half done; and if it is not thoroughly done, it will have to be done over again."<sup>159</sup>

Little is known of the rest of Edmonia Highgate's life. On October 17, 1870, the Syracuse Daily Courier carried an item under the heading "Melancholy and Sudden Death." Edmonia Highgate, age 26, had been found dead in the house of a Syracuse abortionist. She was buried in Oakwood Cemetery, Syracuse, near the grave of her father and that of her brother Charles, who died April 2, 1865, of complications from wounds received at a battle at Petersburg, Virginia. Not far down the hill from the two Highgate graves is the final resting-place of Jermain Loguen, who died in 1872.<sup>160</sup>

The decade of the 1870s saw the passing of many of the principals of the black freedom crusade in Central New York. Samuel J. May died in 1871. Both Gerrit Smith and Beriah Green died in 1874. Frederick Douglass would live until 1895, but he left Rochester for Washington, D.C., after his house burned in 1872.

Another generation of reformers now had to take up the freedom cause once embraced by their parents. Emily Howland (1827-1929) was the daughter of Quaker parents, Slocum and Hannah Howland. The Howland home had been a station on the underground railroad, and Emily embraced the progressive values modeled in the Slocum household. She taught in the Miner School for Colored Girls, Washington, D.C., in 1857, and worked as a nurse and teacher in the refugee or contraband camps during the Civil War. After the Civil War, on land in Northumberland County purchased by her father, Emily Howland set up the Howland School to educate poor children, both white and black.<sup>161</sup>

Harriet Tubman lived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, long enough to inspire future generations of children with her stories of having brought hundreds to freedom along the underground railroad and never losing a passenger. She died on March 10, 1913. Her legacy and that of all those who traveled the Freedom Trail in New York State deserve nothing less than the best we can give them--in terms of documentation, preservation, and interpretation of their stories and their sites.

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<sup>159</sup> Edmonia Highgate to George Whipple, January 18, 1864, in *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Dorothy Sterling (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 294-95. Cited in Sterling, ed., 301.

<sup>160</sup> *Syracuse Daily Courier*, October 17, 1870.

<sup>161</sup> Judith Colucci Breault, *The World of Emilv Howland: Odyssey of a Humanitarian* (Milbrae, Calif.: Les femmes Publishers, 1976); Mildred D. Myers, *Miss Emily* (Charlotte Harbor, Florida: Tabby House, 1998).

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<sup>i</sup> Friend of Man, March 28, 1838.

<sup>ii</sup> Friend of Man, October 4, 1837.

<sup>iii</sup> Friend of Man, September 25, 1839.