

## **Underground Railroad Sites in New York**

with introductions by Laura Peterson and Jennifer Pesato

Study of the Underground Railroad allows teachers to focus on moral, religious and heroic efforts to challenge slavery and provides an opportunity to include more local history in the curriculum. The following Underground Railroad sites in New York and New Jersey are well documented. Some are open to the public.

### **Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged, Residence, and Thompson AME Church: Cayuga County, NY**

Harriet Tubman (1820?-1913), a renowned leader in the Underground Railroad movement, guided approximately 300 people to freedom in the north and Canada . She established the Home for the Aged in Auburn, New York in 1908. The Home for the Aged is located at 180 South Street, her home is located at 182 South Street, and the church is located at 33 Parker Street, Auburn, New York. The Home for the Aged is open to the public by appointment.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground>

### **St. James AME Zion Church: Tompkins County, N.Y. Built in 1836,**

St. James AME Zion is believed to be the oldest church in Ithaca, New York and one of the first AME Zion churches in the country. The church was an important transfer point for fugitive slaves en route to Canada. The congregation officially expressed its anti-slavery sentiments through the writings and preaching of pastors such as the Reverend Thomas James. The church, located at 116-118 Cleveland Avenue, Ithaca, New York, is open to the public.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground>

### **Gerrit Smith Estate and Land Office: Madison County, N.Y.**

Gerrit Smith (1797-1874), a nationally prominent and influential abolitionist and social reformer, served as president of the New York Anti-Slavery Society between 1836 and 1839. During the 1840s and 1850s, Smith acted as a "station master" in the Underground Railroad. His Peterboro, New York estate, a widely recognized safe haven for runaway slaves enroute to Canada, was designated a National Historic Landmark. The Gerrit Smith Estate and Land Office are at the corner of Nelson and Main Streets. The Land Office is the only building open to the public. John Brown Farm and Gravesite: Essex County, N.Y. A National Historic Landmark and New York State Historic Site.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground>

### **John Brown Farm and Gravesite: Essex County, NY**

John Brown's home during the ten year period prior to the Harpers Ferry raid in 1859. After Brown was buried on the farm, it became a pilgrimage site for free African Americans and white abolitionists. It is located just south of Old Military Road in Lake Placid, New York. It is open to the public. . <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground>

### **Foster Memorial AME Zion Church: Westchester County, N.Y.**

Foster Memorial AME Zion Church was founded in 1860. During the Civil War, members of Foster AME provided food and shelter to fugitive slaves escaping to Canada and fugitive slaves who settled in Tarrytown. Foster AME Zion Church is located in Tarrytown, New York at 90 Wildey Street. It is open to the public.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground>

### **David Barker Home: Niagara County, NY**

Baker was a founder of the Quaker community in Barker, New York and is believed to have been a "conductor" on the Underground Railroad. The Quakers, as a group, were very active supporters of the Underground Railroad network. The Barker Home is located on Quaker Road in Barker, New York.

<http://www.murphyorchards.com/ur.html>

**Murphy Orchards: Niagara County, NY**

Charles and Libby McClew moved to the property in 1850 and built the house and barn which houses the entrance to a secret underground chamber which was used to hide people escaping slavery on their way to freedom in Canada. This room remains virtually unchanged since it was used as a "station" on the Underground Railroad. A view of the barn can be seen on the website. The farm is located about 20 miles from the Niagara River in Lewiston, and was one of the last stops before the fugitives crossed into Canada. It is open to the public. Call 716-778-7926 for information or tour schedules. <http://www.murphyorchards.com/ur.html>

**Hopkins Creek: Niagara County, NY**

This creek served as a route used by fugitives heading from Murphy Orchards to the Thomas Root Home. It originates due north of Pekin and flows through McClew farm and empties into Lake Ontario.

<http://www.murphyorchards.com/ur.html>

**Eighteen Mile Creek: Niagara County, NY**

After leaving the McClew farm, the fugitives could follow along the banks of the Creek to reach the Erie Canal in Lockport. The McClews, when possible, may have provided transportation for hidden fugitives in farm wagons taking produce into Lockport. <http://www.murphyorchards.com/ur.html>

**Lockport Locks and Erie Canal Cruises Building: Niagara County, NY**

This building, although not believed to have been used as a shelter, it utilized canal water shunted through an underground water raceway tunnel as its source of power, which also provided secret access from the building to the canal. Many canal boat captains helped in transporting fugitives toward Canada. Open to the public.

<http://www.murphyorchards.com/ur.html>

**Lockport YWCA: Niagara County, NY**

A tiny attic room in this building was used to hide fugitives. 32 Cottage St., Lockport, New York.

<http://www.murphyorchards.com/ur.html>

**Main and Locust Streets: Niagara County, NY**

This area was the site of Lyman A. Spalding's, a conductor on the Underground Railroad, hotel and home. Diagonally across Main Street from the hotel is the first Quaker meeting house in Lockport (built in 1833). The whole area was a cauldron of anti-slavery activity. <http://www.murphyorchards.com/ur.html>

**Thomas Root Home: Niagara County, NY**

People escaping from slavery were hidden by the Root family and often transported to the Canadian border in farm wagons carrying produce. 3106 Upper Mountain Rd., Pekin, New York. <http://www.murphyorchards.com/ur.html>

**First Presbyterian Church: Niagara County, NY**

The church and burial site of Underground Railroad conductor Josiah Tryon. 505 Cayuga St., Lewiston, New York.

<http://www.murphyorchards.com/ur.html>

**Bialystoker Synagogue (formerly Willett Street Methodist Episcopal Church): NY, NY**

This building became a synagogue in 1905, but still contains a passage way through what is now the synagogue's women's gallery. Behind the break in the wall is a narrow shaft with a tall wooden ladder leading to an attic. In the peaked chamber there are additional ladders lean against loft spaces. It has been said that fugitive slaves were hidden here, but the only evidence is oral history. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Thomas Downing's Oyster House: Manhattan, NY**

A free black family, the Downings were committed abolitionists who led fugitive slaves down into the basement of their restaurant where they hid from bounty hunters. The restaurant is long gone, but its operation on the Underground Railroad lasted from the 1830's to the 1860's. The building is no longer in existence. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**David Ruggles Boarding House: TriBeCa, NY**

David Ruggles was an abolitionist leader of the New York Committee of Vigilance, editor of the black magazine *Mirror of Liberty*, and a vital link on the Underground Railroad. The boardinghouse once stood at 67 Lispenard St. at the corner of Broadway, but no longer exists. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**David Ruggles House: TriBeCa, NY**

Located at 36 Lispenard St. at the corner of Church Street, this is the location where he hid fugitives such as Frederick Washington Bailey, who later changed his name to Frederick Douglass. Today this location is a five-story building anchored by a pizzeria. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Mother A.M.E. Zion Church: TriBeCa, NY**

The original Mother A.M.E. Zion Church was one of the first churches in New York built and led by African-Americans. This church was known as an Underground Railroad depot. A plaque now marks its place on the sidewalk at 158 Church Street at the corner of Leonard Street. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Reverend Charles B. Ray Home: New York, New York**

The Reverend often had fugitive guests arriving at his home. The building is now a condominium with a Chinese beauty shop and salon. 153 Baxter Street, at the corner of Grand Street. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Wunsch Student Center (formerly the African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church): Brooklyn, NY**

From 1854 to 1938 this church stood as the first black congregation in Brooklyn, known as the Bridge Street Church. IN the basement the church housed and fed fugitive slaves who slept on the floor. When in fear of detection they descended into a subcellar. It is said that the runaways left markings on the walls. Today there is a fitness center in the basement of the Student Center. The building stands at 311 Bridge Street with no visible signs of the fugitives' hiding spots. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims: Brooklyn Heights, NY**

This was the church where Henry Ward Beecher preached from 1847 to 1887 and hid fugitive slaves in the basement and tunnel-like passageways that run the length of the building. The current church is considering creating a museum in the basement of the Church. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church: Fort Greene, NY**

This building was built between 1860 and 1862 and contains a basement and heating tunnels where fugitives were often hidden. Letters written by the congregation's first preacher, Dr. Theodore Cuyler confirms this occurrence. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Macedonia A.M.E. Church: Flushing, Queens, NY**

This church frequently housed slaves overnight in its basement (now boiler room) and then slipped them out through a side door to move them on to their next stop. This church was built in 1811 and has been renovated many times. The boiler room has remained under the chapel. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**1661 Browne House: Queens, NY**

This building, now a museum, was the original meeting place of the Quakers before the Friends Meeting House was built on Northern Boulevard. The Browne property once extended for 400 acres and contained many buildings where runaways were sheltered. The Browne family was active in abolitionist work. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Main Maid Inn: Nassau County, NY**

This restaurant in Jericho on Long Island was once the home of Valentine Hicks. On the second floor of this building a cupboard door still exists, hiding a set of stairs leading to an attic where there is a hidden crawl space. The cellar also had an unseen passageway behind a wall leading outdoors. The Hicks family is said to have transported fugitive slaves across the Long Island Sound. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**A.M.E. Zion Church: Staten Island, NY**

In the 1840's a free black community developed, Sandy Ground. It was said that fugitive slaves found sanctuary in this community. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Dr. Samuel McKenzie Elliot Home: Staten Island, NY**

In the community now called Rossville there lived a well-known abolitionist whose house (built around 1850) is believed to have been an Underground Railroad station. It is said that a tunnel leads from the cellar down to the waterfront, but the new owners have yet to find it. The house is a New York City landmark. Information gathered by S. Brawarsky, the New York Times.

**Orson Ames House: Oswego County, NY**

Friend of Man, July 4, 1838

In 1838, Orson Ames was part of Mexico township's first Vigilance Committee, organized to help fugitives escape to Canada. The Ames family housed the fugitive Jerry McHenry for one night in 1851 before sending him to Asa Beebe's barn north of the village. Orson Ames then wrote to a brother in Oswego (probably Leonard Ames, Jr.), who made arrangements with a boat captain to take Jerry McHenry to Canada. His business was located across Main Street from his own house, on what would later become the grounds of the Mexico Academy. (Photographs available on the website) [http://www.oswego.edu/Acad\\_Dept/a\\_and\\_s/history/ugrr/contents.html](http://www.oswego.edu/Acad_Dept/a_and_s/history/ugrr/contents.html)

**Asa Beebe and Mary Whipple Beebe House: Oswego County, NY**

In 1840, Asa and his wife Mary Whipple Beebe bought a house on Main Street, just west of Black Creek and then in 1851, they moved to Toad Hollow, where Jerry Henry found refuge for two weeks in the Beebe barn.

[http://www.oswego.edu/Acad\\_Dept/a\\_and\\_s/history/ugrr/contents.html](http://www.oswego.edu/Acad_Dept/a_and_s/history/ugrr/contents.html)

**Starr Clark House: Oswego County, NY**

Starr Clark's tin shop on Main Street in Mexico, New York. Starr Clark housed fugitives in this from the mid-1830s to the Civil War. James Chandler, who owned the brick bank next door, was also an abolitionist. It is believed that a tunnel ran from the basement of the tin shop to the house next door. The arrangement of rocks in the east wall of the tin shop basement suggests a possible filled-in tunnel. (Photographs available on the website)

[http://www.oswego.edu/Acad\\_Dept/a\\_and\\_s/history/ugrr/contents.html](http://www.oswego.edu/Acad_Dept/a_and_s/history/ugrr/contents.html)

**Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church: Brooklyn, NY**

This church was built around 1860 when abolitionist activity was prevalent in Brooklyn. Letters have been found in the church dating back to the 1860's mentioning at least two escape slaves sheltered in the church's basement. The church still stands today and is open to the public. It is located at South Oxford Street in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn. Information gathered by C. Gray, The New York Times.