

19th Century Resistance to Slavery in Upstate New York

Source: New York State Freedom Trail <http://www.oce.nysed.gov/freedom%20trail/fttourism2.htm>

Buffalo: Joseph “Black Joe” Hodge escaped from slavery in the late 1700s and was the Buffalo region’s first known American settler. He lived with local native Americans. William Wells Brown was a fugitive slave, abolitionist, author and Underground Railroad station master. Brown transported many runaways across Lake Erie. Following the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, a former New York City school teacher who feared the precariousness of her own free status, fled to Canada. While residing in Toronto, she founded *The Provincial Freeman*, a weekly newspaper which was distributed in Erie and Niagara Counties. In 1823, a fugitive known only as “slave Ellen” was captured in Rochester and sent to Buffalo for her eventual return to Virginia. Ellen slit her own throat rather than be returned to slavery and separated from her husband and daughter. The home of Sterling and L. Sheldon Ely on Como Park Blvd. served as an Underground Railroad station. E.M. Pettit, author of *Sketches*, detailing his life as a conductor on the Underground Railroad in southwestern New York State. Buffalo area abolitionists included John Wilkes, Elihu Rice, Alvin Orr, Benjamin Parker, and Abner H. Francis. In 1843, Buffalo hosted the annual National Convention of Colored Citizens. Black delegates from various states who met to discuss the problems facing the race. Henry Highland Garnet delivered his “Address to the Slaves of the United States of America,” a call for rebellion.

Rochester: In 1795, free black, Asa Dunbar and his family were among the first pioneers in the Rochester region. Dunbar, who served the local community as city attorney, eventually resettled in Canada. Frederick Douglass arrived in Rochester in the 1840s. A noted orator, essayist and newspaper editor, he was one of the premier leaders of the campaign to abolish slavery. Thomas James was born slave in Montgomery County,. When he was eight years old he witnessed the sale of his mother, sister, and brother. In 1830, he built a church on Favor Street in Rochester that served also as a school and an Underground Railroad station. Abolitionist Austin Steward was a fugitive slave and a successful Rochester Businessman. He led the July 5, 1827 Emancipation day celebration in Rochester. Isaac and Amy Post were leaders of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society. Their Rochester home served as an Underground Railroad Station during the 1840s and 1850s. Rochester area abolitionists included Gideon Pitts, Asa Anthony, Isaac Moore, Lindley Moore, Sara Fish, Samuel Porter, Edward Williams, Ashley Sampson, Thomas Warrant, William Clough Bloss, George Avery, William Falls, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Syracuse: In 1839, Harriet Powell arrived in Syracuse where she was held in slavery by an owner from Mississippi. Aided in her escape, she spent time at the home of Gerrit Smith where she met Smith’s cousin, Elizabeth Cady (Stanton). A fugitive from Tennessee, the Rev. Jermain Loguen settled in Syracuse in 1840 and opened his home at 293 East Genesee Street as an Underground Railroad station and “Fugitive Aid Society.” In 1845, the Rev. Samuel May became pastor of the Unitarian Church in Syracuse and opened his home as an Underground Railroad station. In October 1851, Black and White abolitionists help rescue fugitive slave William “Jerry” Henry from federal officers. Nineteen people were indicted for helping Henry, but only one was convicted. Enoch Reed, a black rescuer, died during appeals. Edmonia Highgate was a young Black woman who left Syracuse following the Emancipation Proclamation to teach the newly freed slaves in the South.

Albany and Troy: In 1794, two enslaved women and a man were hanged on the northwest corner of Pearl and State Street in Albany. Their executions were intended to serve as a deterrent to all slaves. Pinkster was Afro-Dutch cultural and religious festival dating from the 17th century. In 1811, the celebration of Pinkster was outlawed by the Albany Common Council. Nathaniel Paul, the abolitionist minister of the First African Baptist Church in Albany was a strong advocate for the Wilberforce Colony, the free black colony in Canada. In the 1830s, Paul traveled abroad to raise money for anti-slavery activities, including aid to refugees. Stephen Myers, a former slave, was called the state’s best Underground Railroad station master. In the 1840s, he published Albany’s *Northern Star and Freeman’s Advocate*. With Samuel Ringgold Ward, Myers later published the *Impartial Citizen*. He served also as a lobbyist for anti-slavery causes at the state capitol. In 1846, the Rev. Charles T. Torrey, an abolitionist and editor of

the anti-slavery newspaper, *The Patriot*, died in prison while serving a six year sentence for aiding fugitives. He claimed to have helped nearly four hundred escaped slaves reach freedom. In 1850, Gen. William Chaplin, an editor of *The Patriot*, was arrested for aiding fugitives. Local abolitionists included E.C. Delavan, Dr. J. C. Jackson, and Lydia Mott.

Other Upstate New York Historic Sites in the struggle to end slavery: In Wyoming County, the Rev. Ralston W. Lyman, Horatio N. Waldo operator of a woolen mill, and Col. Charles O. Shepard and Samuel Tilden helped escaped slaves or served as conductors on the underground railroad. Katherine Harris, a free black abolitionist, founded the AME Zion Church in Jamestown. She sometimes harbored as many as seventeen escaped slaves in the attic of her home. In the 1850s, the Womens' Anti-Slavery Society of Ellington conducted sewing-circles in the Jamestown area to supply clothes, bedding and other necessities to fugitives. In 1844, John W. Jones escaped from slavery in Virginia. Jones became an Underground Railroad station master in Elmira and helped hundreds of slaves reach freedom. He often used an actual railroad, the Northern Central Railroad, to get refugees into Canada. Beriah Green's Oneida Institute in Oneida County was a 19th Century school for whites, blacks and Indians. Graduates include Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Jermain Loguen. In 1832 Green transformed the school into a center of abolitionism. In 1840s abolitionist Gerrit Smith sold over 140,000 acres of Adirondack Woodland near Petersboro in Essex County, in forty acre plots for one dollar each, to poor blacks and whites. Throughout the Adirondack range are small enclaves with names like Timbuktu, Blacksville, and derisively named nigger hill, nigger lake, and nigger pond. Towns like Witherbee, Northhampton, and North Elba (John Brown's burial site) have significant black populations by the 19th century.