During the autumn of 1836, a slaveholder by the name of Bacon Tate, from the State of Tennessee, came to the
north in search of fugitives from slavery. On his arrival at Buffalo he heard two of the most valuable of the slaves
that he was in pursuit of were residing in St. Catharine’s, in Upper Canada, some twenty-five miles from Buffalo.
Bacon Tate was a man who had long been engaged in the slave-trade, and previous to that had been employed as a
Negro-driver. In these two situations he had gained the name of being the most complete “Negro-breaker” in that
part of Tennessee where he resided. He was as unfeeling and as devoid of principle as a man could possibly be

Stanford and his little family were as happily situated as fugitives can be, who make their escape to Canada in
the cold season of the year. Tate, on his arrival at Buffalo, took lodgings at the Eagle Tavern, the best house at that
time in the city. And here he began to lay his plans to catch and carry back into slavery those men and women who
had undergone so much to get their freedom. He soon became acquainted with a colored woman, who was a servant
in the hotel, and who was as unprincipled as himself. This woman was sent to St. Catharine’s, to spy out the
situation of Stanford’s family. Under the pretense of wishing to get board in the family, and at the same time
offering to pay a week’s board in advance, she was taken in. After remaining with them three or four days, the spy
returned to Buffalo, and informed Tate how they were situated. By the liberal use of money, Tate soon found those
who were willing to do his bidding. A carriage was hired, and four men employed to go with it to St. Catharine’s,
and to secure their victims during the night.

The carriage, with the kidnappers, crossed the Niagara river at Black Rock, on Saturday evening, about seven
o’clock, and went on its way towards St. Catharine’s; no one suspecting in the least that they were after fugitive
slaves. About twelve o’clock that night they attacked Stanford’s dwelling by breaking in the door. They found the
family asleep, and of course met with no obstacle.

The carriage re-crossed the river, at the same place, the next morning at sunrise, and proceeded to Buffalo,
where it remained a short time, and after changing horses and leaving some of its company, it proceeded on its
journey. The carriage being closely covered, no one had made the least discovery as to its contents. But some time
during the morning, a man, who was neighbor to Stanford came on an errand, and finding the house deserted, and
seeing the most of the family’s clothes lying on the floor and stains of blood, soon gave the alarm, and the
neighbors started in every direction, to see if they could find the kidnappers. One man got on the track of the
carriage, and followed it to the ferry at Black Rock, where he heard that it had crossed some three hours before. He
went on to Buffalo, and gave the alarm to the colored people of that place. The colored people of Buffalo are noted
for their promptness in giving aid to the fugitive slave. The alarm was given just as the bells were ringing for
church. I was in company with five or six others, when I heard that a brother slave with his family had been seized
and dragged from his home during the night previous. We started on a run for the livery-stable, where we found as
many more of our own color trying to hire horses to go in search of the fugitives. There were two roads which the
kidnappers could take, and we were at some loss to know which to take ourselves, and so divided our company, one
half taking the road to Erie, the other taking the road leading to Hamburg. I was among those who took the latter.

We traveled on at a rapid rate, until we came within half a mile of Hamburgh Corners, when we met a man on
the side of the road on foot, who made signs to us to stop. We halted for a moment, when he informed us that the
wagon that we were in pursuit of was at the public house. We proceeded to the tavern, where we found the
wagon standing in front of the door, with a pair of fresh horses ready to proceed on their journey. The kidnappers,
seeing us coming, took their victims into a room, and locked the door and fastened down the windows. We all
dismounted, fastened our horses, and entered the house. We found four or five persons in the bar-room, who
seemed to rejoice as we entered.

One of our company demanded the opening of the door, while others went out and surrounded the house. The
kidnappers stationed one of their number at the door, and another at the window. They refused to let us enter the
room, and the tavern-keeper, who was more favorable to us than we had anticipated, said to us, “Boys, get into the
room in any way that you can; the house is mine, and I give you the liberty to break in through the door or
window.” This was all that we wanted, and we were soon making preparations to enter the room at all hazards. One
of our company, who had obtained a crow-bar, went to the window, and succeeded in getting it under the sash, and
soon we had the window up, and the kidnappers, together with their victims, in full view. As soon as they saw that we were determined to rescue the slaves at all hazards, they gave up, one of their number telling us that we might “come in.”

The door was thrown open, and we entered, and there found Stanford seated in one corner of the room, with his hands tied behind him, and his clothing, what little he had on, much stained with blood. Near him was his wife, with her child, but a few weeks old, in her arms. Neither of them had anything on except their night-clothes. They had both been gagged, to keep them from alarming the people, and had been much beaten and bruised when first attacked by the kidnappers. Their countenances lighted up the moment we entered the room. Most of those who made up our company were persons who had made their escape from slavery, and who knew its horrors from personal experience, and who had left relatives behind them. And we knew how to “feel for those in bonds as bound with them.”

After an hour and a half’s drive, we found ourselves in the city of Buffalo. The excitement which the alarm had created in the morning had broken up the meetings of the colored people for that day; and on our arrival in the city we were met by some forty or fifty colored persons. On our arrival in the city, we learned that the man who had charge of the carriage and fugitives when we caught up with them, returned to the city immediately after giving the slaves up to us, and had informed Tate of what had occurred. Tate immediately employed the sheriff and his posse to re-take the slaves. News soon come to us that the sheriff, with his under officers, together with some sixty or seventy men who were at work on the canal, intended to re-take the slaves when we should attempt to take them to the ferry to convey them to Canada.

About four we started for Black Rock ferry, which is about three miles below Buffalo. We had in our company some fifty or more able-bodied, resolute men, who were determined to stand by the slaves, and who had resolved, before they left the city, that if the sheriff and his men took the slaves, they should first pass over their dead bodies.

A mile below the city, the sheriff and his men surrounded us. The sheriff came forward, and read something purporting to be a “Riot Act,” and at the same time called upon all good citizens to aid him in keeping the “peace.” This was a trick of his, to get possession of the slaves. His men rushed upon us with their clubs and stones and a general fight ensued (started). Our company had surrounded the slaves, and had succeeded in keeping the sheriff and his men off. We fought, and at the same time kept pushing on towards the ferry.

In the midst of the fight, a little white man made his appearance among us, and proved to be a valuable friend. His name was Pepper; and he proved himself a pepper to the sheriff and his posse that day. He was a lawyer; and as the officers would arrest any of our company, he would step up and ask the officer if he had a “warrant to take that man;” and as none of them had warrants, and could not answer affirmatively, he would say to the colored man, “He has no right to take you; knock him down.” The command was no sooner given than the man would fall. If the one who had been arrested was not able to knock him down, some who were close by, and who were armed with a club or other weapon, would come to his assistance.

After a hard-fought battle, of nearly two hours, we arrived at the ferry, the slaves still in our possession. Here another battle was to be fought, before the slaves could reach Canada. The boat was fastened at each end by a chain, and in the scuffle for the ascendancy, one party took charge of one end of the boat, while the other took the other end. The blacks were commanding the ferryman to carry them over, while the whites were commanding him not to. While each party was contending for power, the slaves were pushed on board, and the boat shoved from the wharf. Many of the blacks jumped on board of the boat, while the whites jumped on shore. And the swift current of the Niagara soon carried them off, amid the shouts of the blacks, and the oaths and imprecations of the whites. We on shore swung our hats and gave cheers, just as a reinforcement came to the whites. Seeing the odds entirely against us in numbers, and having gained the great victory, we gave up without resistance, and suffered ourselves to be arrested by the sheriff’s posse.

On Monday, at ten o’clock, we were all carried before Justice Grosvenor; and of the forty who had been committed the evening before, twenty-five were held to bail to answer to a higher court. When the trials came on, we were fined more or less from five to fifty dollars each. Thus ended one of the most fearful fights for human freedom that I ever witnessed. The reader will observe that this conflict took place on the Sabbath, and that those who were foremost in getting it up were officers of justice. The plea of the sheriff and his posse was, that we were breaking the Sabbath by assembling in such large numbers to protect a brother slave and his wife and child from being dragged back into slavery, which is far worse than death itself.