

**Hornbeck Family Houses  
38 and 40 Jefferson Street  
Auburn, New York**

**Significance: Homes of freedom seeker (Sebeo Hornbeck) and African American community leaders (including John Hornbeck, barber, and Stephen Murray, postal worker)**



Sebeo and Mary Hornbeck House, 40 Jefferson Street (gray house on left)  
John and Cornelia Hornbeck House, 38 Jefferson Street (pink house in middle)  
Looking southeast, April 2005  
Photo by Tanya Warren



Sebeo and Mary Hornbeck House, 40 Jefferson Street  
Looking east, April 2005  
Photo by Tanya Warren

These Hornbeck-Murray houses represent four important themes:

1. the settlement of African Americans in Auburn on the north side of Genesee Street, as they expanded beyond the original “New Guinea” settlement located between the Owasco Outlet and Osborne Street (once called Mechanic Street).
2. the earliest settlement in Auburn of freedom seekers from the South. Sebeo Hornbeck, who listed his birthplace in the 1860 census as Maryland, may have been a freedom seeker. He arrived in Auburn about 1840, near the beginning of Underground Railroad activity in Auburn.
3. the continuity of African American families in Auburn. Several generations of Hornbecks and Murrays resided in Auburn, from the 1830s until at least the early twentieth century.
4. The economic success of many African Americans in Auburn. Sebeo Hornbeck worked as a laborer. Their sons John and Alfred became barbers. Between 1865 and 1870, their daughter, Cornelia, married Stephen Murray, who became the first African American clerk in the post office in Auburn.

These Hornbeck houses were very difficult to locate, because Auburn addresses in this area changed three times. As houses continued to be built on the large blocks between here and Genesee Street, more addresses were added on Jefferson Street. A deed search, however, revealed a clear title to the property going back directly to the Hornbecks, who first acquired these lots in 1854.

In 1854, Thomas Howe sold lot 26, as identified on the Lewis Clark map of 1835, to Sebeo Hornbeck and his son John Hornbeck. (See attached deeds.) Tracing deed ownership from the Hornbecks to current owners, and following street number changes through city directories and Auburn’s 9/11 conversion directory, we can identify Sebeo Hornbeck’s house as 40 Jefferson Street and John Hornbeck’s house as 38 Jefferson Street. As reported by Tanya Warren, who did the research on these houses, “lot measurements still reflect the division in lot 26 [from the original Hornbeck deeds] down to the present day and match the original map exactly. The “Laneway” in the map is now seen as a wider gap between Sebeo’s house and the next house to the north.” Later in the century, John Hornbeck’s son owned the house north of Sebeo Hornbeck’s home. Other African American families owned several more houses in this block, on the same side of the street as the Hornbeck homes.<sup>1</sup>

The first African Americans in Auburn came as some of the first settlers. They were counted as slaves of John Hardenburgh, who later gave them land along the west side of the Owasco outlet, between the outlet and Mechanic (now Osborne) Street, just north of the bridge. By the 1830s, however, Auburn was expanding west along the Seneca Turnpike and north toward the prison. Here, most of Auburn’s people—whether black or white, rich or poor—settled.

Among them was Sebeo Hornbeck, who appeared as a free person of color in the 1840 Auburn Census. He probably arrived shortly before the census was taken, since the 1855 census reported that he had lived in Auburn for 15 years. Sebeo Hornbeck was probably born about 1785 in Maryland. (He reported his birthplace to the census taker in 1850 as New York, but this was just before passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, when reporting accurately your place of birth to a

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Tanya Warren for such careful detective work.

Sites Relating to the Underground Railroad, Abolitionism, African American Life

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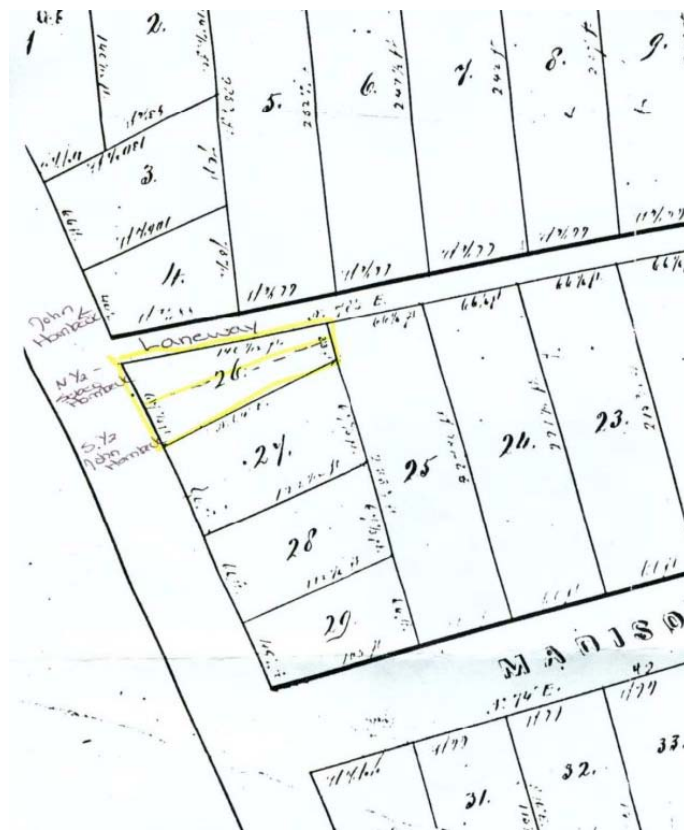
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2004-05

federal official, if you were born in slavery, might jeopardize your freedom. In 1855, Sebeo Hornbeck left his birthplace blank. In 1860, he reported that he had been born in Maryland.) If he was born in Maryland, he was one of the earliest documented African Americans born in the South to settle in Cayuga County. Quite likely, he arrived on the Underground Railroad.

By 1850, Sebeo Hornbeck was 65 years old. He and his wife, Mary, age 51 (who reported her birthplace as Rhode Island), had four children at home: John, 22, a barber; Sarah, 19; Alfred, 15, a barber; and Cornelia, 8. Several children may have died or moved away, for the 1865 census reported that Mary had been the mother of eleven children. Sebeo and Mary Hornbeck also had two boarders in 1850: George Swartz, age 32, a barber, and Dean Blufield, age 30, a laborer.

On April 2, 1850, Sebeo Hornbeck made a contract with Thomas Howe. When it was “fully performed,” in return for \$62.50, he received the north half of lot 26, at what is now 40 Jefferson Street, in a deed recorded March 31, 1854 (Book 87, p. 471-472). At the same time, recorded in the same deed, John Hornbeck “of Skaneateles,” then 26 years old, received the south half of the same lot, now 38 Jefferson Street. (The 1855 and 1860 census listed John and Cornelia Hornbeck and their children in Springport.)



1835 Lewis Clark Map of Jefferson St. (going SE to NW)

Lot 26 on this 1835 was divided into two sections.

The north half was Sebeo Horbeck's. The south half went to John Hornbeck.

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W.W. Richie, *Map of Auburn*, 1871

Note Lot 16, divided into two sections.

Sebeo and Mary Hornbeck House is the north half.  
John and Cornelia Hornbeck House is the south half.

. In 1855, Sebeo Hornbeck was 69 years old. Mary was 55. The only child left at home was their youngest, Cornelia, age 14. By 1860, Sebeo (now 76, born in Maryland), Mary (62, who listed her birthplace as New Jersey), and Cornelia (18, born in New Jersey) still lived in the same house.

By 1865, Sebeo Hornbeck had died. Mary, age 65, was now listed as “owner of land.” John, age 35 and still a barber, and Cornelia, age 30, had returned from Springport. They lived in the same house with his mother, Mary, and his sister, Cornelia, age 22. John and Cornelia had two children: Frank, age 12, and Alfred, 6. A niece, Jane Buck, age 14, also lived in their household, as did Stephen Murray, a laborer, age 27. In 1865, John was listed as an owner of land worth \$1000. Perhaps this included both these houses, and they rented out one of them.

John’s brother, Alfred, age 29, and also a barber, lived with his wife, Susan, age 28, in a boarding house that included John Stewart, one of Harriet Tubman’s brothers, and his new wife, Milla.

By 1870, John and Cornelia Hornbeck had three children: Frank, 17, now a barber; Alfred, 12; and a new son, Frederick, 4. Mary Hornbeck, age 67, still lived with them, but Cornelia Hornbeck had married Stephen Murray. The Murray family moved into the former Sebeo Hornbeck house on the north half of lot 26 at 40 Jefferson Street. Stephen, age 35, worked as a laborer. Cornelia,

24, kept house for their new son, Louis, four months old, and her father-in-law, Isaac Murray, age 60.

In March 1877, Stephen Murray was appointed a clerk in the U.S. Post Office in Auburn. He worked there into the early twentieth century and became the oldest employed clerk in the office.<sup>2</sup>

By 1880, the census taker listed Stephen Murray as 39 years old and a clerk in the post office. Cornelia Murray, 34 was keeping house for her husband, five children (Louie, age 10; Archie, 8; William H, 6; and Mary, 5), and her father-in-law, Stephen Murray (born, like his son, in Massachusetts) and her mother, Mary Hornbeck, age 81. Next door, her brother John, age 48 was a barber, living with his wife Cornelia, and their son, Frederick. They shared the house with John's brother, Frank, also a barber, age 27, and Frank's wife, also named Cornelia, and their children, Maude M., 3; John, 2; and George J., six months.

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<sup>2</sup> *Auburn Souvenir: New York State Association of Letter Carriers: Fifth Annual Convention 1904* (Auburn: Knapp, Peck & Thomson, 1904). Thanks to Mary Gilmore and Anthony Gero for finding this information.



S. B. MURRAY—Assistant Mailing Clerk  
Oldest clerk in the office  
Appointed March 1, 1877

S.B. Murray

*Auburn Souvenir: New York State Association of Letter Carriers:  
Fifth Annual Convention 1904*

(Auburn: Knapp, Peck & Thomson, 1904).

Courtesy of Seymour Library

Research by Mary Gilmore and Anthony Gero.

LAST	FIRST	Town	YEAR	Property/Lot #	ACRES	REAL-\$	PERS-\$	TOTAL-\$	MISC.
Hornbeck	Sebeo	Auburn	1850	Shanty	Jefferson	0.50		0.50	
Hornbeck	Sebeo	Auburn	1851	H/L	Jefferson	150.00		150.00	
Hornbeck	Sebeo	Auburn	1852	H/L	Jefferson	150.00		150.00	
Hornbeck	Sebeo	Auburn	1853	H/L	Jefferson	150.00		150.00	
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1853						no other data
Hornbeck	Sebeo	Auburn	1854	H/L	Jefferson	150.00		150.00	
Hornbeck	Sebeo	Auburn	1857	H/L	Jefferson	150.00		150.00	no entry '55-'56
Hornbeck	Sibbie	Auburn	1860	H/L	Jefferson	0.50		0.50	
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1860	H/L	Jefferson	100.00		100.00	
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1861	H/L	3rd ward	100.00		100.00	Paid by John H.
Hornbeck	Estate (Sebeo)	Auburn	1861		3rd ward	250.00	100.00	350.00	Paid by John H.
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1864	Jefferson	H/L	200.00		200.00	
Hornbeck	Sebeo	Auburn	1864	Jefferson	H/L	25.00		25.00	
Hornbeck	Estate (Sebeo)	Auburn	1866	H/L	3rd ward	50.00		50.00	Paid by John H.
Hornbeck	Estate (Sebeo)	Auburn	1868	Jefferson	H/L	100.00		100.00	
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1873	18 Jefferson	H/L	250.00		250.00	
Hornbeck	Mary (wife Sebeo)	Auburn	1873	14 Jefferson	H/L	75.00		75.00	
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1874	H/L	18 Jeff.	575.00		575.00	
<b>Hornbeck</b>	<b>John</b>	<b>Auburn</b>	<b>1874</b>	<b>18 Jefferson</b>	<b>H/L</b>	<b>575.00</b>		<b>575.00</b>	
Hornbeck	Mary (wife Sebeo)	Auburn	1874	14 Jefferson	H/L	150.00		150.00	
Hornbeck	Mary (wife Sebeo)	Auburn	1878	H/L	14 Jeff.	200.00		200.00	
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1878	H/L	16 Jeff.	300.00		300.00	
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1882	28 Jefferson	H/L	300.00		300.00	
<b>Hornbeck</b>	<b>Mary (wife Sebeo)</b>	<b>Auburn</b>	<b>1882</b>	<b>30 Jefferson</b>	<b>H/L</b>	<b>400.00</b>		<b>400.00</b>	
Hornbeck	Mary (wife Sebeo)	Auburn	1883	30 Jefferson	H/L	300.00		300.00	
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1884	28 Jefferson	H/L	300.00		300.00	
Hornbeck	Mary (wife Sebeo)	Auburn	1884	30 Jefferson	H/L & residence	400.00		400.00	
Hornbeck	John	Auburn	1891	28 Jefferson	H/L	400.00		400.00	
Hornbeck	Mary (wife Sebeo)	Auburn	1891	30 Jefferson	H/L	400.00		400.00	

**Tanya Warren, April 2005**

### **38 Jefferson St., Auburn, NY (previously 36)**

**Current Owner:** Thomas Redmond & Charlene A. Angotti

Tax Map # 115.59-1-38

Book 747, p. 94

Date purchased: 29 Sept 1987

Grantor: Cuddeback

#### **DiMora to Cuddeback**

Book 501, p. 121

Date purchased: 11 Aug 1976

#### **Tutino to DiMora**

City Book 65, p. 563

Date: 28 Sept 1929

Description excerpts:

All that parcel on Lot 26 of Lewis Clark map being 33.66 feet wide on the east side, 135 feet deep and 16.5 feet wide in rear, bounded south by John Holliday's lot (1865), west by Jefferson St., north by the north half of Lot 26 conveyed to Sebeo Hornbeck 31 Mar 1854. Being the same as conveyed to Tutino by Parrino 14 Sept 1921 in City Book 54, p. 484.

#### **Maude Flanagan to Tutino**

City Book 50, p. 356

Date: 20 Nov 1918

Description Excerpts:

All that parcel on Lot 26 of Lewis Clark map being 33.66 feet wide on the east side, 135 feet deep and 16.5 feet wide in rear, bounded south by John Holliday's lot (1865), west by Jefferson St., north by the north half of Lot 26 conveyed to Sebeo Hornbeck 31 Mar 1854, east by Lot 25, being the same premises conveyed to Cornelia Hornbeck by Catherine Freeman 13 Nov 1865 and recorded in Book 111, p. 201 and being the same as conveyed to Maude Flanagan by Augustus Hornbeck and wife by deed dated 21 Oct 1918 with John Hornbeck, Willard Hornbeck, Alfred Hornbeck and Jennie Hornbeck.

#### **Catherine Freeman of Auburn to Cornelia Hornbeck of Springport**

Book 111, p. 201

Date: 13 Nov 1865

Description Excerpts:

For \$500 all that certain ½ of Lot 26 on a map of Lewis Clark, said lot on the east side of Jefferson St in Auburn and is about 33.66 feet wide on Jefferson and about 135 deep and 16.5 feet wide in rear being bounded south by John Holliday's lot, west by Jefferson, north by the north ½ of said lot deeded to Sebeo Hornbeck on 31 March 1854 and east by lot 25.

Note: On the same day, in Book 111, p. 200, John and Cornelia Hornbeck of Springport sell to Catherine Freeman of Auburn for \$500, same property as described above.

#### **Thomas and Sarah Howe of Auburn to John Hornbeck of Skaneateles**

Book 87, p. 471-472

Date: 31 March 1854

For \$62.50, all that certain ½ of lot 26 on the east side of Jefferson St. (south ½), etc.

This deed is made pursuant to a contract made between Thomas Howe and Sebeo Hornbeck on April 2, 1850 which has been fully performed on the part of said Sebeo Hornbeck.

## **40 Jefferson St (previously 38)**

**Current Owner:** Pamela A. Tinti  
 Tax Map # 115.59-1-37  
 Book 783, p. 267  
 Date purchased: April 26, 1989  
 Grantor: Julia Stefaniw

**Carmello Signorelli to John and Julia Stefaniw**  
 City Book 91, p. 267  
 Date purchased: April 5, 1951

**Luciano Signorelli to Carmello Signorelli**  
 City Book 90, p. 7  
 Date purchased: 30 Jan 1950

**Matteo Carnicelli to Luciano Signorelli**  
 City Book 64, p. 279  
 Date purchased: Aug 1 1928  
 Description extracts:

North ½ of lot 26 bounded on the south by the south ½ of lot 26, etc. being the same as conveyed to Sebeo Hornbeck by Thomas Howe in 1854. Also being the same premises as conveyed to Matteo Carnicelli by Stephen B. and Cornelia (Hornbeck) Murray by deed dated Jan 24, 1920.

**Stephen B. and Cornelia Murray of Rochester, NY to Matteo and Margaret Carnicelli**  
 City Book 52, p. 86  
 Date: 4 Jan 1920  
 Description extracts:

North ½ of lot 26 bounded on the south by the south ½ of lot 26, etc. being the same as conveyed to Sebeo Hornbeck by Thomas Howe in 1854, for \$1.00 to the Carnicelli's, tenants in kind. Also being the same as conveyed to Cornelia Murray by John Hornbeck and wife by deed dated Mar 31, 1890 in City Book 23, p. 380.

**John and Cornelia Hornbeck of Auburn to Cornelia Murray of Auburn**  
**City Book 23, p. 380-81 (see note below)**

Date: March 31, 1890  
 Description extracts:

For \$75, all that certain north ½ of Lot # 26 on a map, etc., being 33.66 feet wide on Jefferson St., about 135 feet deep and 16.5 feet wide in the rear, being bounded south by the south ½ of said lot deeded to John Hornbeck on March 31, 1854; west by by Jefferson St. and east by lot 25 and are the same premises conveyed to Sebeo Hornbeck by Thomas How, Jr. March 31, 1854 in Deed Book 87, p. 471. The interest of the party of the first part hereby inteded to be conveyed, is such as he owns as heir at law of said Sebeo Hornbeck and heir at law of deceased children of said Sebeo Hornbeck, deceased. Signed by the mark of John Hornbeck and the hand of Cornelia Hornbeck.

**Thomas and Sarah Howe of Auburn to Sebeo Hornbeck of Auburn**  
 Book 87, p. 471-472  
 Date: 31 March 1854

For \$62.50, all that north half of lot 26 on the east side of Jefferson, etc. This deed is made pursuant to a contract made between Thomas Howe and Sebeo Hornbeck on April 2, 1850 which has been fully performed on the part of said Sebeo Hornbeck.

**Note:** Dec 21, 1886, deed of **Georgette Minns of Syracuse and Ruth Jackson, heirs and next of kin of Deborah Depuy, deceased and Sarah Morris, a daughter of Sebeo Hornbeck, deceased to Cornelia Murray in City Book 23, p. 380**, for \$1, all that certain north ½ of Lot # 26 on a map, etc., being 33.66 feet wide on Jefferson St., about 135 feet deep and 16.5 feet wide in the rear, being bounded south by the south ½ of said lot deeded to John Hornbeck on March 31, 1854; west by by Jefferson St. and east by lot 25 and are the same premises conveyed to Sebeo Hornbeck by Thomas How, Jr. March 31, 1854 in Deed Book 87, p. 471, and being the same premises of which Sebeo Hornbeck, deceased, died seized, and which were conveyed to him by Thomas How, etc.

**Note: County Tax Sale**

City Book 21, p. 649-650

Date: Oct 3, 1888

Description:

County of Cayuga to Cornelia Murray, occupant: You are hereby notified that at the annual sale of lands by the treasurer for delinquent taxes thereon, the following described land, viz, Auburn City, 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, Jefferson Street, East side, Lot 30 Mary Hornbeck-bounded north 140.7 feet by a lane; east 16.6 by Hardwick; south 135 feet by John Hornbeck and west 33.8 feet by the east line of Jefferson St. was sold for such delinquency to Stephen B. Murray, highest bidder, for the sum of \$6.65 being the amount of tax, expenses and interest upon said land to the day of said sale.

Stephen B. Murray, upon being duly sworn, says that on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of July, 1889, he served the foregoing notice upon Cornelia Murray, the occupant of said premises and that such service was made by delivering personally, etc.

This indenture made this 4<sup>th</sup> day of October 1889 between Horace Cook, county treasurer and Stephen B. Murray of Auburn...whereas such taxes of \$3.51 were in arrears and not paid and against Mary Hornbeck on the land hereafter described...do now convey to the party of the 2<sup>nd</sup> part all that parcel in Auburn City, 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, Jefferson Street, East side, Lot 30 of Mary Hornbeck-bounded north 140.7 feet by a lane; east 16.6 by Hardwick; south 135 feet by John Hornbeck and west 33.8 feet by the east line of Jefferson St. excepting and reserving thereout the undivided 1/5 part thereof, heretofore redeemed from such sale by John Hornbeck for himself as heir at law of Sebeo Hornbeck, Alfred Hornbeck and Catherine Owens, to have & to hold, etc.

**William Hosmer House**  
**29 Washington Street**  
**Auburn, New York**

**Significance: Home of Abolitionist Editor, Author, and Underground Railroad Supporter**



William Hosmer House  
 Looking west, May 2005

Influenced by ideals of Christian perfectionism and believing that it was both possible and necessary to implement God's laws on earth, William Hosmer was a nationally important figure, both as editor and author. Hosmer was also part of the tightly-knit abolitionist and Underground Railroad network in Auburn, centered around the Seward-Wright-Underwood-Fitch families.

As editor of the *Northern Christian Advocate*, published at 16 Clark Street, Auburn, Hosmer believed that "holiness or moral purity is one of the most essential principles of the gospel, but slavery is a violation of that right." His radical abolitionist views alienated leaders of the Methodist General Conference and led him to establish, with the help of a sympathetic Methodist publication committee, a new abolitionist newspaper, the *Northern Independent*, published at 113 Genesee Street from 1856-65. Its motto was "No compromise with sin, no silent submission to wrong in church or state, a bold advocacy of all the moral issues of the age and especially of an uncompromising Christianity." In 1859, it had a circulation of 10,000. Copies of both of these papers are located in the Cayuga County Historian's Office.<sup>3</sup>

Hosmer's book, *The Higher Law in Its Relations of Civil Government, with Particular References to Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law* (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1852), was dedicated to William Henry Seward. Hosmer was not alone in advocating adherence to a higher law. (William Lloyd Garrison, in Boston, burned the U.S. Constitution because he thought it was a proslavery document, "an agreement with death and a covenant with hell.") As an Auburn resident, however, Hosmer may have had a particular influence on his neighbor, William Henry Seward, who gave a famous speech on the "higher law" in 1850, in opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act. In a second book, *Slavery and the Church* (Freeport, New York, 1853), Hosmer explored the connection between slavery and religion. He also edited the *Autobiography of*

<sup>3</sup> *Newspapers of Cayuga County*. [Check]

*Rev. Alvin Torry, First Missionary to the Six Nations and the Northwestern Tribes of British North America* (Auburn, 1864).

Both William Hosmer and his wife were interested in temperance and women's education, as well as antislavery. Mrs. Hosmer helped form a Martha Washington Society in Auburn in the 1840s, promoting the teetotal principle of temperance, i.e. abstinence from all forms of alcoholic consumption. William Hosmer was involved in trying to form a female college in Auburn.<sup>4</sup>

In February 1861, Martha Wright, who lived on Genesee Street not far from the Hosmers, wrote a letter to her sister, Lucretia Mott, clearly indicating that William Hosmer was part of the local abolitionist-Underground Railroad network that included the Wright, Seward, and Tubman families:

I called at Mrs. Seward's on my way home, [wrote Martha Wright]. D. [David Wright, her husband]...lent me a letter to shew them, enquiring after Harriet Tubman written by Chas. Mills of Syracuse, saying that she left Canistota en route to Auburn, & that a slaveholder was there the day before enquiring as to the possibility of retaking slaves here—Mr. Mills sd. they cd. learn nothing about Harriet & wished to know if she was here—He also sent a word of caution to fugitives here. D. sent the letter to Mr. Hosmer, & he read it [to] Harriets folks—She has not been heard from, but I told one of her slaves that I tho't most likely Mr. Smith had sent her to Canada.<sup>5</sup>

In 1877, Elliott Storke summed up William Hosmer's career in an article for the Cayuga County Historical Society. "His convictions were earnest and sincere," wrote Storke, "and at all times plainly expressed. He was an 'agitator and reformer' of no mean ability and as such always stood in the front ranks--boldly confronting the opponents of his opinions, and challenging their admiration by the firmness and consistency of his course. Slavery and intemperance were especially obnoxious to him, and no one ever contended against them with greater zeal and energy."<sup>6</sup>

Hosmer's unwavering commitment to equality and a higher spiritual law strengthened abolitionist sentiment not only among Methodists but also for his fellow townsman, William Henry Seward. Through Seward, this doctrine of a higher law became a powerful influence in national politics in the years immediately before the Civil War.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hall, 158, 287.

<sup>5</sup>Chas. Mills was Charles C.D.B. Mills, a Syracuse abolitionist. Martha Wright to Lucretia Mott, [February 1861], Garrison Papers, Smith College. From Seward and African Americans.

<sup>6</sup> Elliott G. Storke, "History of the Press of Cayuga County from 1798 to 1877," *Collections of Cayuga County Historical Society* Vol. 6-7: 269-70.

<sup>7</sup> Research by Joni Lincoln, Sheila Tucker, and Tanya Warren.

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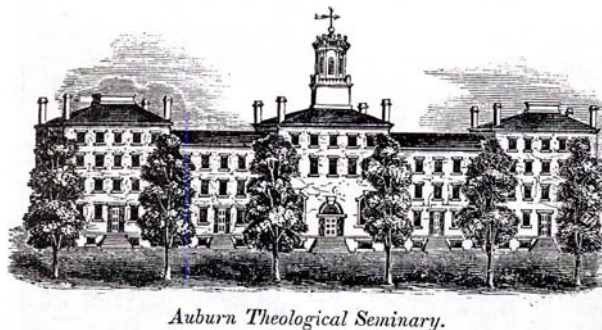
**Ezra A. Huntington House, c. 1861**  
**11 Seminary Street**  
**Auburn, New York**

**Significance: Represents abolitionist and Underground Railroad activity of Auburn Theological Seminary**



November 2004, Looking NE

Built in 1861 as a residence for Rev. Dr. E.A. Huntington, Professor of Biblical criticism at Auburn Theological Seminary, this building is the only remaining pre-Civil War structure of the Auburn Theological Seminary that once occupied this entire block. This house represents the national and international importance of this biracial Presbyterian seminary, as well as the impact of its students and teachers on abolitionism and the Underground Railroad. A hidden attic room may have been built as an Underground Railroad safe place, although no written documentation substantiates this.



From John W. Barber and Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the State of New York* (New York: S. Tuttle, 1842).

Founded in 1819 under the direction of President D.C. Lansing, Auburn Theological Seminary became, along with Union Seminary in New York City, one of the main centers for training Presbyterian ministers in the nineteenth century. In the debates over slavery, revivalism, and theology that divided many

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Protestant denominations in the pre-Civil War years, Auburn was in the eye of the hurricane. The early commitment of many of its students and faculty to abolitionism, as well as its willingness to accept African American students, placed it clearly in the camp of reformers and contributed to the division in 1837 of Presbyterians into separate northern and southern churches.

African American students included Andrew Harris, from the Cayuga Presbyterian parish, a graduate of Middlebury College, who preached in Philadelphia until his death in 1836., and Rev. Brother Holmes, who preached in Brooklyn in the 1860s.<sup>8</sup>

In March 1834, students at Auburn Theological Seminary started one of the first antislavery societies in New York State. By 1836, forty-two of the seventy-five students enrolled at Auburn (or 56 percent of the student body) belonged to the society, They held monthly prayer meetings, and “no discussions,” they assured the public, “have been held, . . . without the consent, either expressed or tacit, of the Faculty.” On July 30, 1836, the adopted the following resolutions, which they published in the *Friend of Man*, the newspaper of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society:

Resolved, That the existence of Slavery in this country, being hostile to the genius of our government and the spirit of the gospel—interfering vitally with the cause of human rights, and crippling the energies of the American Church, calls for the immediate, united and decisive action of every friend of God and man.

Resolved, That as prospective ministers of the cross, we feel ourselves imperatively called upon, while in a course of preparation for the vast responsibility of the holy office to which we aspire, “to remember those who are in bonds as bound with them”—to extend the sympathies and charities of our souls to every being created in God’s image, especially to those whose rights are wantonly outraged—to act on the firm ground of enlightened, Christian principle, and to take a deep and lively interest in all the moral questions which are agitating the religious community, and stand intimately connected with the salvation of men.

Resolved, That we regard the free and untrammelled discussion of the subject of Slavery as by no means “foreign to the purpose for which we are here assembled,” but on the contrary, as perfectly accordant with that purpose and a solemn duty which we owe ourselves, the millions of suffering colored brethren, and the church of God, in which we expect soon to become public teachers.

Resolved, That while we are unwilling to endorse all the language employed by the friends of immediate emancipation as *faultless*, we are prompt to say, as far as we are acquainted, that it exhibits in the main that spirit of love and adherence to moral principle which accords with the Gospel.

Resolved, That the measures of the Abolitionists instead of having a *tendency* to increase the severities of the masters towards the slaves, are designed and calculated to melt the oppressor’s heart, and restore the oppressed to the possession of their divinely chartered rights. Was Moses chargeable with the increase severity inflicted upon his brethren by their oppressors, when he demanded their immediate emancipation from Egyptian bondage?

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<sup>8</sup>Florence Pharis McIntoch, *History of Cayuga Village* (1927), 62; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 251-52. Thanks to Anthony Gerow for finding these references to Andrew Harris. Reference to “Rev. Mr. Holmes” is from Junius, “Brooklyn Correspondence,” *The Christian Recorder*, September 12, 1863. *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, July 30, 1852.

Resolved, That while we firmly adhere to our principles, relying on divine aid for success, we will study to cultivate a spirit of forbearance and kindness towards those who do not agree with us in sentiment, on this important and vital question.

T.T. Bradford, president.  
H.S. Redfield, Secretary.  
Auburn, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1836<sup>9</sup>

Because of Auburn Theological Seminary's importance, its ideas influenced debate throughout the Presbyterian General Conference. These abolitionist sentiments undoubtedly contributed to the split in the national body at its national meeting in Philadelphia the following year. There, issues of slavery combined with theological disputes led the General Conference to excise almost every presbytery in upstate New York from the national body.

In 1838, the student antislavery society was undoubtedly responsible for generating signatures on two antislavery petitions sent to Congress. The first was sent by students and professors of the Auburn Theological Seminary on February 12, 1838, and asked Congress to abolish slavery in Washington, D.C. and in the territories and to abolish the slave trade. It included two columns of signatures. Sheila Tucker, Cayuga County historian, checked these signatures against Seminary records and found the following names listed as either students or faculty at the Seminary:

Albert C. Willson  
Francis Child  
Edwin Reynolds  
Daniel Gibbs  
Lewis Hamilton  
E.B. Fancher  
Nehemiah Cobb Jr.  
Charles O. Mill  
Samuel C. Wilcox  
Henry Bannister  
O. Fraser  
Elliot H. Payson  
Ransom R. Kirt  
Erasmus M. Kellogg  
Horan M. Crasit  
William M. Hoyt  
Hannibal Smith  
John E. Claghorn

On a second petitions sent from Auburn in 1850, more than half of the signers were associated with the seminary, including the following:

Amon Spencer  
Sidney H. Barteau  
Francis H. Sulye  
J.E. Blakely  
A. Fergrison  
H.B. Morgan  
Alfred M. Stowe  
John Campbell  
Richard G. Keyes  
T.D. Austin  
William A. Niles

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<sup>9</sup> *Friend of Man*, August 11, 1836.

Daniel B. Lyons  
 J.C. Moses  
 Robert H. Booth  
 Martin L. Gaylord  
 William A. Fox  
 Edward D. Morris  
 C.L. Adams  
 David E. Blair  
 George G. Smith  
 Stephen Summix  
 A.H. Lilly

Some of these, perhaps most of them, carried their antislavery commitments into work outside the Seminary. In 1852, a student named Bascom was involved with the biracial abolitionist McGrawville College in Cortland County, where, reported Frederick Douglass, he delivered an address that “exhibited considerable talent; but the speaker labored so hard to say witty and pretty things, and went so far aside from his subject to make his attack on those ladies who wear the Bloomer Costume, as to show most clearly that he had mistaken his own qualifications, the character of his hearers, and the claims of the occasion.”<sup>10</sup>

Rev. Charles Anderson, who graduated from the Seminary in 1843 and went to the Sennett Congregational Church, where he and his wife, Elizabeth, used the parsonage as an active stop on the Underground Railroad. According to Anderson’s obituary, “so great an interest did he take in the Southern slave that his home in Sennett, while he was a pastor of a congregation there was made one of the underground stations for runaway bondsmen and much of his time was occupied in caring for the fugitives.”<sup>11</sup> In 1856, Harriet Eglin, freedom seeker from Maryland, stayed several months with the Andersons and wrote three letters to William Still, keeper of the main safe house in Philadelphia, which Still published in his 1872 book, *The Underground Railroad*.<sup>12</sup>

Faculty members sympathetic to abolitionism most likely included Samuel Miles Hopkins, professor of church history, who arrived at the Seminary in 1847. His sister, Sarah Bradford, worked in 1868 with Harriet Tubman to record and publish the first book-length version of Tubman’s life history.<sup>13</sup>

The Rev. E.A. Huntington came to the Auburn Theological Seminary in 1855 as professor of Biblical criticism. A graduate of Union College, he had been pastor of Third Presbyterian Church in Albany for eighteen years before coming to Auburn. For most of his tenure, Huntington served not only as a faculty member but as virtual president of the seminary. He retired in 1893, at the age of 80, but he remained active as professor emeritus until his death in 1901.

Built in 1861, Huntington’s house on Seminary Avenue<sup>14</sup> served as his residence from then until his death in 1901. The house is stucco, with wide unsoffited eaves. It has a large gable with asymmetrical wings on each side and another wing to the rear. Windows on the first and second floor have flat lintels. Those on the front of the main gable have six-over-six sashes. Several windows on the wings have four-over-four sashes. Some are side-by-side, with four-over-four sashes and a mullion down the middle. Simple Florentine windows in the attic gables reflect an Italianate influence, as do the porch supports.

<sup>10</sup> *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, July 30, 1852.

<sup>11</sup> Church records, as transcribed by Sheila Tucker; Obituary for Rev. Charles Anderson, *Auburn Daily Advertiser*, January 4, 1900; “Graduates and Students Auburn Theological Seminary,” *General Biographical Catalogue of Auburn Theological Seminary, 1818-1918* (Auburn: Auburn Seminary Press, 1918), 85

<sup>12</sup> William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia, 1872), 221-23.

<sup>13</sup> *History of Cayuga County* (1908), 182.

<sup>14</sup> *History of Cayuga County*, 185.

In 1863, Rev. E. A. Huntington pronounced the benediction at the funeral of Morgan “Luke” Freeman, an African American barber born in slavery in 1803, who kept an Underground Railroad station in Auburn for 29 years.<sup>15</sup> Although we have found no other evidence connecting Huntington’s name with any abolitionist or Underground Railroad activity, the house does contain two intriguing hidden rooms with a cistern in the attic. Could these have been built as possible hiding places?

In 1903, James R. Cox, former law associated of William Henry Seward, recalled that “the fugitives that came to Auburn were, during the summer time, hidden in the Theological Seminary.”<sup>16</sup>

Research assistance by Sheila Tucker and Anthony Gero.

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<sup>15</sup> *Auburn Daily Advertiser*, April 11, 1863.

<sup>16</sup> James R. Cox interviewed by Elbert Wixom, “The Under Ground Railway in the Finger Lakes Country,” B.A. Thesis, Cornell, 1903, 30.