

Preface

In 1860, Harriet Tubman made her last trip to Dorchester County, Maryland. She wanted desperately to bring out her sister Rachel and Rachel's two children, Ben and Angerine. Although she waited for them in a wood, in a "blinding snow storm and a raging wind," they did not come. Rachel had died. Instead, Tubman brought out the Ennals family--Stephen and Maria and their three small children, six-year-old Harriet, four-year-old Amanda, and the three-month-old baby, along with a poor woman "in a delicate state," and a man named John.¹

The trip was one of the most harrowing journeys that Harriet had ever undertaken. She went first to the home of Thomas Garrett, a Quaker in Wilmington, Delaware, who felt that Harriet had "a special angel to guard her on her journey of mercy." Slave catchers, "wretches," were everywhere. Garrett gave Harriet ten dollars to hire a carriage to take Maria Ennals and the children to Chester County, perhaps to the home of Dr. Bartholomew Fussell or his niece Graceanna Lewis, a common destination.² When they reached Philadelphia, William Still, keeper of the main safe house there, reported that Harriet brought her party "out of the prison-house of bondage," "through great tribulation."³

Their trials were not over, however. It took them almost four weeks to reach Auburn from Thomas Garrett's house. Harriet suffered frostbite, and they were all physically exhausted. Arriving at one home where she had previously received aid, Harriet Tubman rapped to give her usual signal, only to find that a white man now occupied the building. She and her party hurried to a small island in the middle of a swamp, wading through the water with the baby in a basket, drugged with paregoric to keep it quiet, and hiding in the damp grass. Kate Clifford Larson, following Sarah Bradford's account, as told by Tubman herself, told what happened next:

Eventually a Quaker man appeared, "slowly walking along the solid pathway on the edge of the swamp." Tubman and the others, thinking he was "talking to himself," finally realized he was giving them instructions to get to his nearby barn, where a horse and wagon filled with provisions awaited them. A seemingly miraculous answer to Tubman's prayer, Bradford later wrote, "never seemed to strike her as at all strange or mysterious; her prayer was the prayer of faith, and she expected an answer."⁴

Hiding in the woods by day, they waited for Tubman to return with food. She would whistle or sing hymns to let them know she was there.

They finally reached Auburn in late December. On December 30, 1860, Martha Wright wrote to her daughter Ellen that people "had been expending our sympathies, as well as congratulations,

¹ Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, An American Hero* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), 185; William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia, 1872), 531.

² Thomas Garrett to William Still, 12th month, 1st day, 1860, quoted in William Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 531.

³ Kate Clifford Larson, email October 19, 2004; William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia, 1872), 530-31, <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/other/abl/etext/ugrr/ugrr.html>.

⁴ Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land*, tells the story of the Ennals family, 185-89; email October 19, 2004.

on seven newly arrived slaves that Harriet Tubman has just pioneered safely from the Southern part of Maryland.” They had “walked all night, carrying the little ones, and spread the comfort on the frozen ground, in some dense thicket, where they all hid.”⁵

This story illustrates in detail all the major components of a classic Underground Railroad story: secrecy, fear of slave catchers, hiding in swamps, hunger, help from Quakers, Tubman’s reliance on prayer, use of songs as signals, and finally safety in a northern white person’s home. So compelling were stories such as this one that, in the popular imagination, much of the Underground Railroad became associated with them and with Harriet Tubman herself. Mention the Underground Railroad today, and people think immediately of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. Nowhere is this truer than in Auburn, New York, where Harriet Tubman purchased a home in 1857 and lived from the early 1860s until the end of her long life in 1913.

Yet the name “Harriet Tubman” is not a synonym for the Underground Railroad. Tubman arrived in Auburn toward the end of a long period of Underground Railroad activism in Auburn and Cayuga County, upstate New York, and in the north in general. She came to Auburn because she found a well-organized network of both African Americans and European Americans who had supported the Underground Railroad since at least the mid-1830s.

This survey, entitled “Historic Sites Relating to the Underground Railroad, Abolitionism, and African American Life in Auburn and Cayuga County,” uncovered the beginnings of this much longer story. Sponsored by the City of Auburn Historic Resources Review Board, in conjunction with the Cayuga County Historian’s Office, the survey was funded by Preserve New York, a grant program of the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts. It was carried out from September 2004 to September 2005 under the direction of Judith Wellman, Director, Historical New York Research Associates.

With research support from people throughout Cayuga County and guidance from Cayuga County citizens, the project identified one hundred sites relating to these themes throughout Cayuga County, sixty of them in the City of Auburn. The project focused on standing buildings, but we did include descriptions of particularly important places for which no buildings exist, include sites relating to Tubman’s own family. Many more sites could be included as probable Underground Railroad sites, including farms of families whose names appeared as housing African Americans in at least two census records. Names and sites of people possibly affiliated with the Underground Railroad are listed on our project database, available on the web, even if sites related to them are no longer standing.

Focusing on extant buildings, the project nominated seven sites to the National Park Service’s Network to Freedom program (all of them accepted), seven sites to the National Register of Historic Places (of which four were accepted as of September 2005), and one more site to New York State’s Underground Railroad Heritage Trail. Through the efforts of the Howland Stone Store Museum, the entire village of Sherwood was also nominated as one of the Preservation League’s Seven to Save sites for 2006.

Results of this survey, including this report, all databases (more than 2500 names of all African Americans from every census between 1820 and 1870; a project database of more than 600 names of people directly associated with abolitionism and the Underground Railroad; and a list of

⁵ Martha Wright to Ellen Wright Garrison, December 30, 1860, Garrison Family Papers, Smith College, quoted in Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 189, 187, and Jean M. Humez, *Harriet Tubman*, 45-46.

sites related to abolitionists, freedom seekers, and the Underground Railroad in Auburn, as identified from city directories) will be available on the web through the Cayuga County GebWeb site and the Cayuga County Historian's Office. Copies of primary sources are available through local libraries and historical societies.

Harriet Tubman came to Auburn for a very good reason: People in Auburn and Cayuga County—both African Americans and European Americans—had been active on the Underground Railroad for twenty-five years before she settled there. The presence of William Henry Seward (and of Harriet and Nicholas Bogart, African Americans who worked for the Seward's for fifty years) linked Auburn's abolitionist community to events of national importance. The presence of Quakers in the central part of the county connected Cayuga County abolitionists to the Underground Railroad network in southeast Pennsylvania and Delaware associated with William Still, Bartholomew Fussell, and Thomas Garrett.

These buildings in Auburn and Cayuga County are extremely well documented. Some of them are associated with some of the most dramatic stories of the Underground Railroad, abolitionism, and African American life anywhere. Others document the lives of ordinary people who made it out of slavery to raise their families in relative safety and freedom. Still others tell the stories of European Americans who dedicated their lives to helping these freedom seekers and abolishing slavery throughout the nation.

Many of these sites, and the stories that go with them, have turned out to be of national significance, so the rewards will be, we hope, truly magnificent, worth all the energy that everyone has given, bringing attention not only to the Underground Railroad story in Auburn and Cayuga County and throughout New York State and the nation. In some cases, further work may identify more sites relating to the Underground Railroad, especially in Union Springs (where Daniel Anthony and George Howland, who hired Frederick Douglass at his wharf in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1840, might have been involved), Weedsport, Genoa, and Sterling. Research on local people listed in the project database who had African Americans living in their households for two or more census years might also prove useful.

As you drive through Cayuga County today, time folds back upon itself, in accordion-style pleats. You can't forget the past. You are tessered in a time warp. You hear yourself talking in a normal voice, but people around you speak of Harriet Tubman and Emily Howland as "Aunt Harriet" and "Miss Emily" as if these women might at any moment appear among us.

And, indeed, houses and their landscapes enhance that feeling. Walking down Chapman Avenue to the corner of Garrow Street, you see a streetscape created by freedom seekers and their Irish neighbors in the late 1860s, with small story-and-a-half or two story frame houses, most with gable ends to the street and small yards, many still inhabited by descendants of those families.

Near Port Byron, William O. Duvall's home and tenant house still stand on a point of land, surrounded by the Seneca River and marshy lowlands, with a road sign pointing toward "Hayti," the name given to the area by local people because Duvall hired so many African Americans to work on his farm.

Farther south, on roads that freedom seekers would surely have traveled, the landscape is stark and spare. Broad fields drop down in sweeping vistas to Cayuga Lake. You ride close to the sky.

Sites Relating to the Underground Railroad, Abolitionism, African American Life
Sponsored by Auburn Historic Resources Review Board
Cayuga County Historian's Office
Funded by Preserve New York (Preservation League of NYS and NYS Council on the Arts)
Coordinated by Historical New York Research Associates
2004-05

New York State markers remind you that you travel through old Cayuga Indian lands, along old Haudenosaunee pathways.

Using this report and the people of Cayuga County as guides, we invite you take both a virtual journey and a physical journey through this landscape, seeking out the buildings that still tell the stories of freedom seekers and those who helped them.

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This project is the work of a whole team of people, If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a whole county to conduct a survey of this magnitude, and the results are a tribute to the hard work of people throughout Auburn and Cayuga County. Their work and spirit shines on every page. Chief among them are Michael Long, Capital Improvement Program Manger for the City of Auburn, vision inspired this project and all of us from beginning to end, and Sheila Tucker, Cayuga County Historian, who enthusiastically supported this work, generously sharing her time and resources, coordinating local historians throughout the county and surveying local histories for every reference to the Underground Railroad, abolitionism, and African American life. We especially appreciate the support of the City of Auburn Historic Resources Review Board (including Michael Deming, Chairman, and members Ellen Clark, Betty Mae Lewis, David “Sam” Swan, James E. Hutchinson, Christina J. Selvek and Judith Bryant), who sponsored this project; Timothy Lattimore, Mayor of Auburn; the City Council of Auburn (including members Robert E. Hunter, Thomas D. McNabb, William F. Jacobs, and David J. Dempsey), and City Manager John L. Salomone, who gave an additional grant to this project for the summer of 2005.

Researchers for this project included Tanya Warren, whose work in property records was nothing less than astounding and whose database management formed the backbone for all our work; Judith Bryant, whose work in local oral histories and city directories connected Auburn’s nineteenth century African American history to the families who carry it on in the twentieth century; Rev. Paul Carter and Christine Carter, Curators of the Tubman Home, who graciously opened their facilities for our first two meetings of the Advisory Board and who cheered us onward through the whole year; Peter Wisbey, Director of the Seward House, who gave us a warm welcome at the Seward Home and shared his extensive research on African Americans and the Seward family; and members of the Board of the Howland Stone Store Museum in Sherwood (especially Bradley Mitchell, Brian Chappell, Trudy Buxenbaum, and Patricia White), who generously shared their time, research, and space to increase our understanding of the important role of the Howlands and Cayuga County Quakers. Many local historians provided inspiration to all of us, as they shared their knowledge and detailed research about events, buildings, and families, both African American and European American. Sheila Edmunds, Aurora Village Historian; Judy Furness, Ledyard Town Historian; Penny Helzer, Port Byron Village Historian; Mike Riley, Mentz Town Historian; Anthony Gero, Owasco historian, and Hallie Sweeting, Sterling Town Historian have been especially helpful. Jane Simkins provided amazingly detailed information about Quaker families and meetings in Cayuga County. Joni Lincoln produced an extensive report on Methodist minister William Hosmer. Audrey and Ken Mochel, pastors at the Auburn Unitarian Church, have generously shared their findings from the diary of John Austin, Unitarian minister in Auburn in the mid-nineteenth century.

Five consultants—Beth Crawford, of Crawford and Stearns, Architects and Preservation Planners; Kate Clifford Larson, author of *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, An American Hero*; Milton Sernett, Professor, African American Studies Department, Syracuse University; Mary Loe, of the State University of New York at Oswego; and Christopher Densmore, Curator of the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College--shared their

extensive knowledge and made this project a true joy. Doug Armstrong shared the work of his archeology students at the Tubman Home. Carrie Barrett, an intern from the State University of New York at Oswego, helped write nominations to the National Register and the Network to Freedom. Thanks to Bonnie Ryan for finding the drawing of freedom seekers from Maryland in William Still's *Underground Railroad* (1872) that we used on our cover. And then there is Bernie Corcoran, in a class by himself, who has (with the help of many people, including Bill Hecht and his superb scanned images) made the Cayuga County GenWeb site into the gold standard for all GenWeb sites. He has generously shared his skills both as a webmaster and as map maker.

No historical research project could ever succeed without keepers of the records, and Cayuga County has been blessed both with good records and cheerful and efficient keepers, including Sue Dwyer, Cayuga County Clerk; William Hulick, Director of Cayuga Records Retention Office; Bonnie Boughton, whose cheerful assistance with retrieving records made working in that office a pleasure; Alan Kozlowski, Director of the Real Property Tax Office; Sally Otis, Librarian and Hazard Library, Poplar Ridge; and Mary Gilmore, librarian at the Local History section of Seymour Library. Each of these has been so knowledgeable and so willing to take extra time to find just what we needed. Eileen McHugh, Director of the Cayuga Museum, supplied photos and the detailed manuscript biography of freedom seeker Jane Clark. Martha Lollis, of Cayuga Community College's local history room, has provided special assistance through census microfilms and access to local history materials, including newspapers. Meg Vanek and Jesse Kline, of the Cayuga County Department of Tourism, have faithfully given their support to this project throughout a whole year's worth of Advisory Board meetings.

Many, many thanks to owners who allowed us to nominate their houses to the National Register or the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, including Thomas and Jinny Bianconi, Judith Bryant, Stephen and Judy Colman, Richard and Luella Horseler, Edna Nagy, Frances M. Park, Fay and Louie Rood, Alison Van Dyke and William Downing, the Board of the Howland Stone Store Museum, the Board of the Seward Home, and the Trustees of the Sennett Federated Church. None of these nominations could go forward without their support.

Nancy Todd and Mark Peckham, of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, gave extensive and most welcome advice and support, as did Sheri Jackson, Diane Miller, and Barbara Tagger of the National Park Service's Network to Freedom Program. Their work and their input adds incalculable value to these local projects. The local Advisory Board for this project made each meeting a pleasure, truly an energizing experience. It has been a special pleasure to have the support of descendants of both freedom seekers and those who kept safe houses, including Helene Belt, Judith Bryant, Naomi Post Fletcher, Laberta Gaskins Greenlea, Pauline Copes Johnson, Donna Jones, James Livingston, and Erik Osborne.

Finally, the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts, through their Preserve New York grant program, have been a catalyst for so much of the Underground Railroad research, preservation, and tourism work in New York State. Without their vision and willingness to fund these initial and very basic cultural resource surveys, all the rest of the projects based on them—the National Register nominations, Network to Freedom nominations, Environmental Protection Fund grants, tourism brochures, signage programs, curriculum units, conferences, and all the programs that bring life to these stories in so many local communities—would not have been possible. Thank you.