

Prepared by the Oswego County Freedom Trail Commission and Committee, Chaired by Barbara Dix, Oswego County Historian

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Gioia Signs

Historical New York Research Network

Find more information about the Freedom Trail in Oswego County at the following places:

1. **Oswego County Historian's Office**
384 East River Road, Oswego
2. **Oswego County Historical Society**
135 East Third Street, Oswego
3. **H. Lee White Marine Museum**
Foot of West First St., Oswego
4. **Special Collections, Penfield Library**
State University of New York at Oswego
5. **Oswego Public Library**
120 East Second Street, Oswego
6. **Fulton Public Library**
160 South First Street, Fulton
7. **Pulaski Public Library**
North Jefferson Street, Pulaski
8. **Ainsworth Memorial Library**
6064 South Main Street, Sandy Creek

Sites marked with ● indicate existing structures. Sites marked with ● have lost their historic buildings. We have included a few of these to indicate the extent of the Freedom Trail network in Oswego County. For more information see www.oswego.edu/Acad_Dept/a_and_s/history/ugrr.



**OSWEGO COUNTY
FREEDOM TRAIL**

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The Underground Railroad in Oswego County



A Driving Tour



**OSWEGO COUNTY
FREEDOM TRAIL**



Gateway To Freedom
*Following the Freedom Trail
 in Oswego County, New York*

Before the Civil War, an estimated 1500 African Americans escaped each year from slavery. Many of them crossed into Canada through communities in upstate New York.

This tour introduces some of the many sites related to the Freedom Trail, abolitionism, and African American life in Oswego County, New York.

Before the Civil War, thousands of African American men, women, and children fled slavery, looking for freedom in the northern states or in Canada. Many of them came through Oswego County. Some of them headed for the City of Oswego, where ships could carry them across the lake to Kingston. Others went around the eastern end of the lake to cross the border at the St. Lawrence River. Still others decided to remain in Oswego County, where they settled in Oswego, Volney, and elsewhere.

The underground railroad was underground only in the sense that it was often (although not always) secret. Sheltered primarily by people of modest means, freedom seekers would hide in attics, kitchens, barns, or even woods. While men would transport fugitives from one place to another, women provided food and often clothing.

Both African Americans and whites maintained way stations for freedom seekers. In the city, African American barbers and sailors were especially active. Whites were often farmers, lawyers, business people, or homemakers. Although often vilified by pro-slavery people, freedom trail supporters were sustained by a network of abolitionists who worked through churches, political parties, and sympathetic families. Some areas, including the cities of Oswego and Fulton and the villages of Gilbert Mills, Mexico, and Port Ontario, were more active than others.

Whether African American or white, people who worked with the freedom trail were motivated by a commitment to freedom and to equality. They believed in the ideals of the Declaration of Independence, that "all men are created equal," and they followed the biblical commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.



City of Oswego

1. ● Tudor E. and Marie Grant House. 134 W. Bridge. Tudor Grant, once enslaved in Maryland, came to Oswego in 1832 and became an outspoken abolitionist, barber, and African American leader. This house was extensively rebuilt about 1900.

2. ● Nathan and Clarissa Green House. 98 West 8th. The Greens were one of about 15 African American families in Oswego in the 1850s. Both Nathan, cook on a steamboat, and Clarissa, were probably fugitives.

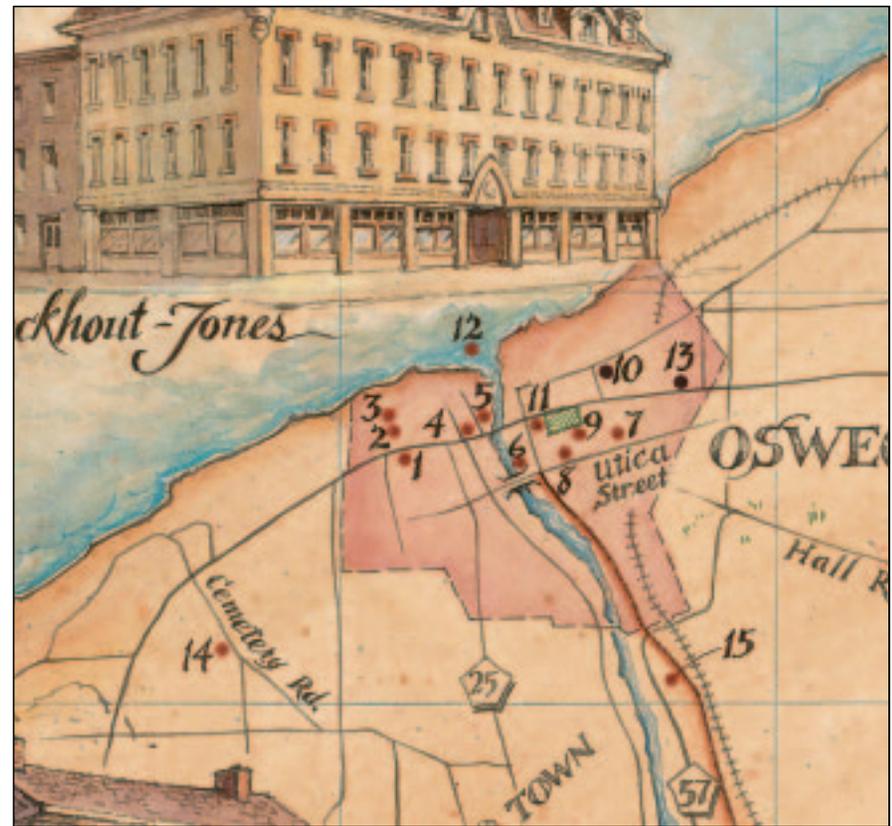
3. ● John and Harriet McKenzie House. 96 W. 8th. The McKenzies, born in slavery in South Carolina, owned this house from 1848-1857. An early 20th century speaker recalled that John McKenzie, a cartman, was heavily involved in underground railroad work.

4. ● Buckhout-Jones Building. NE corner of West First and Bridge Sts. White abolitionist Abram Buckhout owned this building (built in 1852-4). In the 1850s, Charles Smith and Tudor E. Grant, both formerly enslaved in Maryland, operated barbershops in the basement.

5. ● Market House. Water and Bridge. In 1850, the National Liberty Party met here, nominating Gerrit Smith and Samuel R. Ward, an African American minister, formerly enslaved, for President and Vice-President of the U.S. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

6. ● Oswego Canal. On the banks of this canal in 1841, Edwin W. Clarke unsuccessfully tried to rescue a young enslaved woman, testing a new law prohibiting slave owners from bringing enslaved people into New York State.

7. ● Edwin W. and Charlotte Clarke House. 80 East Mohawk. In 1841, Clarke, one of Oswego's most outspoken abolitionists, spearheaded the campaign to free James Watkins Seward, a



freeborn African American, from jail in New Orleans.

8. ● John B. and Lydia Edwards. 144 East Third. As Gerrit Smith's agent in Oswego, John B. Edwards hosted many fugitives and arranged shelter and transportation for many others.

9. ● Hamilton and Rhoda Littlefield. 44 East Oneida. Littlefield ran for office on the Liberty Party ticket, signed anti-slavery petitions, and sheltered fugitives in his home. Recent renovation revealed a cache of abolitionist literature hidden in the ceiling.

10. ● Site of Benjamin and Susan Hockley House. 19 East Sixth. Hockley was buying a house on this site from Gerrit Smith when Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In 1853, pursued by slave-catchers from Tennessee, he fled to Lewiston, where he tied himself to a raft, hoping that the currents would carry him to Canada. A Canadian steamer found him after he

had drifted twelve miles into the lake. Newspapers likened his story to that of Eliza in Uncle Tom's Cabin.

11. ● Oswego City Library. 120 East Second. In 1855, Gerrit Smith donated this library to the City of Oswego with the provision that it be open to both men and women, regardless of color. This is the oldest public library in continuous use in New York State. On the National Register.

12. ● Oswego Harbor. Ships took many freedom seekers from this harbor to Canada. In 1837, for example, one African American woman jubilantly waved her handkerchief as she headed toward freedom on the William IV.

13. ● Cemetery and site of Olive and Sidney Clarke House. North side of Route 104, west of City Line Road. As many as 125 freedom seekers stayed at the Clarke house. Sisters and brothers of Olive and Sidney were also active on the Freedom Trail.

Oswego Town

14. ● Daniel and Miriam Pease House. 261 Cemetery Road. Several Pease family members signed anti-slavery petitions and used their home as a stop on the underground railroad.

Scriba

15. ● Riverside Cemetery. County Route 57, south of Churchill Road. Many abolitionists, both white and black, were buried in this cemetery. Edwin W. Clarke's inscription reads: "Just, fearless, humane, he gave the best of his years and powers to the relief of the oppressed and to the aid and succor of slaves escaping from bondage, having . . . the effectual sympathy and cooperation of his devoted wife." Several people who fled from slavery are also buried here, including members of the Grant and Green families. On the National Register.



New Haven

16. ● David Kilburne House-Route 104, South side, across from George-Hughes Road. In 1836, Kilburne confessed that he had a prejudice against African Americans until "a colored man called at my door and requested permission to tarry in my house over the Sabbath. I found my dislike was wicked prejudice."

Mexico

17. ● Orson Ames House-3339 Main. Ames sheltered famous fugitive William "Jerry" Henry for one night in October 1851. By rescuing Henry in Syracuse, white and black abolitionists successfully challenged the ability of the federal government to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and helped make Central New York a haven for freedom seekers.

18. ● Starr and Harriet Clark House and Tin Shop. 3250 Main. As a member of Mexico's Vigilance Committee, Clark committed himself to assisting fugitives. In 1837, a fugitive named George stayed here and helped promote the abolitionist cause in Mexico.

19. ● Asa and Caroline Wing House. 3392 Route 69. A noted lecturer, Wing promoted equal rights based on a biblical belief in equality. On Christmas Eve, 1851, this family hosted Mr. Thompson, his wife, and five daughters "to save them from the kidnappers." When Asa Wing died in 1854, abolitionists erected a monument in the Mexico Cemetery, and Frederick Douglass delivered the eulogy.

Richland/Pulaski

20. ● Site of George Bragdon House. 7943 Route 3. Bragdon's home was so well-known as a stop on the freedom trail that Wilbur Siebert in his 1898 history called it simply "Bragdon's Place." The current house was built on the foundation of the original homestead.

21. ● Bethel Church. County Route 5 and Route 3. Built by George Bragdon as a non-denominational church, Bethel Church hosted abolitionist minister Luther Lee in 1861.

22. ● Ard H. Stevens-George Washington Store. 31 Broad. Ard H. Stevens was an active abolitionist. George and Lucretia Bakeman Washington, African Americans, later owned this store.

Constantia

23. ● Peter Feeler Cemetery-West side of Center Rd. Peter and Jane Feeler came to Constantia about 1835 from the Hudson Valley. Several African Americans are buried in this family graveyard, including at least two Civil War veterans. This site is not accessible to the public.



Hastings

24. ● Site of Toll Booth, Jerry Henry's Rescue-Behind Deb's Restaurant, 431 Route 11. Hidden in a butcher's wagon, Jerry Henry passed along this plank road on his way to Mexico and Oswego, N.Y., and Kingston, Ontario.

Schroepfel/Gilbert Mills

25. ● Hiram and Lucy Gilbert House. 452 Gilbert Mills Road. Hiram Gilbert (miller, founder of a local academy, and Congregational deacon) assisted fugitives as early as 1837, when the freedom seeker George stayed overnight with his family.

26. ● Amos and Hannah Mason House. Gilbert Mills Rd., across from Red School House Rd. These African Americans actively supported the Freedom Trail. In December 1839, Hannah's son, James Watkins Seward, was kidnapped in New Orleans. Oswego County abolitionists

successfully lobbied for his release, but in July 1841, he was hung for murder in St. Louis. In his last letter, he wrote that he still held his “Abolitions opinions” and his “Calvinistic beliefs.”

27. ● Stephen and Rhoda Griffith House. Gilbert Mills Road, across from Church Road. Grove Gilbert, grandson of Hiram Gilbert, remembered that his grandmother told him the story of two African American sisters, one sheltered in the Gilbert house and one in the Griffiths house, who were joyfully reunited.

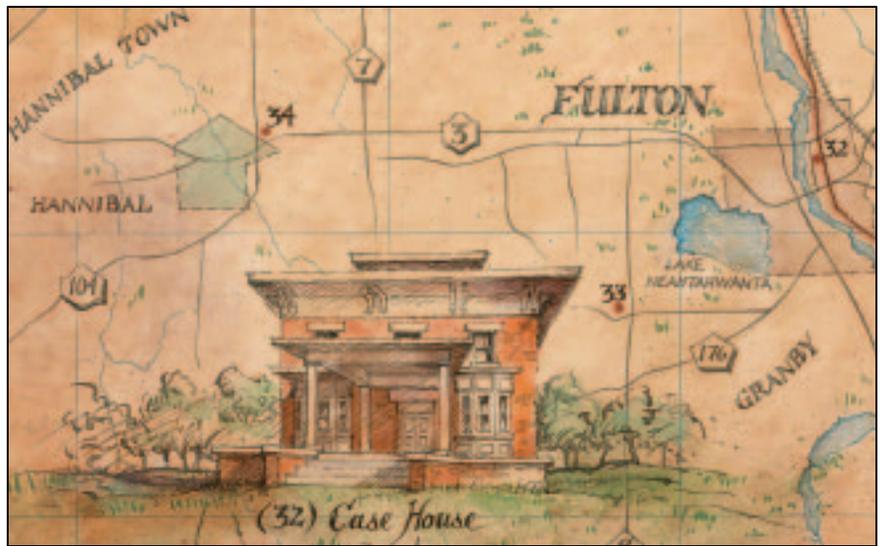
28. ● Gilbert Mills Cemetery. Church Road. Both blacks and whites are buried in this cemetery, including Amos Mason, an African American member of the Schroepel Town Vigilance Committee, (d. 1842) and his twin daughters, Helen and Harriet (d. 1841 and 1842).

Volney

29. ● Bristol Hill Church. North side of route 3, east of Fulton. Established in 1812, this church had both black and white members (including the Gilberts and Masons), many of whom were active in the underground railroad. This building was constructed between 1832-36 and incorporates original wainscoting, windows, and carved lintel. On the National Register.

30. ● Mt. Pleasant Cemetery (Western Section). County Route 45, across from the Methodist Church. This cemetery contains graves of about four dozen African Americans, including at least one Civil War veteran, Samuel Bakeman.

31. ● William Baldwin House. 323 Baldwin Road. Baldwin's granddaughter recalled stories of his participation in the underground railroad. The proximity of several African American families, including the Depuys, Slaters, and Lawsons, suggests the possibility of a biracial freedom trail network in this neighborhood.



Fulton

32. ● Charles and Mary Ann Case House. 133 South First. In 1845, when the Cases still lived on Second Street, nine fugitives from Maryland stayed at their home, fleeing from notorious slave dealer Hope Slatter, who intended to sell them in New Orleans. This house was built between 1849-53. Frederick Douglass spoke in Fulton in 1847.

Granby

33. ● Jacob and Juliett Bakeman House. County Route 8 and Harris Hill Road. Jacob's father, Henry Bakeman, African American, first came to Fulton as a Revolutionary War soldier. He returned in the 1790s and bought 100 acres of land. Jacob bought two mills here in West Granby in 1825 and built the north side of the present house in the early 1830s. Members of the Bakeman family still live in Central New York.

Hannibal

34. ● Silas Brewster House. 963 Cayuga. Local tradition places Silas Brewster at the heart of freedom trail activities in Hannibal, using his barn to hide freedom seekers. Brewster's store is now Cook's Jewelers.