

The Underground Railroad in Chautauqua County: Selected excerpts from published histories, 1873 – 1940

Wendy Straight, Ed., 2010

[Sources: Historical Sketches of the Town of Portland, by H. C. Taylor, M.D. (McKinstry, Fredonia, NY, 1873); Early History of the Town of Ellicott, by Gilbert W. Hazeltine, M.D. (Journal Printing Company, Jameston, NY, 1887); Cherry Creek Illustrated, by Chas. J. Shults (Shults, 1900); Centennial History of the Fredonia Baptist Church (Matthews-Northrup, Buffalo, NY, 1908); History of the First Baptist Church, Jamestown, NY (Journal Press, Jamestown, NY, 1915); History of Chautauqua County and its People, John P. Downs and Fenwick Y. Hedley, Ed. (American Historical Society, 1921); Historic Annals of Southwestern New York, Lewis Historical Pub. Co., NY, 1940.]

[References: The 1854 Wall Map of Chautauqua County and the 1867 Chautauqua County Atlas, both available on CD from the Chautauqua County Genealogical Society.]

Anti-Slavery Society in the Town of Portland

An excerpt from *Historical Sketches of the Town of Portland, comprising also the Pioneer History of Chautauqua County, with Biographical Sketches of the Early Settlers*, by H. C. Taylor, M.D., (W. McKinstry & Son, Fredonia, NY, 1873, p.196.)

Antislavery and other Benevolent Societies have existed in town at various times. No records were kept and nothing definite can be written with reference to them. Without doubt they had their influence on the public mind and the first to some extent aided in establishing the great principles of the human liberty and civil and political equality that have since so revolutionized the sentiment of the whole country and wiped out the darkest stain upon our national escutcheon and the foulest blight upon the moral and Christian sentiment of Christendom.

An Abolitionist in Jamestown

An excerpt from *The Early History of the Town of Ellicott, Chautauqua County, N. Y., compiled largely from the Personal Recollections of the Author*, by Gilbert W. Hazeltine, M.D. (Journal Printing Company, Jamestown, NY, 1887, pp. 348-349.)

A little more than 40 years ago a young man named **Blakesly**, a student at Oberlin college, considered it his duty to speak upon the crime of slavery during his vacation, and came to Jamestown for that purpose. He delivered three lectures at the Baptist church. There was great excitement when it was announced that there would be a lecture there upon the subject of slavery. At the conclusion a second lecture was announced for the next day. The excitement spread like wild fire. He was warned to leave town. Tar, feathers, etc., were plainly spoken of, and if he persisted, death to the Abolitionist more than hinted at. A third lecture was announced. Jamestown and vicinity was never more excited than then. On the afternoon of his last harangue the Baptist church was a dangerous place to be in. The church was crowded; more than half present were there for the lecturer's protection, but the crowd outside was double and triple of that within, gathered from all parts of the country. We believe that if some man in that excited crowd more crazy than the rest, could have reached the lecturer he would have killed

him, and this was prevented by Hiram **Eddy**, who, when he left the church after the third lecture ran by his side with his right hand in his coat collar, and would occasionally give him a flying leap ahead of ten feet or more. The crowd pressing too hard, **Eddy** threw the little lecturer over a five-foot garden fence, and as he proved a good runner, was in a place of safety before the mob had realized what had happened.

The Underground Railroad and George H. Frost (1796 – 1872)

An excerpt from *Cherry Creek Illustrated: a History, 1900*, Chas. J. **Shults**, Ed. (Chas. J. **Shults**, Cherry Creek, 1900)

George H. **Frost** settled within what is now known as the village of Cherry Creek in the spring of 1823 and built the second house of logs within its limits, on the Northwest corner of Southside Ave. and Center Street, which he opened for the numerous purposes of residence, hotel, shoe shop and post office. He was a native of Massachusetts, having been born in the town of Dartmouth, near Brainard's Bridge in that state, April 14, 1796, but a short distance from the imaginary line, separating it from the state of Rhode Island. Mr. **Frost** migrated from the home of his birth to Nassau, Rensselaer County, N.Y., in about 1819, where he remained but a short time when he pushed his way westward as far as Bennington, Genesee County. There he married Zerviah M. **Sherman** and lived until he emigrated to Cherry Creek in the spring of 1823. But few settlers had reached the town at that time and the forests were with a few small exceptions unbroken, and bears, wolves and deer roamed unmolested. The wolves in particular were a terror to the inhabitants and no one ventured from their houses at night without a torch or weapon for their protection.

There were no highways. The settlers blazed their course on trees from one settlement or house to the other to insure against loss of route. For a number of years the nearest grist mill was at Sinclairville to which the settlers journeyed on horseback with their grist divided in a bag across the horse's back in front of them. This was continued until the establishment of a mill at Clear Creek. Steadily the settlers increased in numbers and the forests receded before the settlers' ax. The fertile fields of the hills and valleys gradually became the scenes of waving grain and grazing herds. In March, 1830, the first Town meeting was held in Mr. **Frost's** log house. Mr. **Frost** was chosen Supervisor of the Town in 1834-5, and for many years held the office of Justice of the Peace. He was the first postmaster of the town. In early life he learned the trade of shoemaker and followed that occupation for some time after coming to Cherry Creek.

He lived in the Village until about 1839, when he purchased a large farm, since known as the **Frost** farm, situated in a pleasant valley about two miles northwest of the Village on the Fredonia road. Owing to the numerous settlers in the valley from the State of Vermont, it was named Vermont Hollow and still bears that name. Hither he came with his large family and by their combined industry the forests gradually gave place to cultivated fertile fields which annually yielded a moderate support for them. His near neighbors were Anson **Newton**, Harvey **Putnam**, Ira B. **Turner** and Elkeny **Steward**. His children having grown to manhood and womanhood, and excepting the youngest, established homes of their own, about 1865 he returned to the village where he passed in peaceful happy retirement the remainder of his declining years.

Mrs. **Frost** was born in the State of Rhode Island June 25, 1803, and died at Cherry Creek May 27, 1889, surviving him 17 years. Of their marriage twelve children were born. Francis S.

January 15, 1821. She became the wife of Charles A. **Spencer** of Cherry Creek, who yet survives her in the 90th year of his age. She died on August 24, 1893. Fidelia, May 11, 1823, and died March 27, 1857. She became the wife of Judson **Sheffield** of Cherry Creek, who survived her until February, 1900. Admiral, June 19, 1825, and died in infancy. George N. October 21, 1826, now living in the Town of Cherry Creek. Ruth Eliza, December 30, 1829, and became the wife of Chandler **Johnson** of Charlotte, N.Y., and both of whom are now living in Lowell, Michigan. Mary A. April 6, 1831, and became the wife of William **Mount** of Cherry Creek and now lives with her husband at Corry, Pennsylvania. Sarah Emeline, December 22, 1833. Married Rev. William U. **Edwards**, and now resides with him in the Village of Kenmore, N.Y. Charles L. July 10, 1836, died June 19, 1862. Lilis, January 4, 1838, became the wife of Alonzo **Edwards**, then of Ellington, now of Forestville, N.Y. Isbond H. August 6, 1841, and now living in Cherry Creek, N.Y. Isadore, January 23, 1844, became the wife of Walter E. **Griswold** of Charlotte, N.Y., and now living with her husband at Kenmore, N.Y. Helen J., October 15, 1851, became the wife of Cyrus A. **Mount** of Cherry Creek, and died March 18, 1881.

Mr. **Frost** was born of Colonial ancestors at the time when the Revolutionary fathers, fresh from victorious fields were cementing the discordant states into a harmonious union in a lasting republic. He personally knew many of the veterans of the Revolution. In his early boyhood days he learned from them and from his parents' lips the cause, the story of the terrible struggle for the equal rights of men. Into the very fiber of his existence was born and bred an intense love of justice and of country and the eternal principle "that all men are created equal." During his long and useful life, if malice he had at any time, it was in the defense of these principles. For these principles, he early enrolled himself as a volunteer soldier in the defense of his country, in the struggle of 1812, when but 17 years of age. He suffered the hardships and dangers of a campaign and at the close of the war received an honorable discharge.

He was a man of strong earnest conviction. He loved truth for its own sake and combated error wherever he found it. One might as well have attempted to stay the thunderbolt as to attempt to stay his utterance of what he believed just. Human slavery disturbed the peace and threatened the destruction of the Union from its foundation until the surrender of **Lee** at Appomattox Court House. It existed as a compromise with crime. It poisoned all the sources of power. To this crime ambition bowed and politicians, statesmen, judges and clergymen were parties. The real friend of humanity was denounced as an enemy of his country. From the time Mr. **Frost** became old enough to take an interest in public affairs, he was uncompromisingly opposed to the institution of slavery. His entire being revolted at this monster. No subject of public concern affected him more intensely. He believed that this government founded on the equal rights of men could not long survive with slavery.

His opposition to it was outspoken, earnest, and active. He denounced the Atherton Gag, advocated the Willmot Provision [Wilmont Proviso], strenuously opposed the Fugitive Slave Law, resisted the appeal of the Missouri Compromise, fought the Lecompton Usurpation and earnestly combated the whole Kansas Nebraska invasion. He believed Mr. **Seward** in his appeal to the higher law written as Lord **Broghan** said by the finger of God in the hearts of men and deeply deplored the fact that **Webster** in his vain hope of reconciling the sections had fallen below that level. He early allied himself with the Abolition party, in fact when it required no small degree of moral courage to take position in the ranks of that despised political sect.

His great opportunities for usefulness to the cause in his poverty, in the wilderness of Western New York were small compared to those of the leaders of the cause, but he belonged to, and for a long time was actively engaged in the services of the 'Underground Railroad,' so-called, and

many a fugitive slave was assisted by him on his secret journey in his effort to escape bondage to Canada. In his house he sheltered and fed alike the traveler and the fugitive slave.

His early educational advantages were limited to a few weeks of schooling. But he availed himself of every opportunity afforded from the rugged school of experience to gain information and knowledge. His bump of common sense was large, his judgment good, his heart generous and his conclusions always just. He was widely read in the current literature of his day and kept abreast with public thought on all important questions. He was a believer in the Christian religion and a member and deacon of the First Baptist Church. In this belief he was as sincere and earnest as in any of the most positive convictions of his life. He died October 5, 1872, at his house in the Village situated just across the street west from where he settled, and is sleeping today in the shadow of a beautiful maple by the side of wife, children and grandchildren in the windowless palace on the hill in full view, from the site of his pioneer home and the home of his latest berth.

The Underground Railroad and Fredonia Baptist deacon Eber M. Pettit

An excerpt from *Centennial History of the Fredonia Baptist Church, Fredonia, New York, 1808 – 1908* (Matthews-Northrup, Buffalo, N.Y., 1908, pp. 168 – 169)

Dr. Eber M. **Pettit** was born in 1802. He died in 1885. He was the son of Dr. James **Pettit**, one of the pioneer settlers of Fredonia. For several years Dr. **Pettit** was the agent of the United States Government, in charge of the interests of the Indians of the Cattaraugus Reservation, and resided at Versailles. In 1861 or 2, he removed to Fredonia and became actively engaged in the manufacture and sale of proprietary medicine. The family at once became a valuable accession to the Baptist Church. While in Versailles the doctor had been Superintendent of a Sunday School. In Fredonia his daughter Mrs. D. R. **Barker** was the superintendent of the primary department. Mrs. **Barker** was a refined lovely Christian worker. Early in life her daughter Dora united with the church by baptism. Her husband was the founder and donor to the village of the Darwin R. **Barker** Public Library. Dr. **Pettit** had abundant means and was a liberal supporter of the church expenses. Dr. **Pettit** had most earnest and profound sympathies with the oppressed African race, and his personal work as conductor of the “underground railroad” aiding fugitives from bondage on their way to Canada and freedom, is an important chapter in the career of an upright, God-fearing, noble man. The **Barker-Pettit** home on Central Avenue was full of sunshine, beautiful with flowers, and in season and out, generous with hospitality.

An Abolitionist in Jamestown

An excerpt from *History of the First Baptist Church, Jamestown, N.Y., 1827-1915* (Journal Press, Jamestown, N.Y., 1915, pp. 41-45).

But few people who lived subsequent to the Civil War can realize or comprehend the intensity of the political excitement, or the hostility of personal feeling created by that context, and in the discussion of the question of slavery which led up to it. The Jamestown Baptist Church took an active part in both the discussion and the struggle. Soon after the completion of the first church edifice – 1833 or 1834 – one Elder **Blakesley**, a young Baptist clergyman came to Jamestown in the interests of the anti-slavery movement. The apologists for slavery also appeared with a

political orator and a joint debate was held in the old Congregational Church. The pro-slavery orator claimed the right to speak first, and by his blundering manner and misquotations of Scripture, made a poor showing. Mr. **Blakesley** replied, and fearlessly and skillfully met every pro-slavery argument. The interest and excitement engendered by Mr. **Blakesley's** lectures awakened a demand for a full and free discussion of the slavery question. When it was known that every other suitable place was closed to the continuance of the discussion, the Baptists opened their church and bid Mr. **Blakesley** welcome. A number of lectures were given in the church, attended by large and over-flowing congregations. The excitement increased rapidly, and it was soon learned from his opponents that the life of the speaker was in danger. A young cabinet maker, **Styles** by name, however undertook to act as a body guard, and being an expert with a six-shooter, and a giant in frame, the would-be assassins took notice and acted accordingly. A final mass meeting was appointed to be held at the church for the purpose of concentrating the strength of the movement. Early in the morning on the day of the meeting, a mob appeared on Brooklyn heights with a cannon and a captain from Mud Creek. They maintained a continuous fire until the hour of the meeting when they filed down the hill for the Baptist Church. On their arrival the citizens had filled the church and the front doors were barred. The mob filled the front yard and surrounded the house. Being unable to enter the house they burst in the back windows of the church and as the speaker proceeded with his address, pelted him with stones, brickbats, jack-knives and other missiles. Many were standing on the tops of the seats inside the house, while a prominent citizen of the town, a Justice of the Peace, was emptying asafetida from his pockets on the hot stove that the fumes might compel the congregation to leave the church. The plan was frustrated, however, by one who stood near and brushed off the material.

For the protection of the speaker from the infuriated mob, it was decided to open but one front door for exit. This was done, and as the people were filing out, the mob grappled with a man supposed to be **Blakesley** and threw him to the ground, but the man was soon discovered to be a prominent citizen of the town. While this exciting scene was in progress, centering upon itself all attention, the other door was opened and Mr. **Blakesley** quietly escaped to the home of B. F. **Van Dusen**, at the northwest corner of Prendergast Avenue and Fourth Street. Reviewing past history at this distant day, the church may well congratulate itself that its members have contributed their full share in forming a public sentiment against slavery and thus preparing the way for the acceptance of the memorable proclamation of the martyred **Lincoln**, when he gave freedom to all slaves in the United States, and ushered in for four millions of souls a jubilee of jubilees.

From the time of the event just related during all the controversy over slavery, members of the church provided stations, and took an active part in the management of the "underground road" to Canada, run in the interests of fugitive slaves. Deacon John C. **Breed's** pig pen was one of those stations. And when the storm broke with all its ferocity, Baptists were not found wanting. They take pride in the fact that the Rev. J. **Scofield**, at one time the Baptist pastor at Sinclairville, provided the country with a distinguished Major General for that war, in the person of his son John M. **Scofield**, who was born near Sinclairville aforesaid. And the pioneer Baptist of the county, was the grand sire of those four **Cushing** brothers, thunderbolts of war. The most conspicuous Baptist who represented the county in the Civil War was Rev. J. C. **Drake**, pastor

of the Westfield church, who resigned at once on the breaking out of the war, raised a company of volunteers and became its captain, and served with such energy and efficiency, that he was later chosen colonel of the 112th N.Y. Vol. Inf., the "Chautauqua regiment," and offered up a soldier's supreme sacrifice on his country's altar at the Battle of Cold Harbor.

In the minutes of the Harmony Baptist Association for 1865 are recorded the names of the following members of Baptist churches of the Association who gave up their lives in defense of their country: John **Peterson** and Milton **Lewis**, Busti; Kingsley **Faulkinson**, Clymer; William **Chamberlain**, First Portland; Benjamin F. **Hurlbut**, North Harmony; Thomas **Sparks** and James **Becker**, Sherman; Rev. J. C. **Drake** and Bolivar **Hurlbut**, Westfield; William **Osborn** and D. H. **Slade**, Harbor Creek. The Jamestown church lost none of her sons, though several served in the army. The most noted of whom was Orville A. **Ross**, son of Asa and Abigale **Ross**, and brother of Mrs. Heman **Fox**, Mrs. Hiram **Washburn** and Mrs. Henry **Barrows**, all members of the church. He enlisted at eighteen years of age, first in Co. B, 72nd N.Y., and later in the 120th N.Y. Vol. He served through the war, was severely wounded in Virginia, and was commissioned a lieutenant for gallant and faithful service. Andrew J. **Bowen** served as an officer in the 49th N.Y. and Heman **Fox** and Jerome **Hibbard** served in the 112th N.Y. Vol., the first named as an officer.

Underground Railroad

By Albert S. **Price**

From *History of Chautauqua County and its People, Vol. I*, John P. **Downs** and Fenwick Y. **Hedley**, Ed. (American Historical Society, 1921)

Slavery was an institution which, we would think, must always have been far removed from the life of Chautauqua county; a matter for those distant Southern states whose prosperity depended on slave labor; or at least for those "Border" states which were of necessity more or less controlled by the institutions of their near southern neighbors. In general this is quite true. Yet even this distant community had some connections with that great national problem. And these connections, constituting picturesque exceptions to the ordinary course of life here, stood out by bold contrast.

Many of these incidents resulted from the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, one of the legislative compromises demanded by a powerful and aggressive South, resisted by an anti-slavery North, and found to be not easily enforceable. The quiet but stubborn resistance of the English Puritans to the tyranny of James I and Charles I found itself repeated in the resistance of their American descendants in the North to this law, regarded by them as unjust and tyrannical.

Upon its enactment, numbers of escaped slaves who had lived unmolested in the North fled in terror to Canada. Others stayed and took the risks of being captured. Under the operation of the law many were captured and returned to slavery in the South. These captures invariably aroused intense excitement and opposition in the communities concerned, with the result that North and South became more and more estranged and antagonistic by this irritating friction.

This law did not, however, prevent the slaves from attempting in considerable numbers to reach Canada and freedom. The northern people, smarting under what they chose to regard as the insult heaped upon them by the enforcement of the odious law, cooperated for a deliberate evasion of the law and for a determined opposition to its enforcement. They worked secretly and quietly, without any disturbance of the ordinary course of community life. This secret cooperation became known in the expressive phrase of the day as the "Under Ground Railroad," sometimes referred to by the initials U.G.R.R. The shortest routes from the South to Canada became known as the several "lines" of this railroad; and, in carrying out the technical terminology, those who assisted the fleeing slaves were dubbed conductors, engineers and trainmen.

Several of these well-established routes led through this county. A "trunk line" ran along the Lake Erie shore from Cleveland to Buffalo. Another began at the Ohio river near Marietta, Ohio; ran thence along the eastern border of Ohio through several counties to the village of Jefferson, the county seat of Ashtabula county. This county was the home of Joshua R. **Giddings**, Benjamin F. **Wade**, and several other strong anti-slavery leaders. From this point the "hill division" of the line passed through Monroe township, Ohio; across the State line and through the townships of Conneaut, Elk Creek, Franklin, McKean, Summit, Green and Greenfield in Erie county, Pennsylvania; thence through the townships of Mina, Sherman, Chautauqua, Stockton, Pomfret, Sheridan, and Hanover in this county; and on to Buffalo and Canada.

Still another branch came into the county from the south by way of Sugar Grove, passed through Jamestown, Ellington and Sinclairville; and then apparently north to join the other route.

In every centre there were brave men and intrepid women who at a large risk assisted the dusky fugitives, and so struck, as they believed, an effective blow for freedom. The runaways were hidden from sight during the day, fed, and often clothed. Under the cover of night they were silently and secretly carried forward to the next "station," where word of their coming had preceded them. The new hosts often indicated their readiness to receive the fugitives by previously arranged signals of lights in the windows, and other readily discernible signs. The transfer from wagon or sleigh, to house or other hiding place, was accomplished quickly and as quietly as possible to avoid the undesirable attention of any unsympathetic or even hostile neighbor. Authorities have estimated that by these secret operations no less than thirty thousand slaves were helped to reach Canada. The determined efforts of the slaveholders to follow and recapture their valuable slaves (a perfectly natural desire) served by aggravation to further the growing sentiment against slavery in the North, and to develop rapidly the activities of the Under Ground Railroad.

In Jamestown there was a settlement of free colored people in the district on North Main Street and West Seventh Street which was familiarly known as Africa. In this settlement one of the well-known and respected women was Mrs. Catherine **Harris**. Her house was one of the stations, where she harbored many escaping slaves during the troubled years, at one time secreting as many as seventeen. Many of the county's well known men received, harbored and then forwarded these fugitives. Silas **Shearman** of Jamestown was certainly one of the most active. In Jamestown Dr. **Hedges** and Phineas **Crossman**, too were leaders, in the work.

Others who assisted in this vicinity were Addison A. **Price** and his brother Wilson A. **Price**, of Jamestown; Dr. **Catlin**, of Sugar Grove; Mr. **Page** and Mr. **Nessel** of Ellington; Benjamin **Miller** of Stockton; Joseph **Sackett** near Cassadaga; Levi **Jones** of Busti; and Henry H. **Jones** of Kiantone. Many other helpers whose names have never been recorded took an active part in this dangerous work. Money was freely given by many anti-slavery people. Among those in Jamestown whose purses were always open, are remembered Alonzo **Kent**, Orsell **Cook**, Lewis **Hall**, Albert **Partridge**, and Madison **Burnell**. We should all like to pay equal tribute to those many conscientious patriots who with quiet consecration helped with money, time and steady effort, this great cause of freedom, whose names most unfortunately, have not been preserved in any written record. In all of these there survived the spirit which has made the Anglo-Saxon, at any cost, always stand against what he regarded as tyranny and injustice.

Among runaway slaves was Harrison **Williams**, who escaped from Virginia, arriving foot-sore and exhausted at the farm of William **Storum**, a free colored man, in Busti, in February or March of 1851. **Storum** kept him several months, supplying his wants and helping him back to health. He was a mere boy of seventeen. Early one morning in September he was kidnapped by his former master, who had learned of his hiding place. This man and some others, dressed as women, drove to the farm, went around to the rear of the house where **Williams** was milking, seized and bound him, and put him in the bottom of their wagon. They drove rapidly north through Jamestown by way of Forest Avenue, Roosevelt Square and North Main Street to Fredonia, and thence to Buffalo. The alarm quickly spread, and a man on horseback, outspeeding the captors, arrived before them in Jamestown. A crowd quickly gathered in the Square, but there was no time to organize any effort, and the captors dashed through the crowd and up Main street without being stopped. "Guinea" **Carpenter** addressed the crowd, urging action, and a pursuing party was quickly made up. But valuable time had been lost, and the captors, with relays of fresh horses, got safely to Buffalo. Here the owner established a legal claim. In the crowded court room a lane was opened through the crowd, and an effort was made to induce **Williams** to make a dash for liberty. The crowd intended to close behind him until he should reach the carriage which was waiting at the door to take him to a place of safety. Either he failed to understand, or lacked the necessary courage, for he didn't make the effort, and was taken back to Virginia.

James W. **Broadhead**, of Busti, whose farm was next to the **Storum** farm, and who knew all the circumstances of the capture, enlisted in the 112th N.Y. Regiment in the Civil War. On Christmas Day in 1863 at Culpeper, Virginia, Mr. **Broadhead** saw Harrison **Williams** in camp. After being taken back to Virginia he had been sold to Georgia, and went as servant to his new master in the Confederate army. With his master, he was captured by the Union army near the Rappahannock station in the fall of 1863, and became hostler for Gen. **Slocum**. Mr. **Broadhead** talked with him and verified his identity. This capture deeply stirred the county and is said to have stimulated the activities of the Under Ground Rail Road.

Authorities: Contributed articles and news items published in the "Jamestown Evening Journal" on the following dates: July 21, July 22, 1896; Sept. 27, 1901; May 10, May 17, May 24, 1902; December 26, 1905; April 21, July 14, 1910.

The Underground Railroad in Southwestern New York

By William S. **Bailey***

An excerpt from *The Historic Annals of Southwestern New York*. (Lewis Historical Pub. Co., New York, 1940)

The history of that branch of the Underground Railroad which crossed the State line at or near Sugar Grove, passed through Busti and Jamestown and thence across Lake Erie or to Buffalo and on to the "railroad's" terminal in Canada can never be more than a meager outline.

The Underground Railroad maintained no advertising department. It shunned publicity. Search through the local newspapers of the entire decade following the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 brings to light but a few vague references to its operations. Its offices, stations and eating houses are today but traditions; its engineers, conductors, agents and dispatchers have passed on and, if they left records of its operations through this locality, their records have disappeared. And yet there is no doubt that these stations were open day and night, and this in spite of the penalty of \$1000 fine and imprisonment for giving a meal or any help to the unfortunate passengers on their way to freedom; nor is there any doubt that the business of the Underground Railroad in Chautauqua County was efficiently, though silently, conducted in the shadow of darkness and in profound secrecy.

To the fugitive slaves, furtively passed from station to station over various routes that converged through Chautauqua County toward Buffalo where freedom lay just over the river, the final stages through this county must have inspired both new hope and increased apprehension of capture as they neared journey's end. Frank H. **Severance** in his "Old Trails on the Niagara Frontier," perhaps had this in mind when he wrote that "of all the trails that led to the Niagara Frontier none have a greater significance in American history than that known as the Underground Railroad." The same historian considers the ferry at Buffalo, over which the escaping slaves began to pass as early as 1830, the most vital part of the Underground Railroad. He states that the travel over the eastern and western routes was insignificant compared with that over the routes through western New York and Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. Of these central routes, **Severance** writes that in this State the most active part in the Underground Railroad operations was borne by the western counties.

The men and women of this region who operated the Underground Railroad were actuated by the highest ideals. They denied the validity of the Fugitive Slave Law. They justified their illegal acts by their belief in a higher law that gave the man of color the same inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that they themselves enjoyed.

That the operation of the road through this region was characterized by many thrilling incidents, my research reveals – though, save in a few instances, too dimly to be made into history. If it serves no other purpose, I hope this paper may result in bringing forth all of this unwritten history that may still be available. Not definitely within the scope of this paper, it is nevertheless of interest to note, in connection with this history of a phase of the anti-slavery movement, that in 1817, when the law which provided for the final extinction of slavery in New

York State became effective, eight slaves were held by and were the property of Chautauqua County slave-owners.

From local sources the most distant identification of the underground road is its passage through Concord, a village near Corry, Pennsylvania, whence it came through to Busti via Sugar Grove or its immediate locality. The entire State of Pennsylvania was interlaced with Underground Railroad trails. One well-defined route extended from Baltimore via Bellefonte and Punxsutawney to Warren, so it is certain that many escaping slaves were passed through Jamestown on their way to points on Lake Erie and Buffalo.

Between Lottsville and Sugar Grove, James **Carter** cared for the fugitives; and in Sugar Grove, Dr. James **Catlin** and wife, the latter also a physician, were especially active and fearless in helping slaves on their way to freedom. There does not appear to have been a station in the village of Busti. In fact, as one informant who was a participant in the village life of that day described the village feeling, the popular sentiment was not with the Abolitionists and did not approve their slave-running activities. For this reason, the slaves seem to have been harbored on farms at some distance from the village. These hiding places or stations included the homes of Squire **Plumb**, who was a prominent figure in the work; the Rev. John **Broadhead**, an old-fashioned circuit-riding minister and the father of James **Broadhead** of Busti, to whom I am indebted for valuable assistance in the preparation of this paper; Levi **Jones**; Humphrey **Pratt**; and William **Storum**, the latter a colored man who was held in high esteem.

Of Squire Alvin **Plumb**, I am told by Mrs. S. C. **Irvin**, a former resident of Busti, that he was the leader of the Abolitionist movement in that locality and that his home was the principal station of the Underground Railroad in Busti. A daughter, Harriett **Plumb**, later gained prominence as a suffragist leader. An interior concealed room in the **Plumb** house is reputed to have been the hiding place in which escaping slaves were kept, occasionally for considerable periods. Mrs. **Irvin** states that Squire **Plumb** was an intellectual man of unusual ability. At a later date her grandfather, then living in the old **Plumb** house, found a copy of *Virgil* that had belonged to the squire. While it was safe to do so, Squire **Plumb** sent his colored charges to school at the old schoolhouse on top of the hill. It came to be not unusual to hear these carefree Negroes, whose entire worldly possessions were carried in a bandanna handkerchief, singing their songs of the South as they passed up and down the hill to and from school. The teacher of the school at or about this time was Alice **Lord**, later Mrs. O. B. **Butler**, of Lakewood. The locality of the **Plumb** home was called Pine Ridge, and one of the ancient trees that gave the place its name is still standing.

Another name inseparably connected with the Abolitionist movement in Busti was that of another member of the Underground Railroad group, William **Storum**. The following brief account of William and Sarah **Storum** is taken from "The Rev. J. W. **Loguen**, as a Slave and as a Freeman" (Syracuse, 1859).

*Mr. and Mrs. **Storum** emigrated from New Hartford, in the State of New York, to Busti, in 1816, when Chautauque county was new. They travelled in an ox cart, with all their effects, and purchased and took possession of one hundred and forty acres of good land, cleared and*

subdued it to a high state of cultivation, and made it one of the best farms of the county. They were both slightly tinged with African blood; but nevertheless were estimated by their lives and character among the well-informed and estimable citizens.

*While at the College, Mr. **Loguen** also had charge of a class of Sunday scholars at Utica. There he met, for the first time, Caroline **Storum**, on a visit to her friends. An intimacy commenced between him and Caroline, which ripened into mutual attachment, and resulted in their marriage on the day of the election of General **Harrison** in 1840, at the house of her father and mother, William and Sarah **Storum**, of Busti, Chatauque county, N. Y.*

Caroline was privileged with the best education country opportunities afforded. The standing and respectability of the family always protected her against prejudice of color, which affects so many of her race.

*This connection was a fortunate event in the life of Mr. **Loguen**. Mrs. **Loguen** was about twenty years of age when married – of pleasing person and address, amiable, and of that best of breeding which undervalues the shining and superficial, and highly esteems the intellectual and substantial, the useful and the good – qualities which fitted her to instruct her household, and even her husband, in some things (Mr. **Loguen** often says he wishes he was as well educated as his wife) – and to receive, comfort and bless the hundreds of fugitives from slavery who found asylum at her house, -- which, therefore acquired the eminently appropriate appellation of the Underground Rail Road Depot at Syracuse.*

Mr. **Loguen**, himself a fugitive slave, was described by writers of his day as a man of noble qualities, a respected and beloved citizen of Syracuse for many years, and later a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal church. During this time he was publicly known as the head of the Underground Railroad in Onondaga County, said to have been the most important station in the State; he lectured in Chautauqua County during the presidential campaign of 1852.

Of the number of slaves who came or passed through Busti over the Underground Railroad no data are available. My informant, James **Broadhead**, related that Negroes had come “one or two at a time,” until the winter of 1850-51, when a group of seven came together to the **Storum** place. Of these, Harrison **Williams** remained with the **Storums**, one went to Levi **Jones**, one to Squire **Plumb**, while others were hired by friendly neighbors. Apparently the protectors of the slaves did not at that time fear attempts of capture by the owners of the Negroes under their protection. And now we come to the event that revealed Busti to be no longer a safe haven for runaway slaves, an event that stirred the entire region and gave it an object lesson of the horrors of slavery that must doubtless have led the Abolitionists along this part of the Underground Railroad to redouble efforts in passing the Negroes on to freedom.

On the morning of September 30, 1851, the colored lad Harrison **Williams** was kidnapped by a party of slave owners. From Edward O. **Jones**, of Evanston, Illinois, a son of Levi **Jones**, I secured the following account. Mr. **Jones** was seven years old at the time. A party of the runaway slaves had gone to Jamestown a few days before this kidnapping, attracted by the visit of Dan **Rice's** circus. In the group was a slave named Sam **Smith** who was working for Levi **Jones**. These Negroes did not return to Busti till after three days when Sam **Smith** came to the

Jones farm at night and said he had seen his master on the streets of Jamestown. Since that encounter the slaves had concealed themselves in a swamp. Levi **Jones** evidently kept a watch for the slave owners, for when they came to his farm searching for Sam **Smith**, who was still hidden, he tried to beat them to the **Storum** farm, but his horse was not fast enough. On reaching the **Storum** farm the slave hunters, in three carriages, went at once to the barnyard, where they found Harrison milking, threw him into their conveyance and quickly drove toward Jamestown. Levi **Jones** followed and in Jamestown tried to recruit enough men to effect a rescue, but he could not arouse sufficient interest. However, he and Silas **Shearman**, who joined him in Jamestown, followed the party toward Fredonia, but returned at night after an unsuccessful pursuit.

Following the capture of **Williams** the other slaves were taken to Dunkirk by their friends and sent across the lake to Canada. The slave hunters were said to have followed their human property as far as the boat, but were not in sufficient force to take the slaves from their friends. Two weeks later the slave Sam **Smith** wrote of their safe arrival in Canada.

Mr. **Jones** explained the capture as due to the previous return from Busti of two slaves who went back after their wives but were recaptured and beaten until one revealed the location of the others who had escaped. We can best gain a realization of the depths to which this man hunt, following so closely upon the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law, stirred the outraged sentiments of the locality from an editorial in the Jamestown "Journal" three days later:

Seizure of a Negro Boy – A Hard Case

*On Tuesday morning last our citizens were thrown into a state of considerable excitement by the passage through the village of three carriages containing a strong guard of armed men and an alleged fugitive from Slavery in the State of Virginia. The facts as we learned them were that the person in custody was a colored boy by the name of Harrison, about 17 years of age, who arrived in the adjoining town of Busti about seven or eight months since. For most if not all of this time he has been at work for Mr. Lewis **Clark** of that town, and proved an honest and industrious boy. Early on Tuesday morning, as he was engaged in milking, the party of men above named drove up, pounced upon him without process, bound him with chains, and drove off. The whole transaction was conducted with so much rapidity, that no opportunity was given for alarm, and the party proceeded without molestation. No halt was made here, but we learn that they proceeded to Dunkirk, and from thence by boat to Buffalo. Who the claimant or agent is, or by whose warrant the boy was seized, or before whom he is to be "examined," we have been unable to learn. Certain humane gentlemen followed the captors to see that if the boy should be remanded into slavery, it be done legally, and these are all the particulars of the affair that we possess. For an observance of legal forms, trust must be placed in the captors.*

Whether we look upon this seizure as a successful operation of the Fugitive Slave Act, or as an instance of the loyalty of the people in submitting to its execution, it is a hard case. To see a young boy isolated from kindred and without paternal home, endeavoring to earn his bread by honest industry, roughly seized without process by a party of armed men, manacled and smuggled away before a foreign tribunal, with no right to establish his freedom if he is free, nor offer any evidence in self-defence [sic], appears to our Republican senses as a sad falling off

from the practice of human justice, and a perversion according to the provisions of the Act, and as "nominated in the bond," and all those who were its instruments, in the eyes of the law, "All, all honorable men;" but if there is one stain upon our national fame more foul than another, that Act is the one; and if there is a degradation lower than man in his frailty ordinarily sinks, the persons, the things, who for money voluntarily become agents in the seizure and enslavement of persons having every natural right to be Free, are aided in the above seizure, and that one who was applied to, very promptly declined.

We claim to be, and are, law-abiding citizens, and shall probably loyally observe all enactments that are by the constitutional authorities declared to be constitutional; but we reserve to ourselves the right to think and speak of them according to the dictates of our sympathies and our judgments. Thus we have done, and thus we shall always do.

Notwithstanding the sentiment reflected by the "Journal" editorial my informants Messrs. **Jones** and **Broadhead** agree that the Abolitionists were not popular in Busti. Mr. **Jones** told me they were looked upon as "bad" men and that the only men in the village who voted the Abolitionist ticket in the early fifties were Squire **Plumb**, Levi **Jones**, and William **Storum**, though the majority of the people were in sympathy with the runaway slaves. Mr. **Broadhead** recalled that on the morning of the kidnapping much ridicule was hurled at the Abolitionists and that the feeling toward them in the village was very bitter.

An interesting sequel to the **Williams** kidnapping is told by James **Broadhead**. On Christmas day, 1864, Mr. **Broadhead**, then in the Union army, was in camp near Culpeper, Virginia. Having secured passes to town, he and Byron **Aylesworth** encountered a Negro who impressed Mr. **Broadhead** as a man he had seen before. This Negro proved to be Harrison **Williams**. He told his former Busti friends that he had not been punished after his capture, but had soon been sold into Georgia. He had entered the war as body servant to his master, had been captured with him by the Northern troops after Gettysburg, and at this time was a hostler in the Union army.

The Jamestown "Journal" of September 14, 1855, copies from the Romney (Virginia) "Intelligencer" an article to the effect that a Captain **Harnes**, of Hardy County, had been informed by a friend residing in Jamestown that his Negro man who, eight or nine years before, "had left his comfortable quarters with his master and taken up his abode in Jamestown," was at that time in jail in Buffalo for a misdemeanor. **Harnes** and three friends came to Buffalo to secure possession of the Negro, but did not succeed.

In Jamestown the affairs of the Underground Railroad seem to have been directed by Silas **Shearman** who was known as its agent. It is perhaps needless to say that the records of the period reveal Mr. **Shearman** as an ardent Abolitionist. The Jamestown station was the old **Shearman** home which stood at the corner of Pine and Fourth streets until 1910, when it was demolished to make way for new buildings. Frank E. **Shearman**, Sr., a grandson of Silas **Shearman**, related that he well remembered his grandfather telling his experiences as the Underground Railroad agent, or conductor, of how it was not an uncommon experience for him to come down in the morning and find his kitchen filled with escaping slaves who had been brought to Jamestown during the night, or directed to his home at the last station. Mr.

Shearman would feed the group of hungry passengers and secrete them during the day in the hay in his barn which was at the rear of Stillers Alley. His duty then was to collect sufficient funds from the railroad supporters, if money was needed, and to arrange transportation or guidance to the next station. Mr. **Shearman** was certain his grandfather frequently sent the runaways to a station in the village of Ellington. This statement was confirmed by Austin H. **Stafford**, whose memory of the activities of the Ellington Underground Railroad station was very clear.

Though careful search was made through the newspaper files of 1850-60, only one reference was found to the actual workings of the Underground Railroad in Jamestown. The "Journal" of March 4, 1859, contained the following:

Last week a passenger on the "Underground Railroad" reached this "station" in a needy condition and was promptly assisted by the Agents here. He was one of a party of nine, owned by a man in Southern Virginia, all of them having started for Canada together and doubtless reaching the Queen's domains before this. His master owned 500 slaves; he had never been whipped or badly treated, and but for the increasing years of his master and the certainty of a "sell out" at his death they never would have left. One of the Agents states that the road is in good condition and doing a thriving business. Bueno!

"The Centennial History of Chautauqua County" states that in the early fifties Jamestown had a colored population of 118, including both slave and free. These colored people lived in that part of the community known as Africa. The same work states that the following Jamestown citizens were active in the affairs of the Underground Railroad: Silas **Shearman**, Phineas **Crossman**, Dr. William **Hedges**, Varanes **Page** and Mrs. Catherine **Harris**.

It is reported that there was an Underground Railroad station also at Falconer. Bert **Mosher** relates that when in 1860 his father moved into the old Edward **Work** house, which formerly stood on the corner now occupied by the Falconer Bank, there was a room on the second floor the only access to which was a very skillfully concealed entrance from above. The general supposition has been that this concealed room was used for secreting slaves who came to the place as an Underground Railroad station. The existence of this station, however, cannot be definitely established.

The Ellington station was conducted by Joseph B. **Nessle**, Mr. **Stafford's** stepfather, at his home in Ellington village. Mr. **Stafford** well remembered the frequent signal at the door during the night and of hearing his stepfather open the door and admit the conductor and his party. With the curiosity of a boy, young **Stafford** often stole down to see the strange visitors who he recalls as extremely shy and in constant dread of capture. After the slaves had been fed by Mr. **Stafford's** mother, Mr. **Nessle** would immediately harness his horses and the same night drive on to the next station which was conducted by James **Wells** two miles north of Leon Center. The Leon station was in a more secluded location and the slaves could be secreted there during the day with greater security. Mr. **Stafford's** only knowledge of the route beyond Leon was that it led to Buffalo. At the time Mr. **Stafford** as a boy saw the slaves brought to his home he did not know the identity of the conductor but later coming to Jamestown to work he recognized Silas

Shearman as the nocturnal conductor who brought the slaves from Jamestown to the Ellington station.

In 1854 there was formed in Ellington a Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society which was active in supporting the fugitive slave cause until the war. Every year this society sent a box of clothing and supplies to the Underground Railroad headquarters at Syracuse or Philadelphia. Of their work locally I have no record. Mrs. **Brooks**, mother of John M. **Brooks**, M.D., appears to have been a leading spirit of this society, and a series of letters she wrote to William **Still**, for many years connected with the anti-slavery office in Philadelphia and chairman of the acting vigilant committee of the Philadelphia branch of the Underground Railroad, appears in **Still's** "The Underground Rail Road" (Philadelphia, 1871). In a letter of December 7, 1859, Mrs. **Brooks** wrote that she was

... thankful for the growing interest there is for the cause throughout the free States, for it certainly is on the increase, even in our own locality. There are those who, five years since, were (ashamed, must I say it!) to bear the appellation of "anti-slavery," who can now manfully bear the one and then still more repellant of Abolitionist. All this we wish to feel thankful for, and wish their number may never grow less.

*The excitement relative to the heroic John **Brown**, now in his grave, has affected the whole North, or at least every one who has a heart in his breast, particularly this portion of the State, which is so decidedly anti-slavery.*

*I have just learned that John **Brown's** body passed through Dunkirk, a few miles from this place, yesterday. A funeral service is to be preached in this place one week from next Sabbath for the good old man.*

The most prominent figure in the history of the Underground Railroad in Chautauqua County was that of Dr. E.M. **Pettit**, of Fredonia, who died in 1885 at the age of eighty-three. Dr. **Pettit** was an active and fearless agent and conductor and the **Pettit** house was a noted station on the line that followed the lake shore from Erie, Pennsylvania, to Buffalo. Dr. **Pettit** wrote some serial sketches of the history of the Underground Railroad for the Fredonia "Censor" in 1870, which were reprinted in 1879 in a volume of 174 pages. **Siebert** makes frequent reference to Dr. **Pettit's** book.

Of the total number of slaves who reached Canada through the Chautauqua County route of the Underground Railroad I have found no estimate. The total number who escaped from the South during the thirty years preceding the Civil War was between thirty-five thousand and seventy-five thousand. The financial loss to the South has been estimated at \$30,000,000. As there were nearly four million slaves in 1860, it is apparent that, compared to the total slave population, the number who reached Canada by the Underground Railroad offered the South no serious menace.

The outstanding history of the organized movement in the northern States for aiding fugitive slaves to reach the free soil of Canada is Wilbur H. **Siebert's** "The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom" (New York, 1898), with an introduction by Albert **Bushnell Hart** and an

extensive bibliography. **Siebert** lists the following as active participants in the movement in Chautauqua County: Andrew **Cranston**, Rev. Mr. **Frink**, **Knowlton**, Dr. J. **Pettit** and Eber M. **Pettit**. In Cattaraugus County, he includes **Wells**, who conducted the station at Leon. He gives two routes through the angle of southwestern New York, one hugging the shore of Lake Erie through Westfield and Fredonia, the other from Franklin, Pennsylvania, to Jamestown and thence via Ellington to Leon. At Leon, he states, the route branched, one line running to Fredonia and thence northward, the other following a more direct route to Buffalo.

In its larger aspect, the Underground Railroad had a profound effect upon the nation during the period 1830 – 60. While the secret activities of the militant anti-slavery element supplied the reason for the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, the law, instead of stopping the channels and thereby arresting the escape of the liberty-seeking slaves, actually increased the number of those participating in the work of the Underground Railroad. The slave-owners naturally charged the loss of every slave that disappeared to the hated system, the profound secrecy which enshrouded the railroad's operations contributing to exaggeration of its extent and aggressiveness. Thus the Underground Railroad became one of the greatest forces that brought on the Civil War.

The operations of the Underground Railroad are a closed but still thrilling chapter of the history of pre-Civil War days. Its agents secreted, fed, and by night transported their unfortunate charges, without reward, always in danger of arrest and punishment by fine and imprisonment, and not without conflict with the sentiments of their non-Abolitionist neighbors. For even in Jamestown an anti-slavery speaker of the time was saved from mob violence only by the physical strength and fearlessness of a minister of the Gospel, the Rev. Hiram **Eddy** of revered memory.

And so, let us not withhold the tribute that is due the moral and physical bravery of the men and women who manned the section of the Underground Railroad that wound through the valleys and over the hills of the Chautauqua region.

*Read before the New York State Historical Association at Chautauqua, August 24, 1934. The author has been interested in this phase of the history of the county for many years.