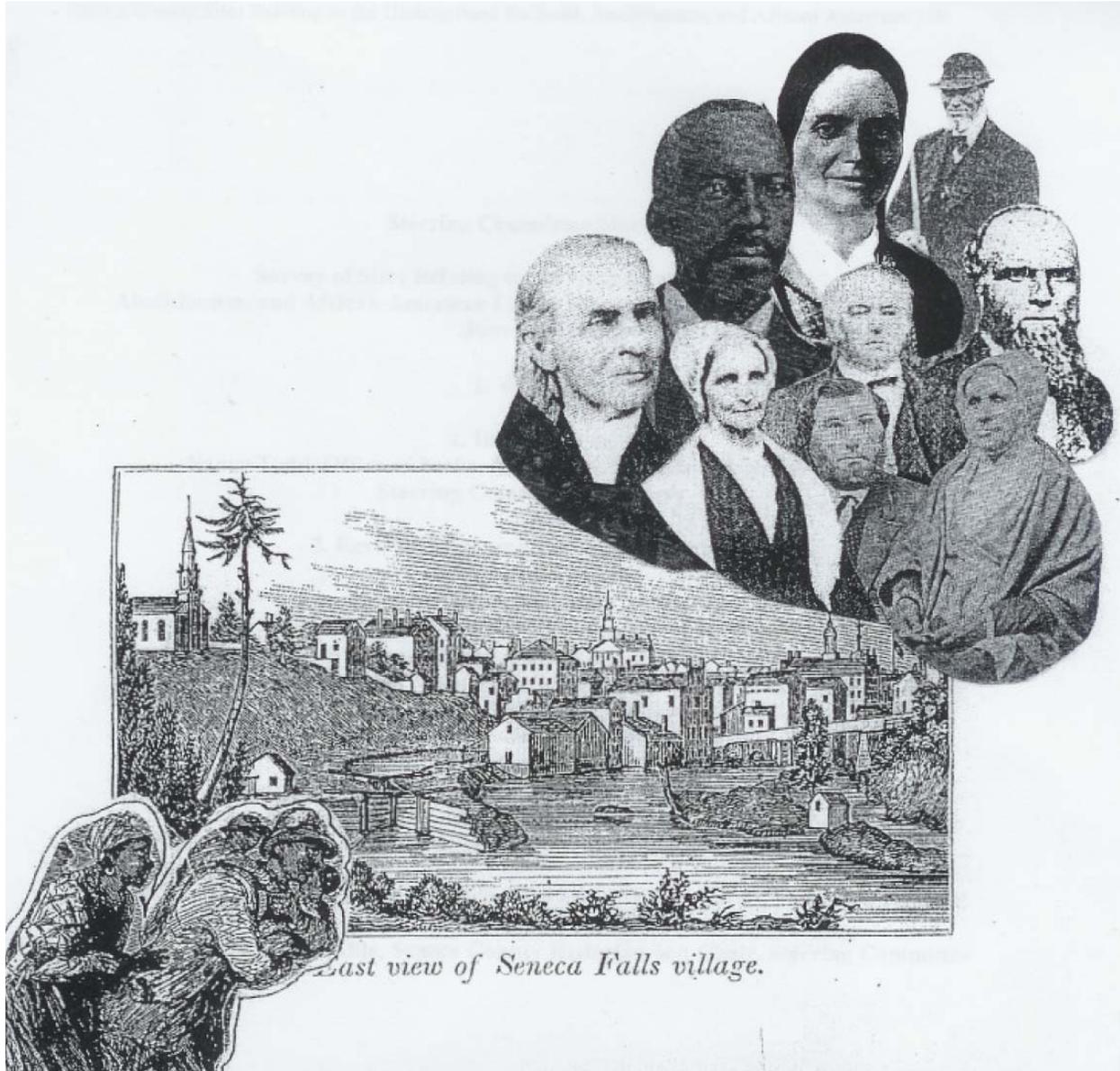


Thomas James Freedom Seeker



Seneca County was established in March 1804.

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February 2007

Thomas James Curriculum

Thomas James was a freedom seeker who became a rather prosperous barber in Seneca Falls before his death in 1867. In the year-long Preserve New York grant-funded research project “The Underground Railroad, Abolitionism and African American life in Seneca County, 1820-1880,” much new information about has been learned about this Thomas James. Much of this newly-uncovered information came from newspaper articles and his probated will. As a result of our grant research project, his house at 52 State Street in Seneca Falls has been placed on the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. (His house is already within the designated area of the village of Seneca Falls that is listed in the National Register of Historic Sites.) He is the epitome of what the Underground Railroad was all about.

As part of the Preserve New York grant, project steering committee member Lori Stoudt has developed a curriculum unit making use of various primary source documents about Thomas James. The unit can easily be modified and infused into virtually any grade level of instruction about the Underground Railroad in the years leading up to the Civil War. The curriculum unit is great for reinforcing interpretation of documents, higher level thinking, as well as match skills in reading graphs (perhaps even constructing graphs). It has direct relevance to the New York State social studies learning standards.

There are actually two different versions of this Thomas James curriculum unit. What you have here is the version as modified by Walter Gable, the Seneca County Historian. You can contact him to obtain a CD of this version and/or the original version prepared by Lori Stoudt.

It would be greatly appreciated if any classroom teacher making use of the Thomas James curriculum unit would please let Walter Gable know. When some classroom teacher(s) makes use of this curriculum unit, it will be possible to proceed to have this curriculum unit added to the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom as a curriculum unit. This would facilitate its wider usage throughout the country.

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Thomas James—Freedom Seeker Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. utilize various types of primary source documents (census data, newspaper articles, probated will and executors' statement) and other documents (timelines, pictures and articles) to answer questions dealing with Thomas James
2. identify the different terms used to refer to the African American named Thomas James
3. relate specific national historic events regarding the Underground Railroad to the life of Thomas James
4. show how Thomas James became a rather prosperous and respected person in Seneca Falls by the time of his death

List of Terms

Abolitionist - A person who wanted to abolish or put an end to slavery

Census – An official counting of all the people in a country or area to find out how many people there are and to determine the sex, ages, occupations, etc. of those counted

Free Soil Party – A political party that opposed slavery and proposed laws to keep slavery from expanding into new territories

Freedom Seeker—Term currently used to refer to fugitive slaves or runaway slaves

Fugitive – a runaway slave

Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 – This act made it illegal to help an escaped slave in any way. People could be fined and jailed for helping a suspected escaping slave, and the fugitive could be captured and sent back to the owner.

Petition – A written request to someone in authority, signed by a number of people, expressing an opinion in an attempt to create change

Primary Resources – Original documents such as census records, newspaper articles, legal documents, and maps that were created at the time the event being researched took place

Slave – A person who is owned by another person

Underground Railroad – The name given to the many ways fugitive slaves took to escape slavery in the southern United States to freedom in the north before the Civil War

Activity One—Exploring Census Records

Vocabulary

Census: A census is an official counting of all the people in a country or area to find out how many people there are to and to determine the sex, ages, occupations, etc. of those counted. The U.S. Constitution requires a national (federal) census every 10 years so as to determine how many representatives each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives (one of the two houses of Congress).

Focus Question: Can we determine if Thomas James was a fugitive slave?

Materials:

- 1850 U.S. Census data for village of Seneca Falls
- 1860 U.S. Census data for village of Seneca Falls

Procedure

1. Questions based on the 1850 U.S. Census sheet
 - Who lived with Thomas James in 1850?
 - How old is Thomas James in 1850?
 - What is listed as his occupation?
 - When and where was he born? (Hint: Subtract his age from the year the census was taken.)
2. Questions based on the 1860 U.S. Census sheet
 - Who lived with Thomas James in 1860?
 - What is listed as his color (column 6)? Why might this information be recorded in a census?
 - Where was Thomas James born according to this census?
3. Summary Questions
 - What has happened to the value of his real estate between the 1850 and the 1860 census? Do you think it is more likely that this indicates that he owned more property in 1860 than in 1850?
 - What “conflicting” information is found in these two censuses regarding Thomas James? (Hint: Note the discrepant ages listed for Thomas James in 1850 and 1860—they are not simply 10 years different. Note also that in the 1850 census Thomas’ color is listed as “M” for “Mulatto” but as “B” for “black” in 1860. Note also the difference in listed birthplace.)
 - What evidence, if any, is there on these sheets that Thomas James was a “freedom seeker” (fugitive slave)?

SCHEDULE I. Free Inhabitants in the Town of Jensen Falls in the County of Jensen State of New York enumerated by me, on the 21st day of Oct. 1850. Jesse Fuller Ass't Marshal.

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Dwelling-house in the name of the owner or visitation	Family numbered in the order of visitation	The Name of every Person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1850, was in this family.	Description			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of such Male Persons over 15 years of age.	Value of Real Estate owned.	Place of Birth. Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.			
			Age	Sex	Color (White, Black, or Indian)				10	11	12	13
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
		Chas. C. Wheatstony	21	m		Clerk		N.Y.				
		H. S. Hall	17	m								
246	2524	Thomas James	37	m	alt	Booker	700	Unknown				
		Joseph C.	36	f	B			Penn.				
		Maria	19	f	alt			Canada				
		William Brown	30	f	alt	39		Penn.				
247	2529	Frederick R. Gray	58	alt		Iron	3,000	West India				
		F. J.	36	m		Tramway	2,000	England				
		Jessie	26	f				N.Y.				
		A. B.	3	f								
		Patrick M. Gorman	40	m		Seafarer		Ireland				
		John M. Donald	22	f								
		Michael Magee	22	m								
		Thomas Bodley	21	f								
		Ellen Donahue	26	f								
248	2536	J. C. Blossman	33	m		Lawyer	1,000	N.Y.				
		Amelia	32	f								
		Richard Conright	3	f								
249	2539	Carl M. Jackson	34	m		Millwright	900					
		Billy	33	f								
		Carl M. Van Riper	24	f								
		Elizabeth Crosby	21	f								
250	2538	James Sanderson	54	m		Cabinetmaker	5,000	N.Y.				
		Mary J.	53	f				N.Y.				
		Elizabeth	24	f								
		J. J.	22	f								
		Henry	19	m		Cabinetmaker						
		George	17	m								
		Mary	15	f								
		Harriet	11	f								
		Ed. H.	9	f								
		Sarah Day	79	f				England				
251	2531	Charles Platten	30	m		Taylor	1,500					
		C. A.	26	f				N.Y.				
		H. C.	9	f								
		Malde	7	f								
		John P. H.	8	m								
252	2532	David North	42	m		Hotelkeeper	3,000	Mass.				
		Leila	30	f				N.Y.				
		George	23	m		Seamster						
		Louisa	20	f								

of New York, enumerated by me, on the 12th day of June, 1860. *John D. Hoag*
 Post Office *Seneca Falls*

1	2	3	Description			7	Value of Estate Owned		10	11	12	13	14
			Age	Sex	Color		Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Estate					
8	9	Charles C. Foy	38	m		Machinist			New York				
		Emma Davis	19	f		Does not ch		250	Do				
		Bridget Machin	20	f		Servant			Ireland				
8	10	William Standish	48	m		Shoemaker	1500		England				
		Olga	41	f					New York				
9	11	William Smith	42	m		Carpenter	700	500	Do				
		Olga	40	f					Do				
		James Smith	37	m		Carpenter			Do				
		Major White	50	m		Wood Chopper			Do				
		Robert Parker	20	m		Machinist			Do				
10	13	Richard Casey	39	m		Wagon Driver	1100	200	Ireland				
		Rebecca	31	f					New York				
		John	12	m					Do				
		Andrew	10	m					Do				
		Henry	8	m					Do				
		Matthew	4	m					Do				
		Mary	3	f					Do				
		Margaret	1	f					Do				
		Sabrina Rogers	40	f		Seamstress			Ireland				
		Anna Dwyer	18	f		Servant			New York				
11	13	Lulia Paulick	40	f				1000	Do				
		Augusta	18	f					Do				
		Katie	13	f					Do				
		Price Bailey	23	m		Wagon Driver			Do				
		John White	25	m		Shoemaker			Do				
		George Ayres	25	m		Machinist			Do				
		James M. Hart	25	m		Merchant Clerk			Pussia				
		William White	20	m		Machinist			New York				
		William Green	18	m		Wagon Driver			Do				
		Joseph Phardrup	16	m		Merchant Clerk			New York				
		Kannah Woodman	32	f		Milliner			Do				
		Maria Waller	19	f		Seamstress			Do				
12	14	Thomas James	43	m		Printer	6000	600	Do				
		Elizabeth	40	f					Pennsylvania				
		Nathaniel Hall	14	f					New York				
		Caroline Smith	50	f		Washerwoman			Do				
		Thomas Hill	23	m		Printer			Pennsylvania				
		June 13th 1860											
13	15	David Bachman	57	m		Printer		300	New York				
		Lelia Bachman	57	f					Do				

X. Sum. 1860 to 1861. 1861. 1862. 1863. 1864. 1865. 1866. 1867. 1868. 1869. 1870. 1871. 1872. 1873. 1874. 1875. 1876. 1877. 1878. 1879. 1880. 1881. 1882. 1883. 1884. 1885. 1886. 1887. 1888. 1889. 1890. 1891. 1892. 1893. 1894. 1895. 1896. 1897. 1898. 1899. 1900. 1901. 1902. 1903. 1904. 1905. 1906. 1907. 1908. 1909. 1910. 1911. 1912. 1913. 1914. 1915. 1916. 1917. 1918. 1919. 1920. 1921. 1922. 1923. 1924. 1925. 1926. 1927. 1928. 1929. 1930. 1931. 1932. 1933. 1934. 1935. 1936. 1937. 1938. 1939. 1940. 1941. 1942. 1943. 1944. 1945. 1946. 1947. 1948. 1949. 1950. 1951. 1952. 1953. 1954. 1955. 1956. 1957. 1958. 1959. 1960. 1961. 1962. 1963. 1964. 1965. 1966. 1967. 1968. 1969. 1970. 1971. 1972. 1973. 1974. 1975. 1976. 1977. 1978. 1979. 1980. 1981. 1982. 1983. 1984. 1985. 1986. 1987. 1988. 1989. 1990. 1991. 1992. 1993. 1994. 1995. 1996. 1997. 1998. 1999. 2000. 2001. 2002. 2003. 2004. 2005. 2006. 2007. 2008. 2009. 2010. 2011. 2012. 2013. 2014. 2015. 2016. 2017. 2018. 2019. 2020. 2021. 2022. 2023. 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2356. 2357. 2358. 2359. 2360. 2361. 2362. 2363. 2364. 2365. 2366. 2367. 2368. 2369. 2370. 2371. 2372. 2373. 2374. 2375. 2376. 2377. 2378. 2379. 2380. 2381. 2382. 2383. 2384. 2385. 2386. 2387. 2388. 2389. 2390. 2391. 2392. 2393. 2394. 2395. 2396. 2397. 2398. 2399. 2400. 2401. 2402. 2403. 2404. 2405. 2406. 2407. 2408. 2409. 2410. 2411. 2412. 2413. 2414. 2415. 2416. 2417. 2418. 2419. 2420. 2421. 2422. 2423. 2424. 2425. 2426. 2427. 2428. 2429. 2430. 2431. 2432. 2433. 2434. 2435. 2436. 2437. 2438. 2439. 2440. 2441. 2442. 2443. 2444. 2445. 2446. 2447. 2448. 2449. 2450. 2451. 2452. 2453. 2454. 2455. 2456. 2457. 2458. 2459. 2460. 2461. 2462. 2463. 2464. 2465. 2466. 2467. 2468. 2469. 2470. 2471. 2472. 2473. 2474. 2475. 2476. 2477. 2478. 2479. 2480. 2481. 2482. 2483. 2484. 2485. 2486. 2487. 2488. 2489. 2490. 2491. 2492. 2493. 2494. 2495. 2496. 2497. 2498. 2499. 2500. 2501. 2502. 2503. 2504. 2505. 2506. 2507. 2508. 2509. 2510. 2511. 2512. 2513. 2514. 2515. 2516. 2517. 2518. 2519. 2520. 2521. 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2688. 2689. 2690. 2691. 2692. 2693. 2694. 2695. 2696. 2697. 2698. 2699. 2700. 2701. 2702. 2703. 2704. 2705. 2706. 2707. 2708. 2709. 2710. 2711. 2712. 2713. 2714. 2715. 2716. 2717. 2718. 2719. 2720. 2721. 2722. 2723. 2724. 2725. 2726. 2727. 2728. 2729. 2730. 2731. 2732. 2733. 2734. 2735. 2736. 2737. 2738. 2739. 2740. 2741. 2742. 2743. 2744. 2745. 2746. 2747. 2748. 2749. 2750. 2751. 2752. 2753. 2754. 2755. 2756. 2757. 2758. 2759. 2760. 2761. 2762. 2763. 2764. 2765. 2766. 2767. 2768. 2769. 2770. 2771. 2772. 2773. 2774. 2775. 2776. 2777. 2778. 2779. 2780. 2781. 2782. 2783. 2784. 2785. 2786. 2787. 2788. 2789. 2790. 2791. 2792. 2793. 2794. 2795. 2796. 2797. 2798. 2799. 2800. 2801. 2802. 2803. 2804. 2805. 2806. 2807. 2808. 2809. 2810. 2811. 2812. 2813. 2814. 2815. 2816. 2817. 2818. 2819. 2820. 2821. 2822. 2823. 2824. 2825. 2826. 2827. 2828. 2829. 2830. 2831. 2832. 2833. 2834. 2835. 2836. 2837. 2838. 2839. 2840. 2841. 2842. 2843. 2844. 2845. 2846. 2847. 2848. 2849. 2850. 2851. 2852. 2853. 2854. 2855. 2856. 2857. 2858. 2859. 2860. 2861. 2862. 2863. 2864. 2865. 2866. 2867. 2868. 2869. 2870. 2871. 2872. 2873. 2874. 2875. 2876. 2877. 2878. 2879. 2880. 2881. 2882. 2883. 2884. 2885. 2886. 2887. 2888. 2889. 2890. 2891. 2892. 2893. 2894. 2895. 2896. 2897. 2898. 2899. 2900. 2901. 2902. 2903. 2904. 2905. 2906. 2907. 2908. 2909. 2910. 2911. 2912. 2913. 2914. 2915. 2916. 2917. 2918. 2919. 2920. 2921. 2922. 2923. 2924. 2925. 2926. 2927. 2928. 2929. 2930. 2931. 2932. 2933. 2934. 2935. 2936. 2937. 2938. 2939. 2940. 2941. 2942. 2943. 2944. 2945. 2946. 2947. 2948. 2949. 2950. 2951. 2952. 2953. 2954. 2955. 2956. 2957. 2958. 2959. 2960. 2961. 2962. 2963. 2964. 2965. 2966. 2967. 2968. 2969. 2970. 2971. 2972. 2973. 2974. 2975. 2976. 2977. 2978. 2979. 2980. 2981. 2982. 2983. 2984. 2985. 2986. 2987. 2988. 2989. 2990. 2991. 2992. 2993. 2994. 2995. 2996. 2997. 2998. 2999. 3000.

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Activity Two – Evaluate a Timeline

Note:

Timelines assist in placing an individual's life and experiences in perspective with the politics of the time in which the person lives.

Focus Question: What evidence exists suggesting that Thomas James was active in the abolitionist (anti-slavery) movement?

Materials:

- Biographical Timeline for Thomas James

Procedure:

1. Questions based on the timeline:
 - What anti-slavery organizations did Thomas James join?
 - What political action did Thomas James take in 1850?
 - Could the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law be used to place Thomas James back into slavery?
 - How could the 1857 Dred Scott decision by the U.S. Supreme Court affect Thomas James' rights as a black man living in the United States?
 - In what year was slavery abolished in the United States?
 - What event ended slavery?
2. Conclusion discussion questions:
 - How are national events reflected in the life and actions of Thomas James?
 - How could Thomas James manage to live in Seneca Falls in the 1850's in light of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law and the 1857 Dred Scott decision?

Biographical Timeline

National	Thomas James
1793 Fugitive Slave Act makes it a crime to help a fugitive slave or to prevent the slave's arrest.	
1826 Canada is asked to return fugitive slaves who have escaped there. The Canadian government refuses.	1813 / 1814 Thomas James is born
1831 The term "underground railroad" is first used.	1842 Thomas James purchases a home at 52 State Street, Seneca Falls, NY
1850 Fugitive Slave Law is passed denying captured blacks any legal power to prove their freedom and helping slave owners to capture their "property". This law is harsher than the 1793 act.	1843 James joins the Wesleyan Methodist Church, an anti-slavery congregation
1857 Dred Scott Decision is made by the U. S. Supreme Court ruling that blacks, free or slave, are not United States citizens.	1848 James signs a petition in support of the Free Soil Party, a political group that opposed slavery.
1861 Civil War begins	1850 James signs an anti-slavery petitions that were sent to Congress
1862 Emancipation Proclamation declared freedom of all slaves in Confederate territory not already under Union control.	1860 U.S. Census is taken
1865 Civil War ends; The 13 th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishes slavery	1863 An article was written declaring Thomas James as a fugitive slave
	1864 The construction of a new business building, owned by Thomas James, is completed
	1867 Thomas James dies

Activity Three—Newspaper Articles Give Insight into Thomas James the Barber

Note:

Newspaper articles can provide insight into the daily life of an individual and that person’s standing (reputation and status) in a community.

Focus Question: What can newspaper articles tell us about obstacles Thomas James faced and his success as a businessman in Seneca Falls?

Materials:

- 1845 newspaper article from the *Seneca Falls Democrat* that begins with heading :“Outrage”
- 1856 article from the *Seneca Falls Reveille* that has the heading “The People’s Shaving and Hair Dressing Saloon”
- 1863 newspaper article that begins with the heading “Woodmansee’s new Hotel”
- 1863 newspaper article that begins with the heading “More Improvements”
- 1864 newspaper article that begins with the heading “James’ New Block”
- 1867 newspaper article that has the heading “Death of Thomas James”

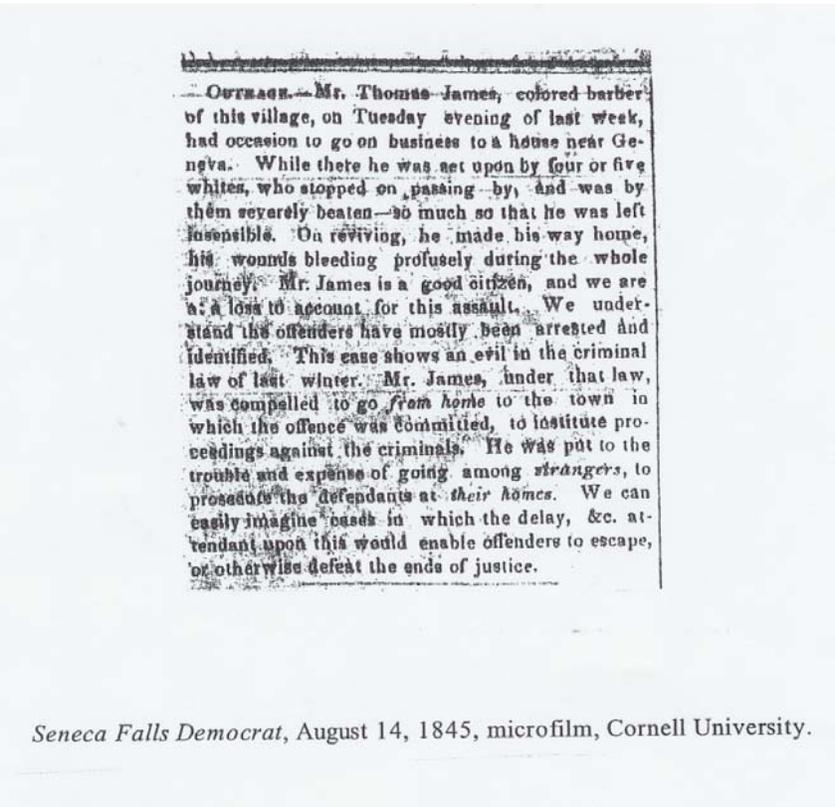
Procedure:

1. two 1863 and one 1864 newspaper articles
 - a. Ask students if they were to start a scrapbook of events happening in the current year, what would they include? The tell students why many ladies like Mrs. C.O. Goodyear kept scrapbooks in the 1800s.
 - b. Questions based upon these three newspaper articles:
 - What evidence, if any, is there in these articles that Thomas James was a “freedom seeker” (fugitive slave)?
 - Today we use the term “African American.” In these newspaper articles, what terms are used rather than “African American”?
 - At the very end of the “More Improvements...” article there is the wording “we think no one will deny that he has rights which white men are bound to respect, Judge Taney to the contrary notwithstanding.” What U.S. History event is being referred to in this quote?
 - What evidence, if any, is found in these documents to suggest that Thomas James was a respected and rather prosperous person living in Seneca Falls?
2. 1845 newspaper article
 - What happened to Thomas James when he was returning home from going to a house near Geneva, NY, in August 1845?
 - Is this article “proof” that Thomas James was living in Seneca Falls at this time?
 - How does James’ treatment as described in this article compare with the view of Thomas James expressed in the previous three newspaper article (see procedure #1 above)? How do you account for this difference?
3. 1856 newspaper article
 - What is this article? (Is it a newspaper article or a paid advertisement?)

- What is the purpose of this article?
 - What kind of “reputation” does Thomas James have as a barber?
 - Why might a barber, like Thomas James, be in a good position to hear news about abolitionist activities and freedom seekers? How could this help him if he were involved in the Underground Railroad operations in Seneca Falls? If pro-slavery people were to think he was involved in the Underground Railroad operations in Seneca Falls, how might that affect his barber business?
4. 1867 newspaper article
- How is Thomas James referred to in this obituary?
 - Is the overall “tone” of this article a positive or negative viewpoint of this man?

The *Seneca Falls Democrat* contained the following article in its August 14, 1845 issue:

OUTRAGE: Mr. Thomas James, colored barber of this village, on Tuesday evening of last week, had occasion to go on business to a house near Geneva. While there he was set upon by four or five whites, who stopped on passing by, and was severely beaten by them—so much so that he was left insensible. On reviving, he made his way home, his wounds bleeding profusely during the whole journey. Mr. James is a good citizen, and we are at a loss to account for this assault. We understand the offenders have mostly been arrested and identified. This case shows an evil in the criminal law of last winter. Mr. James, under that law, was compelled to go from home to the town in which the offense was committed, to institute proceedings against the criminals. He was put to the trouble and expense of going among strangers, to prosecute the defendants at their homes. We can easily imagine cases in which the delay, &c., attendant upon this would enable offenders to escape, or otherwise defeat the ends of justice.



OURNEN.—Mr. Thomas James, colored barber of this village, on Tuesday evening of last week, had occasion to go on business to a house near Geneva. While there he was set upon by four or five whites, who stopped on passing by, and was by them severely beaten—so much so that he was left insensible. On reviving, he made his way home, his wounds bleeding profusely during the whole journey. Mr. James is a good citizen, and we are at a loss to account for this assault. We understand the offenders have mostly been arrested and identified. This case shows an evil in the criminal law of last winter. Mr. James, under that law, was compelled to go from home to the town in which the offence was committed, to institute proceedings against the criminals. He was put to the trouble and expense of going among strangers, to prosecute the defendants at their homes. We can easily imagine cases in which the delay, &c. attendant upon this would enable offenders to escape, or otherwise defeat the ends of justice.

Seneca Falls Democrat, August 14, 1845, microfilm, Cornell University.

Newspaper clipping
from the
Seneca Falls Reveille
December 6, 1856

Seneca Falls Reveille, 06 Dec 1856

THE PEOPLE'S
Shaving and Hair Dressing Saloon.

THE subscriber would respectfully inform the public that he has recently remodelled and refitted his Saloon, and added the latest improvements in the art of SHAVING AND HAIR DRESSING, and will be found at all times ready to serve all to anything in his line. His workmen are all competent and obliging, and customers may rest assured that work will be done to their satisfaction. The subscriber has also on hand a good supply of Perfumery and Hair Oils, and is the Sole Proprietor of JAMES' CELEBRATED RESTORATIVE for the Hair, which he unhesitatingly recommends to the public. Saloon next door east of Woodmansee's Hotel, Fall St., Seneca Falls.

Sept. 22, 1855. T. JAMES.

THE PEOPLE'S
Shaving and Hair Dressing Saloon.

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Sept. 22, 1855 T. JAMES

1863 newspaper article
located in
Mrs. C.O. Goodyear's scrapbook, page 40,
in the
Seneca Falls Historical Society

 Woodmansee's new Hotel and James' block of stores, corner of Fall and Cayuga-streets, are rapidly approaching completion, and make the most marked improvement of recent date in our village. Mr James' building, standing directly on the corner, is quite elegant in style, and its appearance reflects very favorably on the enterprise and taste of its sable proprietor, who is a fugitive from slavery. We mention this fact to show what freedom will do for a man, and that "some things as well as others" can be done by colored men.

1863 newspaper article
located in
Mrs. C.O. Goodyear's scrapbook in the
Seneca Falls Historical Society

RE. MORE IMPROVEMENTS.—Mr. Thomas James having purchased the premises adjoining his barber shop, on the corner of Fall and Cayuga-sts., has made arrangements for erecting a three-story brick block, to extend from the corner to Woodmansee's new hotel, now in process of erection. When these buildings are completed this corner will exhibit a very fine improvement of our village.

In this connexion we cannot refrain from bringing to notice the fact that Mr. James, who is a fugitive slave, is the possessor, in this village, of real estate to the amount of twelve or fifteen thousand dollars, all of which he has honestly acquired during his residence here. He has shown that although he belongs to the down-trodden race *he can take care of himself*, and we think no one will deny that he has *rights which white men are bound to respect*, Judge Taney to the contrary notwithstanding.

1864 newspaper article
source unknown
located in
Mrs. C.O. Goodyear's scrapbook, page 40,
in the
Seneca Falls Historical Society

JAMES' NEW BLOCK.—The new brick block on the corner of Fall and Cayuga streets, which has been in the course of construction for the past few months, is now complete in all its parts, and is a very marked improvement to that part of the village.—The building was put up by Mr. THOMAS JAMES, who has shown commendable zeal and enterprise in the undertaking. The basement of the building in part is occupied by Mr. JAMES as a barber shop, and JAMES GRAY, as a Saloon. The first floor is used by Messrs. H. WELLER and W. H. TICKNOR, both carrying on the grocery business. Mr. GREEN has rooms in the second story, where he keeps music and musical instruments.

All the rooms in the block are large and commodious, and the building itself presents a very fine appearance. Mr. JAMES is entitled to much praise for the enterprise and public spirit displayed in thus improving and adding to the beauty of the street.

Death Notice in 1867 for Thomas James
found by
Roberta Halden, the Seneca Falls Village Historian
in her scrapbooks of newspaper articles
in the
Seneca Falls Library

DEATH OF THOMAS JAMES.—Thos. James, a well known colored citizen, who has carried on the barbering business in this village for nearly thirty years, died on Monday last. He had an apoplectic attack some few weeks since, which was the cause of his death. Mr. James was an industrious and enterprising man and had accumulated quite a handsome property. His wife survives him.

Activity Four—Anti-slavery Petitions

Note:

Thomas James signed at least four anti-slavery petitions, addressed to the United States Congress that tried to stop the extension of slavery.

Focus Question: Can we determine if Thomas James was involved in the Underground Railroad, willing to help freedom seekers, or an abolitionist?

Materials:

- Petitions

Procedure:

1. Petition

- What did this petition ask the United States Congress to do?
- If you were alive in 1850, would you have signed this petition?
- Thomas James was the only black man to sign this petition. What risks might Thomas James have been taking that were not present for the other signers of this petition?
- Do you think it was legal for a black man to sign such a petition?
- How do you think Thomas James became aware that this petition was in existence? What does this suggest about his “involvement” in anti-slavery activities in Seneca Falls?

Activity Five – Thomas James’ Will and the Executors’ Papers

Focus Question: What “evidence” can be gathered from his probated will that Thomas James was a freedom seeker?

Materials:

- Will and Testament of Thomas James
- Will and Administration Papers for Thomas James

Procedure:

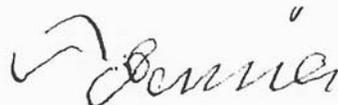
1. Give students both documents and explain what a “will” is and what “executors of an estate” do.
2. Questions:
 - What evidence is found in his will and testament that Thomas James was likely a “literate” person? Why isn’t this conclusive proof?
 - What evidence exists in these documents that Thomas James was a freedom seeker (fugitive slave)?

Will and Testament of Thomas James:

"I, Thomas James of the Town of Seneca Falls, etc., being of full age and of sound mind and memory do make, etc. and declare this my last will and testament in manner following, that is to say:

1. I direct my executors herein after appointed to pay from my property both real and personal all my honest debts of every kind and character.
2. I direct my said executors...to pay my funeral expenses and to erect a monument at my grave that shall not cost to exceed \$100.00, whenever my said debts are so far paid as that the payment of the \$100.00 for my said tombstone will not embarrass my said estate and not until then.
3. I give and bequeath to my dear wife Sarah Elizabeth James the use of all my property both real and personal (excepting and reserving there from only so much thereof as I shall hereafter bequeath to other parties, during her natural life to use the same for her own use and as she may deem proper after the payment of my debts...And it is my desire and I hereby direct my said wife to support her sister Julia Ann Potter out of the avails of my estate...either at the house of my wife or in some other manner, during the natural life of said Julia An Potter or so long as she and my wife and executors can agree and no longer.
4. I give, etc. to my friends Mrs. Mary A. Baker and her mother the use of the upper part of the small frame building standing on Cayuga Street next and north of my Brick Block during their natural lives to either occupy said premises or give to them the rents and profits arising there from as they shall think best and most proper, provided the said Mary A Baker and her mother shall always conduct themselves in a prudent becoming and proper manner and not otherwise.
5. After the death of my said wife and after the death of the other parties herein in any manner provided for and after the payment of all my debts and funeral expenses of myself and my wife, then and not until then I give and bequeath to my said executors all my property that shall remain unexpended and not otherwise lawfully disposed of in trust to be by them given to some one or more good schools which shall be permanently established for the education and mental improvement of colored persons in the United States, and I hereby direct my executors to use great diligence...in the disposal of this my last bequest and to take such security for the investments they shall make in pursuance thereof as shall secure the use of my said property to the purpose of educating colored children forever and to see that the principle sum shall not be expended but that the interest thereof shall be appropriated to use of educating colored children forever.
6. I do hereby nominate and appoint my dear wife Sarah Elizabeth James and my friends Jacob H. Corl and Henry Henion to be my executors, etc.

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 2nd day of February 1865.





**Will and Administration Papers for Thomas James
Seneca County Court
#00-547**

The petition of Elizabeth James and others to the Town of Seneca Falls, etc., showeth that Thomas James...died in Seneca Falls 16 December 1867 and left a will dated 2 February 1864 and a codicil dated 16 January 1867.

The deceased appointed Elizabeth James, Jacob Corl & Henry Henion as executors, etc.

The respective heirs are as follows:

“Elizabeth James, his widow, and the said Thomas James had no other relatives known to the deponents or either of them-**he having formerly been a slave** and made, during his lifetime, diligent enquiry for his relatives without effect.”

Signed by the hand of Elizabeth James, Jacob H. Corl and Henry Henion

The following articles are exempted from appraisement, to remain in the possession of Sarah Elizabeth James, wife of the deceased:

1 cook stove and furniture; 1 parlor stoves and pipe; Family Bible; family pictures; school books-all the library; wearing apparel; 1 straw bed; 1 feather bed and necessary bedding for same; 1 cherry table; 6 cane seat chairs; 6 knives & forks; 6 plates; 6 tea cups and saucers; 1 sugar dish; 1 milk pot; 1 tea pot; 6 spoons; 1 bed stead.

In addition to the above-enumerated articles, the appraisers, in the exercise of their discretion, set apart the following articles of necessary household furniture and personal property for the use of Sarah Eliz, James:

20 yards carpet; 1 sofa; 1 what-not; 1 stand; 1 mirror; 3 muslin window curtains; 23 yds rag carpet; 1 lounge and cushion; 1 oil table cover; 1 clock; 2 rocking chairs;...1 bird cage; 1 wash stand and toilet; 1 map; 1 bureau; etc.

The following articles were presented to us for appraisement over and above what was exempted “to wit” in the house:

1 rocking chair and 1 arm chair; 4 bed quilts, 2 comforters; 1 counter pane; 1 leather trunk; 1 cupboard.

Also, in the Barber’s Shop:

3 mahogany mirrors; 2 black walnut mirrors; 6 arm chairs; 1 barber’s chair; 4 stands; 1 table; 1 shaving cup case and stand; 1 sink and stand; 1 settee; 1 bunk; 2 show cases; 1 stove; 1 screen; 1 lamp; 4 spittoons; 40 shaving cups and brushes; 1 lounge; 4 picture frames; 1 clock.

Signed James Payne and A. Failey

Activity Six—2005 Picture of the Thomas James House

Focus Questions:

- How can a home's external appearance undergo change over time?
- What problems does this kind of change pose for historical research?

Materials:

- 2005 picture of the Thomas James house, 52 State Street in Seneca Falls, NY

Procedure:

- What evidence is shown in this picture that this house has very likely undergone some major change since it was owned by Thomas James between 1842 and 1867?
- What kinds of special problems do such changes over time pose for historical research of what the house was like at the time that Thomas James lived there?
- What portions of the house are least likely to have been changed from when Thomas James lived there?



Activity Seven—Putting It All Together

Notes:

The classroom teacher could possibly do only this activity with the students, forgoing the previous six activities.

Focus Question: How is Thomas James the epitome of what the Underground Railroad was all about?

Materials:

- Article “Thomas James: Freedom Seeker Barber in Seneca Falls”

Procedure:

1. Have students read the article.
2. Questions:
 - Biographical Questions:
 1. Where did Thomas James live?
 2. With whom did he live?
 3. What is his marital status?
 4. Why did Thomas James give different answers in the 1850 and 1860 census regarding his birthplace?
 - His Political Activities:
 1. In what organizations was he a member?
 2. Were these organizations for or against slavery?
 3. What is an abolitionist?
 4. What evidence exists that suggests that Thomas James may well have been an abolitionist?
 5. Do you think Thomas James would have aided fugitive slaves who might have come to his house or business looking for help?
 - Thomas James as a Businessman
 1. What was his occupation in Seneca Falls?
 2. What evidence suggests that Thomas James was successful as a businessman?
 - Concluding Questions:
 1. What advantages did Thomas James have living in New York before the Civil War, as opposed to living in the South?
 2. In what ways are national events reflected in what we know about Thomas James?
 3. In what ways is Thomas James the epitome of what the Underground Railroad was all about?

Thomas James

Freedom Seeker Barber in Seneca Falls

Thomas James is the epitome of what the Underground Railroad was all about—a “freedom seeker” escaping from his enslavement somewhere in the south and taking advantage of the opportunities freedom offered in the North. He became a rather prosperous barber in Seneca Falls and was an abolitionist activist. His house has been placed on the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

We surmise that Thomas James had been born in slavery in the mid-18-teens and escaped to the North in the 1830s. At some point, he went to Canada, where he probably married Sarah Elizabeth and where his daughter Martha was born about 1837. He then returned to the United States, arriving in Seneca Falls sometime before 1840, where his name appeared in the 1840 census.

Thomas James’ birthplace, as reported in U.S. census data, gave the first clue that he might be a freedom seeker. In 1850, he listed his birthplace as “unknown.” James most likely knew where he was born but he was also very aware of national politics. On September 18, 1850, three months after the official 1850 census, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law, putting the full power of the federal government behind returning freedom seekers to slavery. As a practical strategy, James chose to avoid possible recapture by not revealing his birth in slavery to a federal official. James did report that his wife Sarah Elizabeth had been born in Pennsylvania, and his thirteen-year-old daughter Martha had been born in Canada. In 1860, James reported his birthplace as New York. Reported patterns of birth such as this—both the use of “unknown” and reporting different places of birth in different census years—are a good indication that such a person was a possible freedom seeker.

Thomas’ wife, Sarah Elizabeth James, may also have been a freedom seeker. We can piece together Sarah Elizabeth James’ biography from various sources. According to the 1880 census, her father was born in Virginia, and her mother was born in Maryland. She was born either in Pennsylvania or a slave state, sometime between 1802 and 1814. (According to Seneca County poorhouse records, she was born in November 1814. Her obituary noted that she was between 93 and 102 years old when she died in 1904.) Although every census entry (including 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1900) listed Sarah James’ birthplace as Pennsylvania, her obituary noted that she was born in slavery, escaped with her parents to Canada, and then came to Seneca Falls, where she lived for 50 years.

From his position as a free person of color in a northern city, Thomas James took an active part in the fight against slavery. In 1840, he subscribed to the *Colored American*. In August 1840, he attended the “Convention for Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York,” held at Albany, August 1840. There he was appointed head of the Seneca County committee along with Thomas Jackson and D. W. Keeler. He continued to be active in state conventions. In 1853, he was appointed at Geneva in November to serve (with Rev. David Blake, Rev. William Cromwell, Perry B. Lee, Henry Highland Garnet, and J. W. Duffin) on a committee to help organize “a society auxiliary to the state council of colored people; and to further consider the

proceedings of the National Convention held in Rochester in July last, and to take measures to carry out the same.” He signed an announcement for Democratic League Convention in Seneca Falls, and he agreed (along with George Jackson) to take a census of colored people in his district. He joined the antislavery Wesleyan Methodist Church when it was organized in 1843 and became one of its first trustees. He signed a call for a Free Soil meeting, published in the *Seneca County Courier* in June 1848. In 1850, he signed the first extant antislavery petition sent from Seneca Falls. In the early 1850s (and quite likely longer), he subscribed to *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* and the *National Era*.

As an African American in a predominately European American region, even in a community whose citizens knew and respected him, James’ life was not easy. An article in the *Seneca Falls Democrat*, August 14, 1845, noted that:

OUTRAGE: Mr. Thomas James, colored barber of this village, on Tuesday evening of last week, had occasion to go on business to a house near Geneva. While there he was set upon by four or five whites, who stopped on passing by, and was by them severely beaten—so much so that he was left insensible. On reviving, he made his way home, his wounds bleeding profusely during the whole journey. Mr. James is a good citizen, and we are at a loss to account for this assault. We understand the offenders have mostly been arrested and identified. This case shows an evil in the criminal law of last winter. Mrs. James, under that law, was compelled to go *from home* to the town in which the offense was committed, to institute proceedings against the criminals. He was put to the trouble and expense of going among *strangers*, to prosecute the defendants at *their homes*. We can easily imagine cases in which the delay, &c., attendant upon this would enable offenders to escape, or otherwise defeat the ends of justice.

Thomas James did exceedingly well economically in Seneca Falls. As a barber, he attracted a steady business, both from local people and railroad passengers. One of his most famous customers was Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In 1852, inspired by movements for the short dress (or the Bloomer costume), homeopathic medicine, and health reform, Stanton and several other women paid James a shilling apiece for a shampoo and haircut. "It would delight all physiologists and lovers of comfort, to see the heaps of beautiful curls and rich braids that have fallen beneath James' magic touch, from the over heated aching heads of about one dozen of our fair ones," Stanton reported in the *Lily*.

James’ wealth increased dramatically in the 1850s. The census listed the value of his real property in 1850 as \$700. The 1851 assessment record noted that he owned a house on State Street worth \$700, a shop on Fall Street worth \$500, and another house on Cayuga Street worth \$300. By 1860, the census listed his real property as worth \$6000.

The 1863 directory listed the address of Thomas James’ shop as 86 Fall Street. By 1863, he had enough money to consider a major real estate investment. In that year, he and Sarah Elizabeth mortgaged all three of their existing properties to the First National Bank of Seneca Falls for \$3500 and began to build a brick business block at the corner of Fall and Cayuga Streets. This three-story building is the Bank of America building today.

By any measure, Thomas James was an economic success. But wealth could not bring him a long life. His daughter Martha had died in childbirth when she was only eighteen years old on July 22, 1855. On February 2, 1864, just as he completed his new business block, he made out his own will. Without children, he left all his property, after the death of his wife Sarah Elizabeth, to be invested for “educating colored children forever.” (A codicil, written in January 1867, rescinded this provision.)

Thomas James died of consumption (according to cemetery records) on December 16, 1867. He is buried in Restvale Cemetery in Seneca Falls, as is his wife and daughter. He left an estate worth many thousands of dollars. The 1870 census listed Sarah Elizabeth James as owning property worth \$17,000.

James appointed as executors his wife Sarah Elizabeth James and two friends, Jacob Corl and Henry Henion. Administrative papers prepared by Corl and Henion made it very clear that Thomas James had been born in slavery, noting that “Elizabeth James, his widow, and the said Thomas James had no other relatives known to the deponents or either of them-**he having formerly been a slave** and made, during his lifetime, diligent enquiry for his relatives without effect.”

Sarah Elizabeth James was listed in the 1870 census as sixty years old, born in Pennsylvania, living with Mary James, four years old, born in New York. In 1874-5, she was listed in the directory as widow, still living on State Street. In January 1880, Peter Van Cleef, Under Sheriff of Seneca County, sold the State Street house at auction. By 1880, according to the census, Sarah Elizabeth James was living as a boarder with Catherine Hall in Elmira. By 1896, she had returned to Seneca Falls, where she was a member of the Seneca Falls Congregational Church. In 1900, she was living in the county home (1900 census). When she died, Sarah James was buried next to her husband in Restvale Cemetery.

When Sarah James died, her obituary appeared in a local paper:

Sarah E. James: widow of Thomas, died October 6, 1904 at the County Home. She was born in slavery, escaped with her parents to Canada. Had lived in Seneca Falls for 50 years. Her husband was a barber. They owned considerable property which was lost through the years. After his death she worked for others. Had lived in the County Home for 2 years. She was a devout Congregationalist all her life. A long time friend of Rev. William Bourse Clarke, she often expressed her fears of being buried in a pauper’s grave. When she died, he conducted the burial and she was put next to her husband in Restvale Cemetery, Seneca Falls. Prominent men of the village were the bearers. She was from 93 to 102 years old.

We may never know where Thomas James had been born, when and under what circumstances he escaped from slavery, or why he chose to settle in Seneca Falls. We do know, however, that his was a remarkable story of one freedom seeker who, against all odds, found stability, respect, and wealth in one small city in upstate New York.

Optional Extended Activity

Have the students go to the website for the National Park Service National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom and look at what sites are listed, especially the other Seneca County sites (i.e., the Joshua Wright House in Seneca Falls, the M'Clintock House in Waterloo, and the Richard P. Hunt House in Waterloo).