

## Anti-Slavery Activity in Seneca County Before the Civil War

Seneca County played an important role in the anti-slavery activity in the United States in the two decades preceding the Civil War. The most obvious one is the Underground Railroad. Various Seneca County sites became “stations” (“safe houses”) on the Underground Railroad. These sites include the carriage house of the Richard P. Hunt residence in Waterloo, the parsonage of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Seneca Falls, as well as probably several other sites.

In addition, to having actual stations on the Underground Railroad, there were other important aspects to the anti-slavery movement in Seneca County. These included the formation of the Seneca County Anti-Slavery Society in October 1837, and the first of several antislavery fairs in Seneca Falls starting in October 1843.

The M’Clintock family and other Quakers were instrumental in sending many anti-slavery petitions to Congress. Anti-slavery businessmen in both Seneca Falls and Waterloo started woolen mills so that people would have an alternative to slave-produced cotton.

Many Seneca Falls residents became active in local units of the Free Soil Party in 1848, the Liberty Party in the early 1850s, and the Republican Party in 1854. Carlton Seely, running as the Republican Party candidate, was elected mayor of Seneca Falls in January 1854. This is the first Republican Party election held anywhere in the United States.

Several prominent anti-slavery speakers stirred up Seneca County residents with anti-slavery fervor. These speakers included William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass and Abbey Kelly.

Something that too often gets overlooked as an anti-slavery activity is the fact that businessmen in both Seneca Falls and Waterloo established woolen mills as an alternative to slave-grown cotton. Since many local farmers now had an expanded market for wool they could supply, these woolen mills helped to strengthen anti-slavery feelings for basic economic reasons.