

Timeline—Basic Events from 1787 to 1861

1787--The Founding Fathers draft the new Constitution, with some important “decisions” about slavery: (1) basically it left it up to each state to decide the status of slavery in the state; (2) 3/5 Compromise—5 black slaves count as 3 white persons; and (3) Congress can’t prohibit the foreign import of slaves for 20 years

1793--Congress passes a Fugitive Slave Act. The owner or hired slave-catchers are allowed to seize slaves who had run away to another state and return them to their owner. The fine for hiding a runaway slave was \$500.

1794--Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin. Now, cotton becomes more profitable and southern white plantation owners want more slaves.

1808--Congress prohibits the foreign import of slaves.

1820--Missouri Compromise provides that Maine comes into the Union as a free state and Missouri as a slave state, with slavery prohibited in the rest of the Louisiana Territory north of 30 degrees 30 minutes north latitude.

Approx. 1825 to 1835--The nationwide religious revival movement known as the **Second Great Awakening** leads to western New York becoming known as the “**burned-over district**” because there are so many “converts” to various Protestant denominations that there are no people left yet to convert. With their strong belief that all evil needs to be rooted out, the religious zeal of the burned-over district people focuses on many reform efforts—abolitionism, women’s rights, dress reform, education reform, peace advocacy, asylum building, Millerites, etc.

1827--Slavery abolished in New York State. Gradual emancipation had first begun in 1799.

1831--William Lloyd Garrison begins publication of his abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*.

1833--American Anti-Slavery Society organized.

1839--Liberty Party organized in Warsaw, NY.*

1835--New York Anti-Slavery Society meets for the first time, in Utica. Protesters disrupt session, and abolitionist Gerrit Smith moves the meeting to Peterboro; protesters disrupt Onondaga County’s first anti-slavery society meeting.*

1836--*Geneva’s Colored Anti-Slavery Society established. As early as December, twenty Waterloo residents formed their own antislavery society.**

1838--The Rochester Anti-Slavery Society is established.*

Feb. 1839--Antislavery Convention of Western New York held in Penn Yan.*

Nov. 1839--The Liberty Party is established in Warsaw. This is an attempt by a faction of abolitionists to get a pro-abolition President because they feel the Democratic and Whig Parties are not pro-abolition.*

1840--*Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, along with her husband, along with several others, attend the world anti-slavery convention in London. Lucretia Mott and the six other female “delegates” from U.S. antislavery societies are not seated as delegates simply because they are females.**

1842--The Western New York Anti-Slavery Society is established.*

1843--*A Wesleyan Methodist Church in Seneca Falls is established because of a split in the Methodist Episcopal Church over the issue of slavery. In August, the Abby Kelley lectures in Seneca Falls galvanized antislavery sentiments. Seneca Falls held its first antislavery fair in October.**

July 19-20, 1848--*The first women’s rights convention is held in Seneca Falls, New York. Frederick Douglass, the former slave, gives a strong speech in support of the provision calling for women suffrage. A Declaration of Sentiments and various resolutions are adopted.**

Aug. 1848--The Free Soil Party is organized in Buffalo.*

1849--Harriet Tubman escapes from slavery in Maryland.

1850--Congress and President Millard Fillmore create a series of laws known as the Compromise of 1850. California comes into the Union as a free state, the selling of slaves is prohibited in the District of Columbia, and a much stricter Fugitive Slave Act is passed. This new law doubles the fine amount of the 1793 law and contains other provisions that were intended to make it easier to apprehend and return fugitive slaves. Abolitionists “see red” over this law.

1851--In May, Secretary of State Daniel Webster announces outside Courier Building in Syracuse that the government will enforce the Fugitive Slave Act there. On October 1, white and black Syracuse residents storm a police station by Clinton Square to free runaway slave William “Jerry” Henry in what becomes known as the “Jerry Rescue.”*

1852--*The National Era*, a newspaper published in Washington, D.C., by Linnaeus Noble, a one-time resident of Fayetteville, serializes “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” Also, the Women’s State (NY) Temperance Convention is organized in Rochester.*

1854--Congress passes the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This leads directly to the birth of the Republican Party which is opposed to the spread of slavery.

1857--Harriet Tubman settles in Auburn. Also, the Supreme Court ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* provides that slaves are property--not citizens—and that Congress does not have the power to prohibit slavery in the territories.

Oct. 1859--John Brown and his 21-man “army of liberation” raids a U.S. Army armory in Harpers Ferry, Va.

1860--In November, Abraham Lincoln elected president. In December, South Carolina secedes from the Union.

1861--Civil War begins; rioters disrupt American Anti-Slavery Society convention in Syracuse.

*Denotes an event that helps to illustrate the reforming zeal arising from the religious fervor of the “burned-over district.”

[This preliminary timeline was prepared by Walter Gable, the Seneca County historian, in February 2005. The italicized events took place specifically in Seneca County and/or involved Seneca County residents directly. Many Seneca County residents were involved in other events included on this timeline.]