

(**Note:** This is the ninth in a series featuring the 11 Underground Railroad sites in Oswego County that have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.)

July 3, 2002

The Hamilton Littlefield House is Listed on the National Register of Historic Places



The home of Hamilton and Rhoda Littlefield was a significant stop in the path of the Underground Railroad in Oswego County. The Littlefield's lived at 44 E. Oneida St. in Oswego. When the house was renovated in 2000, several abolitionist writings were found hidden above the kitchen ceiling.

Hamilton and Rhoda Littlefield moved to Oswego in 1836, where Littlefield began a career trading in lumber, real estates speculation, and farming. The Littlefields made their home at 44 E. Oneida St.

His antislavery commitment, combined with his lumber trade and farming, gave Hamilton Littlefield a unique opportunity to assist freedom seekers. They could rest at his house of farm and then travel on a lumber ship, often in the company of a Canadian crew, to Ontario.

When the house was renovated in 2000, it revealed a cache of abolitionist writings hidden between the kitchen ceiling and the floor of the room above. This material included a printed speech made by Gerrit Smith in the Kansas Meeting, at the capital in Albany on March 13, 1856, a copy of Frederick Douglass's paper dated Nov. 7, 1856, and a manuscript account book from 1840 to 1842.

“In this house, the walls actually spoke volumes of abolitionist activity, and provided documented evidence of how Oswego County was a significant stop on the path to freedom for fugitive slaves,” said Barbara Dix, Oswego County Historian and chairwoman of the Oswego County Freedom Trail Commission.

Littlefield's abolitionist activities in Oswego County spanned decades. He attended the first meeting of the New York State Anti-Slavery in Utica on October 19, 1836, accompanied by 26 other Oswego County Delegates, including Edwin W. Clarke, Tudor E. Grant, T.C. Baker, Sylvester Brown, and Dr. Deodatus Clarke.

In 1839, he helped organize a political abolitionist convention in Fulton. From 1839 to 1842, he was an officer and member of the executive committee of the Oswego County Antislavery Society. In 1853, Gerrit Smith's agent John B. Edwards wrote that he had taken one fugitive to “Hamilton Littlefield's for housing.”

In a research article written for the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1907, Mrs. John Post Miller noted that she had interviewed several older residents of the city who agreed that Hamilton Littlefield was particularly active in the Underground Railroad. Mrs. Miller's article is now lost, but a research paper written by Frieda Schuelke quoted Mrs. Miller's research. It was noted that “he had fitted up a room in the cellar of his house as a place for concealing fugitives.”

In her paper, Schuelke stated that:

“Mr. Littlefield told of a party of fifteen or sixteen runaways who arrived at one time. One of their number was sent to him to say that the party were hidden in some woods at the edge of the City. Guided by the messenger, Mr. Littlefield with some of his co-workers took lanterns and found the whole bunch armed with clubs broken from branches, their eyes gleaming with fear and desperation, huddled in the hollow made by a tree that had been uprooted by the wind. They were divided into separate parties and smuggled into Mr. Littlefield’s cellar... After several days Mr. Littlefield sent on of his vessels down to the lake to a point where the slaves could be loaded during the night and carried to Canada.”

Hamilton Littlefield’s house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in March of this year.

The Oswego County Freedom Trail Commission, which was formed by the Oswego County Legislature, researched and nominated several Underground Railroad sites in Oswego County to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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