

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

June 12, 2002

Oswego Home of Former Slave is Listed on the National Register of Historic Places



Former slaves John and Harriet McKenzie found freedom in Oswego. They lived at this house at 96 W. Eighth St. between 1848 and 1857.

John and Harriet McKenzie were born into slavery in South Carolina. They traveled north and settled in Oswego. An early 20th century speaker recalled that John Mckenzie, a cartman, was heavily involved in Underground Railroad activities.

Historians estimate that approximately 1,500 slaves escaped southern plantations each year and came north to seek freedom through the Underground Railroad.

Many Oswego County residents became involved in the struggles to end slavery in the years before the Civil War. Some provided assistance to African-American slaves

escaping bondage in the southern states by hiding them in their homes or helping them find transportation to Canada. Not all escaped slaves continued north to Canada. Some made new lives for themselves in northern communities, such as Oswego.

John and Harriet McKenzie owned a home at 96 W. Eight St., Oswego between 1848 and 1857. Currently owned by Mable Babcock, the home was listed on the National Register of Historic Places last December.

“The successful nomination of this house marks a victory for those who have been working to recognize the sites associated with the Underground Railroad,” said Oswego County Historian Barbara Dix. “These simple homes were often changed somewhat since their early days. Now we recognize them and their importance to our country by inclusion on the National Register.”

The Oswego County Freedom Trail Commission, which was formed by the Oswego County Legislature, conducted research and successfully nominated 11 Underground Railroad sites in Oswego County to the National Register of Historic Places.

For more information, contact Dix, chairwoman of the Freedom Trail Commission, at the Oswego County Records Center, weekdays, phone 349-8460 or 1-800-596-3200, ext. 8460.