

Jermain Loguen and the Underground Railroad in Syracuse, New York

Jermain Loguen was trained as an abolitionist, teacher and minister at the Onedia Institute in Whitesboro, New York (near Utica). In 1841, he moved to Syracuse, where as the “station master” of the local underground railroad “depot,” he helped over one thousand “fugitives” escape to Canada. In 1859, he published his memoirs, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen, as a Slave and as a Freeman* (Syracuse, NY: J. G. K. Truair).

In the month of September, 1839, J. Davenport, of Mississippi, accompanied with his wife and child, and another white lady, arrived, with much show of importance, in Syracuse, and took lodgings at the Syracuse House. . . It was soon learned by the servants, and communicated to outsiders, that this beautiful southern girl was a slave - the property of Mr. Davenport. The fact that a woman so white and attractive was held as property, awakened curiosity and indignation among some who had no objection to black slavery. . .

Two citizens, . . . having learned that this young lady felt keenly the restraints of slavery, and that rich dresses, and expensive baubles in her ears, and on her fingers and bosom, were no compensation for liberty, signified to her through the colored servants of the hotel, that if she dared, they would put her into Canada, and she should be free. She consented, and a plan was concocted . . . to put her out of the reach of her master. . . . She was aware her master had been importuned to sell her for \$2500, for the worst of purposes, and she knew he had no conscientious scruples to deter him from yielding to the base intents of the purchaser.

Mr. Davenport now fixed the day of his departure to Mississippi. A single day intervened - the evening of which was spent at a select party at Major Cook’s, as a sort of closing fete of the Syracuse fashionables to their southern friends. Harriet was at the party to take charge of the babe, and at a certain hour of the evening - which had been settled as the hour for her escape - she passed through the assembly, very naturally, and placed the babe in its mother’s lap, and told her she wished to step out. The mother took the child without suspicion, and the beautiful white slave disappeared from her sight forever. . . .

The rage of the man Davenport, so soon as the escape was known, was beyond bounds--and political and sectarian snobs, officials, and citizens, joined these mad ones in a chorus of indignation. Every man and horse was put in requisition to find the beautiful Harriet, who had so slyly and foolishly fled from happiness and duty. No afflicted King or Queen ever had more, or more genuine sympathizers among their subjects, than had Mr. and Mrs. Davenport on that occasion.

The tide of feeling took two directions - one to find the track of the girl, and hunt her down and replunge her into slavery; and the other to hunt out the villains who dared to put their abolition in practice in Syracuse, and subject them to the terrible penalties of slave laws. But it was vain. The white and black men managed this enterprise so prudently and bravely, that no trace of the one or the other could be scented by the blood hounds. . . .

No crime was ever committed in Syracuse that excited so much blustering and active indignation as this. Expresses were sent to Oswego and in other directions, to had and capture the fugitive. The outrage was published through the press, then decidedly on the side of slavery; and the enraged slave-holder issued a circular, describing the person of Harriet, her ornaments and dresses, and offering a reward of \$200 to whoever would return her to him, and \$100 to any one who would inform of her whereabouts, that she might be captured.

The friends of liberty quietly but firmly pursued their course, notwithstanding the threats of their numerous and powerful opponents - who appeared before magistrates, and searched their houses, and disturbed their wives and children, to find the beautiful slave.

Harriet had enjoyed her asylum but a short time, ere her saviors learned that Davenport & Co., by means of some treachery not yet explained, were informed of her whereabouts. Happily, this information was given late at night, and the anti-Abolitionists determined early next morning to take and return her to slavery. Her liberators, however, were informed of the treachery the same night, and sent an express and . . . carried her to Lebanon, Madison county, and concealed her with a friend.

The next morning, the agents of Davenport & Co. arrived at Mr. Shepard’s and demanded Harriet - not doubting she was in the house. Mr. Shepard made very strange of the matter, and so conducted that the agents, after searching the house, left for Syracuse - cursing the traitors, as they charged, who had humbugged them. The result was as it should be - the informer lost all credit for truth and honor, by all parties, - and what was worse than that in his esteem, he lost the one hundred dollars bribe which Davenport offered to quiet his conscience if he would assist in re-enslaving Harriet.