

# Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Tour Cayuga County

**Harriet Tubman was Auburn's most famous freedom seeker.**

But, as a traveler on the Underground Railroad, she was a relative latecomer. Although she escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1849, she did not settle in Auburn until 1859. By that time, the Underground Railroad had been operating locally since at least the early 1830s, sustained by an inter-racial group of men and women, rich and poor, old, and young, Black and White.

By the 1850s, Cayuga County's Black population numbered about 400. Two hundred of them lived in Auburn. The first African Americans had come to Cayuga County in slavery, part of the earliest non-Indigenous post-Haudenosaunee settlers. Freed by 1827, when NYS formally abolished slavery, they remained to welcome newcomers from the South, many of whom bought land, found jobs, and raised their families here, leaving many descendants who represent their stories.

Cayuga County's significance on the Underground Railroad emerged partly from its geographic position. In the middle of the Finger Lakes region, it was a major crossroads for people coming north from Philadelphia to Lake Ontario, as well as for those coming from eastern NY on what became the NY Central Railroad, headed for Niagara Falls and Canada.

The importance of Cayuga County for the Underground Railroad came also from its people. Several Quakers worked with a network that included the Vigilance Committee headquarters in Philadelphia kept by William Still, who regularly sent travelers to Auburn. Martha Coffin Wright, Frances and William Seward, and the Howland family in Sherwood were part of this network. Local African Americans such as Morgan "Luke" Freeman, a barber born enslaved in Auburn in 1802, became major Underground Railroad operatives.

The initial research study "Uncovering the Freedom Trail in Auburn and Cayuga County" was completed by Judith Wellman and others in 2005 as published by the City of Auburn's Historic Resources Review Board and the Cayuga County Historian's Office. The study completed at that time identified over 100 documented connections in Cayuga County to the Under Ground Railroad. Additional research by noted historian Kate Clifford Larson and others has expanded our knowledge of several more connections. This project only identifies a small number of historic sites relating to the Underground Railroad remaining on Cayuga County's landscape in the twenty-first century. They help tell stories of the remarkable people who committed their lives to freedom.



**1 Kirk House**, 1280 NY-104 A, Sterling. Local tradition strongly associated the Kirks with the Underground Railroad and the abolitionist Baptist Church in Sterling.

**2 Ingham House**, 3069 NY- 370, Meridian. William Smith Ingham was part of the group that successfully rescued George Washington after his release from Auburn Prison in 1854, after Washington's owner tried to seize him under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Act. Ingham operated a store, sawmill, and hotel in Meridian and constructed this Greek Revival mansion in 1835.

**3 Duvall Tenant House**, 1326 Haiti Road, Port Byron. William O. Duvall was an outspoken, brilliant, and committed abolitionist lecturer and friend of William Henry Seward. His home on an island in the Seneca River was so well known as a haven for African Americans that it was dubbed "Hayti," (pronounced Hay-tie).

**4 Port Byron Hotel**, 1 Church Street, Port Byron. The Port Byron Hotel represents the many public places in Cayuga County where African Americans worked as an integral part of community life. Abolitionist owner Richard Dyer hired freedom seekers such as John Stewart, even though he knew it violated the Fugitive Slave Law.

**5 Shorter House**, 255 Genesee Street, Cayuga. This is a rare surviving example of an early "shanty" built by freed people of color. Charles and Sally Shorter were born in slavery about 1770. They built the wing of this house early in the 19th century and the upright section later for their son Charles. After the Civil War, the two sections were joined together.

**6 Sennett Federated Church**, (NR) (P) 7777 Weedsport-Sennett Road, Sennett. Before the Civil War, both Congregationalists and Baptists in Sennett were committed abolitionists and Underground Railroad supporters. Rev. Charles Anderson and his wife Elizabeth hosted freedom seekers in the Congregational (now Federated) parsonage. Fourteen probable freedom seekers lived in Sennett, including Harriet Eglin, who wrote three letters from the parsonage. There were eight European American families who were probable Underground Railroad activists.

**7 Levanna Square**, 370 Ellis Point Road, Aurora. Site of Slocum Howland's docks and warehouses, where he shipped pork, grain, and wool from Cayuga County farms to urban markets, with the help of African Americans who owned property here, including freedom seeker Jerome (Rome) Griger, Griger's son Sherburne, and Alfred Tate, whose parents had been born in slavery in NY.

**8** **Hart House and Cooper-Cromwell House**, 231 and 237 Main Street, Aurora. Sarah Jane Cromwell Hart and her husband Thomas Hart lived in the gray house (231 Main). Thomas and James Hart came from Maryland in May 1840, carrying a note addressed to Slocum Howland from fellow Friend John Mann: "I have mailed two passengers to thee..." The Hart house burned in 1899 but the present house is on the same foundation. Sarah's parents had been born in slavery in NY and lived in the house next door, the Cooper-Cromwell house at 237 Main.

**9** **Marriott-Gifford House**, 78 Court Street, Aurora. Susannah Marriott, a Friend born in England, was an influential educator and abolitionist; this is one of three houses in which she held a school for girls. Her connections with and among her students and teachers became an important part of the Underground Railroad network linking Aurora, Sherwood, and Auburn.

**10** **North Street Meetinghouse**, (NR) 2960 Brick Church Road, Aurora. This meetinghouse, "a storm center of reformers," was the focus of a Quaker network of abolitionists, Underground Railroad supporters, advocates of Seneca Indian land rights, and woman's rights activists. At least two African Americans joined this meeting, which hosted famous abolitionist speakers.

**11** **Site of Slocum and Hannah Howland House**, (NTF) 1781 Sherwood Road, Hamlet of Sherwood. Collapsed in 2016, the Howland house was the best documented Underground Railroad safe house in Cayuga County. Sustained by his Quaker commitment to the Light within all people, Slocum Howland used his position as merchant to help people who escaped from slavery in Maryland and Virginia. He worked with a Quaker network that extended to southeastern Pennsylvania. This is presently the site of a modular home.

**12** **Howland Stone Store Museum**, (P) (NR) (NTF) 2956 NY-34B, Sherwood. The hamlet of Sherwood was once a bustling mercantile and farming community, so important to the Underground Railroad and woman's rights that the whole village is on the National Register of Historic Places as the Sherwood Equal Rights Historic District. Slocum Howland operated this cobblestone store with his son William as the center of a large regional trading center. He used his economic resources to help freedom seekers move to Canada and to find homes and jobs for those who wanted to settle in Cayuga County.

**13** **Howland Tenant Houses**, (NR) 2933 NY-34B and 1801 Sherwood Road, Sherwood. When Herman and Hannah Phillips and their four children first came from slavery in Maryland in 1843, they stayed in Slocum Howland's tenant house "on the post road," most likely the house at 2933 Route 34B. By 1850, the Phillips family lived in the house at 1801 Sherwood Road. Once part of Seth Sherwood's 1796 tavern, this house may be the oldest building still standing in the hamlet.

**14** **Opendore Museum**, (P) (NR) 2978 NY-34B, Sherwood. Owned by abolitionists William and Hannah Letchworth Howland and their daughter Isabel Howland, this house was a major center of Sherwood's community life. In 1910, "Miss Isabel," created a many gabled small mansion where she hosted school programs, temperance meetings, and women's suffrage events, with the help of Stella Phillips, granddaughter of freedom seekers Herman and Hannah Phillips. Abandoned since 1976, and heavily deteriorated, a major part of the house was restored and opened to the public in 2021.

**15** **Herman and Hannah Phillips House**, (NR) (NTF) 3000 NY-34B, Sherwood. Herman and Hannah Phillips and their four children, born in slavery in Maryland, came to Sherwood in 1843. Herman followed a vision that he was to stay in a place where there was an orchard, a stone store, and a man crossing the road who was to be his friend. A visitor in 1856 reported that "they now live in a snug little house built with their own earnings and the older children's, enjoying confidence and respect, and finding employment in the community." Three sons served in the Civil War.

**16** **Sherwood Cemetery**, (P) (NR) 3025 NY- 34B, Sherwood. This cemetery is a testament to the abolitionist character of this small community. African American John Baker and his family are buried at the southeast corner. Just north of them, an obelisk marks the grave of freedom seekers Herman and Hannah Phillips. James Phillips, Civil War soldier, has a picture of the angel Gabriel with the gates of heaven carved on his tombstone. Seth Sherwood, founder of the hamlet, also lies buried here.

**17** **Letchworth Home**, (NR) 2942 NY-34B, Sherwood. Josiah and Hannah Letchworth were involved with the Underground Railroad both in Sherwood and Auburn. In 1854, Letchworth helped in the rescue of George Washington, freedom seeker from South Carolina, and concluded that "the fugitive slave law ain't worth a fig in Auburn."

**18** **Emily Howland House**, (NR) 2934 NY-34B, Sherwood. Emily Howland was a nationally important figure in both abolitionism and woman's rights. She worked in schools for free people of color in Washington, D.C., and Virginia, and supported or founded at least fifty schools throughout the nation, most of them for African Americans in the South. In 1926, the State University of NY gave her an honorary doctorate, the first woman to be so honored. Howland was also a major supporter of woman suffrage.

**19** **Site of Benjamin and Mary Howland House**, 1256 Poplar Ridge Road, Aurora. Slocum Howland's boyhood home served as the first Quaker meeting place in Cayuga County. Though the house was demolished in 2015, the foundation and a well-built stone springhouse still stand.

**20** **Old Homestead Cemetery**, (P) near the junction of Angling and Poplar Ridge Road, Aurora. The cemetery is a short distance northwest of the Benjamin Howland house, just to the north of Little Creek. It is accessed by a farm lane that runs parallel with Poplar Ridge Road between Angling Road and Dog Corners Road. Most of the Sherwood Howland family is buried in this well-kept cemetery.

**21** **Hutchinson House**, 1041 NY-34B, King Ferry. Matthias and Hannah Hutchinson were part of the network of Quaker UGRR supporters. In 1843, according to oral tradition, they cared for Herman and Hannah Phillips and their four children, freedom seekers who had walked all the way from Maryland with their youngest child on their back.

**22** **Cady Tavern**, 78 South Main Street, Moravia. From this tavern, Isaac Cady and John Stoyell Jr. took freedom seekers north to Skaneateles. Isaac's widow at age 94, reported that "many an evening a wagon left this place in the darkness with a negro [sic] hidden beneath the blankets, bound for Skaneateles, whence the trip to Canada was made in safety."

**23** **Congregational Church** (now Methodist), (P) 36 Church Street, Moravia. Congregational deacon John Stoyell Jr. and choirmaster Isaac Cady were the most active members of the Moravia Underground Railroad network. A memorial window in this church is dedicated to Cady's memory. Moravia was a frequent stopping point for abolitionist lecturers.

**24** **Stoyell House**, 176 North Main Street, Moravia. Once, carrying a freedom seeker concealed in his wagon, Stoyell drove right past a federal marshal. In 1862, 60-year-old Stoyell, "fearless, conscientious, and intelligent," walked to Auburn to join the U.S. 160th Regiment.

**25** **Midlakes Methodist Church**, (P) 3703 NY- 41A, New Hope, Moravia. Sampson Eddy, born in 1844 in slavery in Goldsboro, North Carolina, served in the Union Army during the Civil War and then came North. He was "a preacher of power and one fervent in prayer." In 1936, the Methodist Church installed a window in Eddy's memory.

**26** **Historic New Hope Mills** (Rounds Mills). 5983 Glen Haven Road, New Hope, Moravia. Sampson Eddy worked at Rounds Mills for almost thirty-five years.

**27** **Site of Glen Haven Water Cure**, 7042 North Glen Haven Road, Glen Haven, Sempronius. In the 1850s, Glen Haven Water Cure was a major center for alternative medical treatment, frequented by abolitionists, operated by two noted Underground Railroad families. William Chaplin organized the unsuccessful escape attempt of 77 African Americans in Washington, D.C., in 1848. He was jailed in Maryland for his activities.

#### KEY

(NTF) - Network to Freedom Site

(NHL) - National Historic Landmark

(NR) - National Register of Historic Places

(P) - Open to the General Public - check for hours

(NHP) - National Historical Park

★ Open to the General Public - check for hours