

John Henry Ross Stewart and Eliza Stewart House
51 Parker Street
Auburn, New York

Significance: Home of freedom seekers and of Harriet Tubman’s nephew, John Henry Ross Stewart



February 2005, Looking NW

About to be sold, three of Harriet Tubman’s brothers escaped with her help on Christmas Eve, 1854. One of them, John Stewart, born Robert Ross, lived first with Harriet Tubman and then on South Street, where the First Methodist Church now stands. John Stewart had been forced to leave his first wife, Mary Manokey Ross, and two toddler sons, John Henry Ross, born in 1851, and Moses Ross, born in 1853. Mary Manokey Ross was in childbed with their third child, Harriet, when he escaped. Although ostensibly freed by the Civil War, these sons found themselves placed as indentured servants in Talbot County, Maryland, on the farm of Thomas Haddaway. (Maryland slaveholders indentured formerly enslaved children after Maryland’s Emancipation Act in Nov. 1864.) Their uncle John Bowley managed to rescue them about 1868 and bring them to Auburn. By 1870, John, age 53 and a teamster; Millie, age 53, keeping house; John Henry, age 18 and a laborer; and Moses, age 15 and a laborer, all born in Maryland, were living together in one household in Auburn. Millie Hollis Stewart was also from Dorchester County. Whether she was born free or enslaved is not known, nor do we know whether she had known John Stewart before their escape to Canada. They married in Auburn in 1863 or 1864.

In the early 1870s, John Henry Stewart married Eliza Smith, born in Canada about 1854, and they had three children, Dora, born about 1875; Gertrude, born about 1878; and Clarence, whom everyone called Dye, born about 1879. In 1880, John Henry Ross Stewart worked as a “grinder in a shop,” and Eliza kept house here at 35 Parker Street (now 51 Parker). Very

shortly, John Henry Stewart would be dead, of “congestion of the lungs.” Perhaps this was pneumonia or tuberculosis. Eliza would move with her three children to Union Avenue, to live with her cousin-in-law, Elijah Stewart, and his family, until she married Alfred Parker. The family then moved to 20 Chapman Avenue, and Parker became a loving father to her children and an important figure in the Auburn African American community into the 20th century. In 1887-88, James and John Warren, Maryland-born, probably freedom seekers, lived here.¹

¹Grateful acknowledgements to Kate Clifford Larson, for her careful work on Stewart genealogy, 237-38, and for her email, July 5, 2005. Research assistance by Tanya Warren, Pauline Johnson, and Judith Bryant.

Sites Relating to the Underground Railroad, Abolitionism, African American Life

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Thompson Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, 1891
National Historic Landmark
49 Parker Street
Auburn, New York

Significance: Harriet Tubman's Church



Description: Built as a simple frame church with a small belfry and a hooded doorway, this building retains many original features, both inside and outside, including interior stenciling. It is a National Historic Landmark and is currently under restoration by Crawford and Stearns, Architects and Preservation Planners, with funding from Save America's Treasures.

Significance: Incorporated in 1838, the first AME Zion Church in Auburn was built on Washington Street, just north of Genesee. After the Civil War, Auburn's African American population expanded considerably, as freedom seekers who had settled in Canada, especially St. Catherine's, followed Harriet Tubman to Auburn and purchased property on the south side of the city along Chapman Avenue, Garrow Street, Fitch Avenue, Union (Richardson) Avenue, and Parker Street. Following the population, the AME Zion Church built a new structure here at 49 Parker Street. This church was dedicated in 1891, named after Henry Thompson, first local AME Zion bishop and himself a freedom seeker.

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**AME Zion Parsonage, post-1904
47 Parker Street
Auburn, New York**



Looking southwest
July 2005

**Copes Johnson House
45 Parker Street
Auburn, New York**

Significance: Home of African American community leaders and descendents of freedom seekers



February 2005
Looking NW

Pauline Copes Johnson, who has lived in this house since her marriage, is a descendent of Ann Marie Stewart Elliott, niece of Harriet Tubman and wife of Thomas Elliott, one of the Dover Eight, who lived at 31 Richardson (Union) Avenue, through their daughter Mary Elliot Gaskin. She is also a descendent of William Copes, probably another freedom seekers, who is first listed in Auburn in the 1865 census as born in Virginia, living in a house worth \$500. In the 1867-68

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city directory, he lived on South Street, near Hamilton. Mrs. Johnson has been an important source of information for this survey of historic sites.

Hornbeck-Ray House
41-43 Parker Street
Auburn, New York

Significance: Home of African American community leaders



February 2005
Looking West

Important members of the Hornbeck and Ray families lived here from the late nineteenth century into the early twenty-first century. More research is needed to document both the house and the families.

**37 Parker Street
Auburn, New York**

Significance: Home of African American Community Members



Further research is needed to document this house.

Dale-Waire House
35 Parker Street
Auburn, New York

Significance: Home of freedom seeker and son of freedom seeker



February 2005
Looking NW

In 1887-88, James and Elizabeth Dale lived at this site. James Dale was one of the sons of George Dale, freedom seeker. George's obituary noted that he rescued both his sons—James and Jacob—from slavery. It is not known how long the Dales lived here or when this house was built. This site was later occupied by the Waire family, descendants of John Waire, born in Virginia and probably a freedom seeker, who lived at 35 Union (Richardson) Avenue.

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Perry Williams, Melinda/Elizabeth Williams House
31 Parker Street
Auburn, New York

Significance: Home of freedom seeker



Looking southwest
 July 2005

Perry Williams, whose obituary noted that he was a fugitive from slavery, came to Auburn by the 1860s. City directories noted that he lived in several different places, including the American Hotel (1867-68, at 141 Genesee, now gone), a house at Fitch near Genesee (1869) when he worked at 107 Genesee (gone, replaced by Cayuga Bank), a house at Fitch near Garrow (1879-80), 63 Fitch Avenue according to the 1880 census, and a house at 41 Garrow in 1887-88 (probably still standing). By 1900 and until his death in 1925, he was living here at 31 Parker Street. The 1880 census listed Perry Williams and wife, with two sons and father-in-law Henry Mitchell, age 69, b. Virginia. Worked as janitor at a bank. He had a second wife Elizabeth in 1910. Perry Williams' obituary, dated July 27, 1925, read:

Former Slave, Beloved City Character-Dead. Lived at 31 Parker St. Died age 85. Born in slavery and lived the life of a slave in Virginia and the Carolinas, joined the Union Army, was a doorkeeper at military balls, etc. at the State Armory. Known as "Uncle Perry".²

² Perry Williams obituary found by Sheila Edmunds. Property and genealogical research by Tanya Warren.
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**Carter House
22 Parker Street
Auburn, New York**

Significance: Home of African American Community Leaders



Looking northeast
July 2005

Members of the Carter family, influential African American community leaders, lived in this house into the twenty-first century. More research should be done to document this house and this family.

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