

Underground Railroad Sites in Loudoun County, Virginia

Leesburg

Leonard Grimes was an important black abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor. He was born in Leesburg around 1815 and was tried and convicted there in 1839 for helping a woman named Patty and her six children escape from slavery in Loudoun.

Nelson Talbott Gant was freed and forced to leave Virginia without his beloved wife Maria, whose Leesburg owner refused to sell her. He returned and was denied again; but the couple left anyway. They were captured, returned, and Nelson Gant was tried in 1847. His lawyers successfully argued that matrimony was higher law than slavery.

John W. Jones escaped from slavery near Leesburg and became a noted stationmaster on the Underground Railroad in Elmira, New York, as large numbers of blacks fleeing slavery migrated to Canada before and during the Civil War.

Leesburg blacksmith Peyton Lucas swam across the Potomac to escape from slavery. He settled in Pennsylvania until he saw an ad for his capture, then left for New York. After passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, he fled to safety in Canada.

Oatlands Plantation and Vicinity

A number of slaves escaped from Oatlands Plantation. George Carter complained of “struggling with the most enthusiastic and invincible opposition in the recovery of my property, from the Quakers and others . . . The sneers, the contempt, and scorn of the whole mass of aiders, advisors, and accomplices of runaway slaves, who are now triumphing at my shame.”

Just south of Oatlands on the French Simpson farm, Daniel Dangerfield escaped from slavery and settled in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In 1859 he was captured and sent to Philadelphia for trial. The affair attracted more than a thousand black and white abolitionists and Lucretia Mott sat next to him throughout the trial. He was released.

Lincoln

Samuel Janney, a Quaker, was an important abolitionist. He was a member of the Benevolent Society of Alexandria, which was very active during the 1820s—assisting free blacks held illegally by slave traders, lobbying for emancipation and operating schools for black children.

Yardley Taylor was a leading Quaker in the county and president of the Loudoun Manumission and Emigration Society. In 1857 his opponents called him “the Chief of the abolition clan in Loudoun” and charged him with assisting slaves escaping to the North.

Middleburg/Aldie

On Christmas Eve, 1855, two couples from Loudoun County and two men from neighboring Fauquier escaped from slavery. Barnaby Grigby and his wife, Elizabeth, her sister, Emily Foster, and Emily’s fiancé, Frank Wanzer headed North to Canada by carriage. One of the Fauquier men followed on horseback. Christmas Day in Maryland, white men challenged the fugitives, drew weapons and fired. The couples in the carriage escaped, but one of the Fauquier men was killed and the other captured. Emily and Frank were married in Syracuse, and then they all settled in Toronto.

Despite the obvious danger of returning to Loudoun, in August Frank Wanzer went back for his sister, Betsy Smith, her husband, Vincent, and Robert Stewart. The Pennsylvania Vigilance Committee documented their safe arrival.

Notes

For Leonard Grimes and Daniel Dangerfield, see Kendra Hamilton, ed., *Essence of a People II: African Americans Who Made Their World Anew in Loudoun County, Virginia, and Beyond* (Leesburg, Va.: Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, 2002), 21-25 and 32-37, respectively.

For John W. Jones, see Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, *Essence of a People: African Americans Who Made a Difference in Loudoun County and Beyond* (Black History Committee, the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, 2001), 40-42.

For Nelson Talbott Gant, see the (Washington, D.C.) *National Era*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (January 7, 1847), 4.

For Peyton Lucas, see *Benjamin Drew, North-Side View of Slavery* (New York: Negro University Press, 1968), 105-09.

For George Carter, see *George Carter Letterbook*, p. 201, *Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Transcription at Oatlands.*

For Samuel M. Janney, see *Memoirs of Samuel M. Janney, Late of Lincoln, Loudoun County, Virginia, A Minister in the Religious Society of Friends (Written by Himself)* (Philadelphia: Friends Book Association, 1881), 28-33.

For Yardley Taylor, see *Yardley Taylor File*, the Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Virginia.

For the Christmas Eve group escape, see *Brenda E. Stevenson, Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 253.