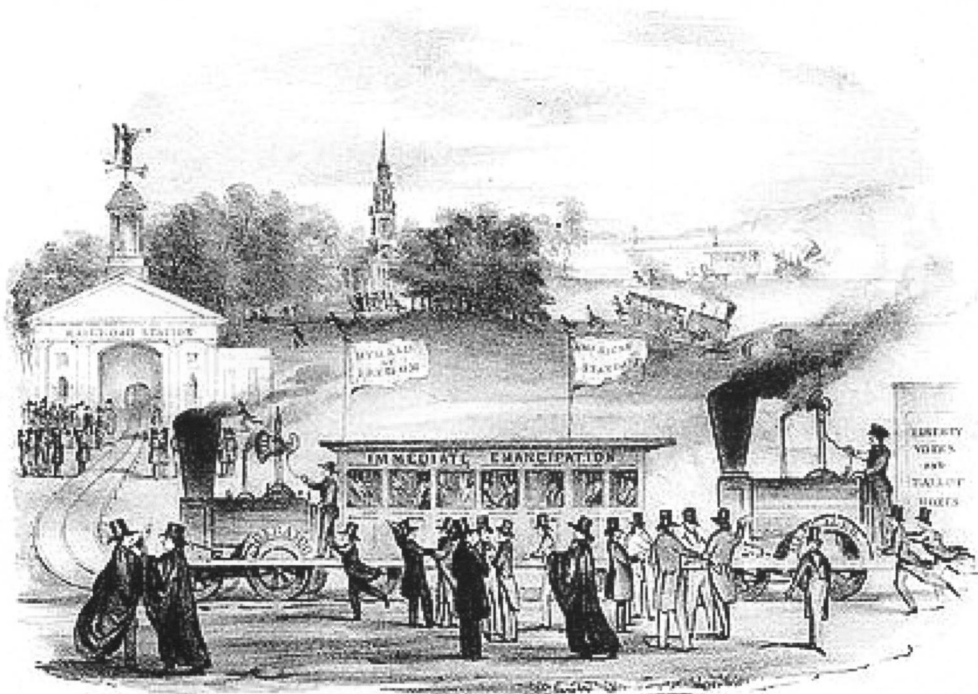


"GET OFF THE TRACK!"



A Song for Emancipation, sung by
THE HUTCHINSONS,
Respectfully dedicated to
NATH P. ROGERS,

As a mark of esteem for his integrity in the cause of Human Rights. By the Author.

JESSE HUTCHINSON JUNR.

Printed by G. W. & C. B. Faxon.

Price 25 cents.

1851
Published by the Author

Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1851, in the Office of the Register of the District of Massachusetts.

This abolitionist song sheet depicts the underground railroad as a freedom train. Abolitionists demanded "Immediate Emancipation" and warned opponents to "Get Off the Track." Courtesy, Library of Congress.

Underground Railroad Activists in Washington, D.C.

by Hilary Russell

The Underground Railroad was a series of efforts, whether highly organized, spontaneous, successful, or failed, to assist those fleeing from slavery by providing them with forged passes, transportation, shelter, and other necessary resources. Such efforts, in violation of state and federal laws, occurred everywhere slavery existed. An estimated 100,000 bondsmen and women successfully escaped to freedom between the Revolutionary Era and the Civil War, though some did so with little or no covert assistance.

The metaphor “underground railroad” came into being in the 1830s as a potent weapon in the propaganda war to win hearts and minds to the cause of abolition. It conjured up a clandestine and highly organized national network of “conductors” and “station masters” ever ready to offer assistance to the runaways who were the railroad’s “passengers.” A powerful and centralized network may not have

existed except in legend, but more localized networks did. Their operations were particularly important in the border states between slave and free lands. Men and women from almost all walks of life participated in these local networks, though the participation of African Americans, both free and enslaved, was especially crucial to their success. In the antebellum period, the assistance that such networks provided to runaways undermined the institution of slavery and profoundly unsettled slaveholders, contributing to widening divisions between North and South and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. Such underground railroad operations also produced a diverse pantheon of American heroes, one that extends from millionaires like Gerrit Smith and Louis Tappan to former runaways like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass.

The District of Columbia was a center of abolitionist activity during the decades before the Civil War. While most of these efforts centered on influencing Congress to abolish chattel slavery and the slave trade in the nation’s capital, some courageous local abolitionists sought more concrete and immediate results. They undermined and attacked slavery by assisting escapes,

Hilary Russell moved to Washington after a long career as an historian with Parks Canada. This article is part of her recently completed study of the underground railroad in Washington, D.C., funded by a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.



Charles Turner Torrey, radical abolitionist, who claimed to have helped 400 people escape from slavery in the Washington, D.C., area between his arrival in 1841 and his arrest in 1844. From L.C. Lovejoy, Memoir of Rev. Charles T. Torrey, 1847.

engaged in dangerous and covert actions, and risked their own freedom. These local activists attempted to remain hidden figures, known perhaps only to those committed to the same goals. Their full picture has not emerged from the historical record, but they were clearly a diverse group—men and women, black and white, free and enslaved.

Among them were freed men like Thomas Smallwood and Anthony Bowen; free-born African Americans like Leonard Grimes, Elizabeth Smallwood, and John Bush; a Mrs. Padgett and Mrs. Ann Sprigg, two white women who ran anti-slavery boarding houses; and such respected local white men as retired lawyer Jacob Bigelow and Interior Department clerk Ezra L. Stevens.¹ They did not all work together, nor were they necessarily aware of one another, but all played a part in the local history of the underground railroad and contributed to the public perception of a vast continental conspiracy to aid and abet

runaways and to undermine the slave system. The best known of Washington's underground railroad activists were two white men, Charles T. Torrey and William L. Chaplin, who successively attracted considerable national attention after each was jailed for assisting escapes from slavery. In the early 1840s and 1850s, each masterminded hundreds of such escapes, with the help of a far-flung biracial network and the financial backing of radical abolitionist Gerrit Smith of Peterboro, New York.

Torrey was the most active and influential of the two. Born in Massachusetts and educated at Yale and as a Congregationalist minister, he had helped to organize the biracial Boston Vigilance Committee and the New York wing of the Liberty Party. He relocated to Washington from Albany in 1841, ostensibly to become editor and local correspondent of the *Albany Patriot*. Almost immediately, he attracted press attention when he was jailed for disrupting a slaveholders' convention in Annapolis.² This publicity attracted Thomas Smallwood, who would soon become a key associate for Torrey's covert underground railroad work.

Smallwood had been freed from slavery in Prince George's County, Maryland, in about 1831, and was working as a shoemaker in the District in 1842.³ He asked his wife Elizabeth, a free-born Virginian, to introduce him to Torrey, as she was the laundress for Mrs. Padgett's boarding house on 13th Street, N.W., where Torrey resided. Smallwood described their collaboration in a narrative published in Toronto in 1851. He claimed that his wife Elizabeth and "the lady with whom [Torrey] boarded" were "the only assistance we had for some time in the execution of our underground railroad plans."⁴ Their network later expanded to include another local African-American couple, John Bush and his wife, as well as William Nichols, a preacher at Israel Bethel AME Church,⁵ Ohio Congressman Joshua R. Giddings and his landlady Mrs. Ann Sprigg,⁶ Thomas

Garret, the famous white abolitionist of Wilmington, Delaware, and James J. G. Bias, a black dentist in Philadelphia.⁷ They also had valuable contacts in Troy and Albany, New York, and across the border in Toronto, where the Smallwoods settled in 1843.

Between March and November of 1842, Smallwood estimated that the "Washington branch" of the underground railroad had helped as many as 150 runaways. Torrey later claimed responsibility for about 400. According to Smallwood, some escaped in groups of ten or fifteen, and he outlined the "mode of our operations" for such large numbers. On the eve of the departure, a unique location would be chosen "on the suburbs of the city." Would-be runaways were instructed to arrive there singly or in groups of no more than two, and from different directions. Timing was also a strategic concern because any person of color on the streets of Washington risked being apprehended and locked up between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. (when the night watch retired).⁸ Runaways then traveled to an unidentified "place of deposit" 37 miles from Washington. They reached another such place, 40 miles distant, the following night, and Philadelphia by the third night. The group might be transported by wagon, especially if it included women and children. Smallwood complained that teamsters had to be paid "a very high price in order to induce them to risk themselves and [their] teams in so dangerous an enterprise," and that he and Torrey had soon been obliged to purchase a wagon and team of horses.⁹

In November 1843, the Washington police seized 14 runaways in this wagon at John Bush's residence located "in low grounds" east of City Hall. It proved to be Torrey and Smallwood's last joint underground railroad mission, and the pair narrowly escaped arrest. That Torrey remained out of the clutches of the authorities in Washington is all the more remarkable because he filed a claim to recover the team



Ex-slave Thomas Smallwood described in his published narrative his work as an underground railroad conductor in Washington during the early 1840s: would-be runaways were instructed to arrive alone or in groups of no more than two to secret departure spots selected the night before. Those assembled headed for Pennsylvania, stopping at safe places along the way. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

and wagon through Washington lawyer David A. Hall, whom he hired to defend Bush (and who won his acquittal).¹⁰

In January 1844, Torrey reported that he was working with "a shrewd woman" to free some of the people captured in Bush's stable.¹¹ In June of that year he also engaged in another plot with a woman—"a most respectable lady of Baltimore"—to effect the successful escape of three slaves in that city. He had already determined to expand his operations deeper into Virginia and Maryland, using the Philadelphia home of James Bias as a base, but his reach exceeded his grasp. Following more narrow escapes, in March 1844 Torrey was arrested in Baltimore. He perished in the

List of Negroes Captured on board the Pearl

Mary Benson	owned by J. G. Young.		
Mary Little King	"		3
Lemard King	"		
William	Miss Dick		
Jane	do		
Sam	do		4
Kitty	do		
Mary Ann	2 boys	Cotthill	Mary Ann
	one boy	P. Vinipen	
✓ John Evans		Miss Culver	v3
✓ Ephraim		do	
✓ Reuben		do	
✓ Sam		do	
✓ Mary		do	
✓ Emily		do	
✓ Andrew		Mr. Armstrong	v6
✓ George Bell		do	
✓ Daniel Bell		do	
✓ Mary Bell	2 Children	do	
✓ Caroline	2 do	do	
✓ Mary Eliza		do	
✓ Harriet		do	v11
✓ Louisa Washington	3 Children	John H. Smith	v4
✓ John Calvert		Q 13 Brown	1
✓ William		W. Bell	1
✓ John Thomas		L. Horn	1
✓ Hannibal		Mr. Lisle	
✓ Augusta		do	
✓ Nat		do	3
✓ Joe		Mr. Hoover	
✓ Frank		do	2
✓ Joe Hornet		John M. Young	1
✓ Peter Pitt		W. Councilly	1

This "List of Negroes captured on board the Pearl" shows the names of the runaways and those holding them to service. Several families had attempted to escape together, including Mary and Emily Edmonson and their siblings, who are listed above with "Miss Culver." Alfred Pope, whose name appears on the right page, remained in

Underground Railroad Activists in Washington, D.C.

✓ W ^m Thompson	Jos. Bantel Aug 18 th X	1
✓ John Rix	R. F. Middleton	1
✓ Isaac	Mr. W. B. Dainell	1
✓ Philip Crowley	W ^m Harmon	1
✓ Saml. Turner	Mr. Lyons	1
✓ Henry Smallwood	W. Jackson	1
✓ Henry Usher Steward	Mr. Madison	1
✓ Saphie Paine 1 Child	Genl. Hunter	1
✓ Grace	Dr. Triftott	1
✓ Ellen	Genl. Mos. Beacom	1
✓ Jane Brent	Dr. Cousin	1
✓ Rebecca Washington	John H. Smith	1
✓ Parilla Linn	W. Upperman	1
✓ Parilla	do	3
✓ Alfred Pope	Col Carter	1
✓ George Craig	R. B. Sully Agent	1
✓ Perry Crose	Mr. Sarah Crow	1
✓ Augustus Chase	Vincent King	1
✓ John B. Brooke	John Downey	1
✓ Henry Graham	S. Brenton	1
✓ George Shashlin	Mr. Froyl	1
✓ Madison Conroy	Mr. Lewis, Alay	1
✓ Madison Pitts	Geo. C. Harwood	1
✓ Stray Day	Charles Filcher	1
✓ Henry Edwards King	W. Herkwood	1
✓ Parilla King 2 Child.	F. A. Dodge	3
(Phineas Mathews)	W. Mayo	
✓ Madras Marshall	J. Mudd	
✓ Matthew W.	do	
✓ Elizabeth W.	do	3
✓ Minnie Davis	Mr. Daniels	1
	17 April 1828	
	H. C. Williams	

slavery in Washington until 1851, when he was freed by the terms of Colonel Carter's will. After the Civil War, Pope was a successful businessman in Georgetown; in the 1870s he sold to Mt. Zion United Methodist Church the land on which it now stands. Courtesy, National Archives.



GEN WM L. CHAPLIN.

Lith. B. W. Thomas & Co.

William L. Chaplin, radical abolitionist who helped many escape from slavery, masterminded "The Pearl Affair" in which 77 enslaved African Americans attempted to gain their freedom by sailing out of Washington on the schooner *Pearl* in April 1848. From *The Case of William L. Chaplin*, 1851.

Maryland penitentiary in May 1846 while serving his sentence for "slave stealing."¹²

By this time, William L. Chaplin, another Massachusetts native, had moved to Washington to become correspondent of the *Albany Patriot*. He also assumed Torrey's role as the principal white organizer of underground railroad operations in the city, again with the financial backing of radical New York abolitionist Gerrit Smith. Like Torrey, Chaplin plotted daring mass escapes by forging extraordinary coalitions. Among his associates were "an obscure black couple named Luke and Sarah Carter and the famous white couple John and Peggy O'Neale Eaton."¹³

The most audacious of these mass escape attempts became known nationally as "The Pearl Affair" in April 1848. Chaplin conceived of the plot after meeting a free African-American carpenter named Daniel Bell, who feared that his enslaved wife and children would be sold away by heirs who were contesting their promised manumissions. Chaplin worked with Bell to plot the escape of his family, hiring Philadelphia supercargo Daniel Drayton and the trading schooner *Pearl* for this purpose. Bell recruited other passengers for the voyage, as did Paul Jennings, an enslaved valet to Daniel Webster,¹⁴ and Samuel Edmonson, one of eleven siblings, who hired his time as a butler to local attorney Joseph H. Bradley.¹⁵ At the last minute, Jennings decided not to embark, but Samuel Edmonson went on board as planned, accompanied by two of his brothers and two sisters, Emily and Mary, who would become the most famed of the *Pearl* captives.

That Chaplin was the main organizer of the venture on the *Pearl* is confirmed in his March 25 letter to Gerrit Smith:

The number of persons here, who are anxious to immigrate [sic] is increasing on my hands daily—I believe there are not less than 75 now importunate for a passage. I am every day expecting the arrival of a vesil from Philadelphia on purpose to take off 50 or more.¹⁶

Daniel Bell seems to have been the one to make contact in Philadelphia with supercargo Daniel Drayton, who, the previous summer, had transported a woman and her children out of slavery from the Seventh Street wharf in Washington. Drayton explained this action as an impromptu response to the request of a "colored man" who approached him at the dock,¹⁷ though he was likely well paid for the risk. The prospect of further monetary gain enticed Drayton and ship owner Edward Sayres into becoming "conductors" for the largest mass escape attempt in underground Railroad history. Bell, his wife Mary, their six children, and one grandchild were included

among the 38 “men and boys,” 26 “women and girls,” and 13 children who crowded below the deck of the 52-ton schooner by the early hours of Sunday, April 15.¹⁸

The *Pearl's* voyage to freedom was beset with wind problems; by about 4 a.m. the next day, the schooner was overtaken at the mouth of the Chesapeake by the steamer *Salem*, carrying 30 volunteers commanded by Washington magistrate H. C. Williams. On April 18, 1848, the *Salem* towed the *Pearl* back to the Seventh Street wharf, where a waiting mob menaced its passengers and crew. Washington authorities managed to protect the distraught captives as they marched them up 4½ Street to the jail located at Judiciary Square.¹⁹

None of the conspirators admitted that Chaplin was behind the venture, though Drayton promised “if his employer let his family suffer it might make a difference,” and later claimed that he had been “offered one thousand dollars cash” to turn state’s evidence.²⁰ He acknowledged to Magistrate Williams that his “employers” were “persons of high standing,” but that he was “only a mite or small fry in the matter.” Further, he testified that he was “no abolitionist”; he had only taken on the venture because of his poverty.²¹

Drayton and Sayres suffered a four-year imprisonment before receiving presidential pardons. Of the two, only Drayton was lionized: he published his memoirs and appeared on anti-slavery platforms, but, dogged by poor health and poverty, he committed suicide in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1857.

Following the capture of the *Pearl*, Chaplin continued to organize daring escapes from slavery. He was arrested in August 1850 after a gun battle with police in Maryland, just beyond the District line. He had two runaways named Allen and Garland concealed in his carriage; both were wounded, but Garland managed to escape.²² Chaplin escaped the harsh prison conditions that had led to Torrey’s death by jumping the \$19,000 bail posted by his



Of the three white men aboard the Pearl, Daniel Drayton was the most responsible for arranging the mass escape, though he insisted to his captors that he did so for pecuniary gain. He served a four-year jail sentence before receiving a presidential pardon. He became a hero to the abolitionist movement, but committed suicide in 1857. From Drayton’s Personal Memoir, 1855.

defense fund, whose main contributors had been, once again, Gerrit Smith and local lawyer David A. Hall, a defender of Drayton as well as John Bush.²³

After Chaplin’s departure from Washington, another Massachusetts native, Jacob Bigelow, took on the leading role in Washington’s underground railroad. In Washington since 1843, Bigelow was a retired lawyer who lived alone in a room next to his office on E Street, N.W. Over the years he had been engaged in various abolitionist efforts in the capital, including attempts to ransom the *Pearl* captives and to establish an antislavery church. As he proudly recalled, “I have, for years, cheerfully regarded one half of my time as appropriated to aid the oppressed in some form, or to oppose the oppressor.”²⁴ Unlike Torrey



Ann Marie Weems dressed as a male carriage driver when she successfully fled slavery in Rockville via Washington, D.C., in 1855. People of both races and various class backgrounds assisted in her escape, demonstrating the diversity of the underground railroad activists. From Still, The Underground Railroad, 1871.

and Chaplin, Bigelow maintained a low profile and managed to keep out of jail.²⁵ Among his close allies was William Still of Philadelphia, an African American and Vigilance Committee member.²⁶

One of their famously successful joint ventures was the flight in November, 1855 of fifteen-year-old Ann Marie Weems, who was dressed as a male carriage driver in transit from Washington to Philadelphia. (From there, she traveled to New York City and on to the Buxton Settlement, Canada West). Others involved in the effort were Ann Marie's father, John, a free man living in Rockville, Maryland, Ezra L. Stevens, a white abolitionist and an Interior Department clerk in Washington, and unnamed black families who sheltered Ann Marie in the District for two months until arrangements to move her north were in place. En route to freedom, she was assisted by a Philadelphia college professor known as "Dr. H." who met her in front of

the White House and went with her by carriage to Philadelphia, and Charles B. Ray and Amos N. Freeman, African-American clergymen who welcomed her in New York City, along with Lewis Tappan, a wealthy New York merchant who was even more influential in the antislavery movement than Gerrit Smith.²⁷

Relatively few primary sources give detailed accounts of the clandestine deeds of white abolitionists like Jacob Bigelow in the capital, but even fewer exist that tell the stories of free African Americans upon whom those escaping bondage more often depended. Black churches, magnets for runaways, regularly offered crucial assistance. Often, only oral tradition testifies to the underground railroad work of such congregations as Israel Bethel AME (at South Capitol and B streets, S.W.), Mt. Zion United Methodist Church (then at 27th and



William Still, a prominent Philadelphia activist, described Weems's escape in his 1871 book, The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives . . . , and proved the central role in organizing it played by his main Washington ally Jacob Bigelow, a retired lawyer. From Still, The Underground Railroad, 1871.



Anthony Bowen had been freed from slavery in Prince George's County in 1830 and became an underground railroad activist in the District. He is said to have met runaways at the Washington waterfront and sheltered them in his home on E Street, S.W. From Shaw Ad-Hoc Coalition to Save the Anthony Bowen "Y", A Community Response...[1982].

A little more is known about the covert activities of Leonard Grimes, a "light mulatto" born free in Leesburg, Virginia, and later a militant antislavery pastor in Boston involved in the most notorious fugitive slave cases. In October 1839, Grimes was arrested for allegedly transporting an enslaved woman named Patty and six children to the District from Loudoun County.³² He could do this easily because he was an owner and driver of hacks—the only licensed occupation that free African Americans could legally pursue by an 1836 city ordinance, but one that proved very useful for the underground railroad work of Grimes and many others.

A biographical sketch of Grimes in the 1887 publication *Men of Mark* stated that he had "resolved to do all he could to aid the slaves in any attempt they might make to escape from bondage. This disposition was known, and the slave who wished to run away sought Mr. Grimes for advice, which he never failed to give. Slaveholders began to suspect young Grimes as an enemy to their traffic in human flesh and blood. He was watched, detected, arrested, tried, convicted and imprisoned."³³ In March 1840, Grimes was fined \$100 and sentenced to two years in the penitentiary in Richmond, though the evidence against him was flimsy and he was ably defended by General Walter Jones, the former U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia who had important family connections in Leesburg.³⁴

Jones probably arranged many of the testimonials and pardon petitions that referred to Grimes's unblemished personal history, "former good character," and "the decency and respectability of him and his family in their class." These were endorsed

P streets in Georgetown), St. Paul AME (on Eighth Street, S.W.), and Union Wesley AME Zion (on 23rd Street N.W.).²⁸

Oral tradition is also the main source for the covert activities of individuals like Anthony Bowen, freed from slavery in Prince George's County in 1830, whose home on E Street, S.W., has been described by Charles Blockson as "a station on the underground railroad."²⁹ *The Guide to Black Washington* asserts that Bowen "often met incoming boats from the South on the Sixth Street Wharf on the Potomac River, leading the fugitives to the sanctuary of his residence."³⁰ The particulars of Bowen's operations and the names of his contacts have not survived, but he was clearly an indefatigable and caring "race man," and one likely to have made every effort to free those in bondage. He was an organizer of an 1846 fundraiser to buy a woman out of slavery, a founder of St. Paul AME Church and its Sunday Evening School, and of the "colored" YMCA in the District.³¹



Leonard Grimes, born free in Leesburg, Virginia, and later a noted antislavery pastor in Boston, lived in Washington in the late 1830s. He assisted escapes and undermined slavery while working as a hack driver, one of the few occupations then open to free blacks in the District. From Simmons, Men of Mark, 1887.

by "a number of the intelligent and most discreet and respectable people of Washington," including Chief Judge William Cranch of the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Columbia and U.S. Circuit Court Judge Buckner Thruston.³⁵

Cranch and Thruston had first-hand knowledge of other persons intent on undermining the slave system by direct action. A number of people appeared in their courtrooms who were charged with forging free passes, abetting, enabling, transporting, and harboring runaways from slavery, and spreading seditious printed thoughts on the subject of slavery and freedom. Three cases that came before their Circuit Court during its November term, 1836, corroborate the diverse picture of Underground Railroad activists in the District of Columbia. A white woman, a free African American, and a slave were all

charged with assisting escapes from slavery (though none appear to have been convicted of the offense).³⁶

Jane Steiner, "a spinster," was charged with assisting "by advice & donation of money the transportation of a certain negro woman slave" on September 4. The money in question, two dollars and fifty cents, paid for a ticket in the railroad car from Washington to Baltimore. Steiner was said to have "falsely and fraudulently represented herself as the owner," who was actually George W. P. Custis, builder of Arlington House, adopted son of George Washington, father-in-law to Robert E. Lee, and, in 1830 census returns, holder of 57 slaves. Perhaps Steiner collaborated with "Free Negro" Alexander Vincent, who was charged with loaning a free pass to another of Custis's slaves on the same day. It is possible, as well, that they were both part of a larger network of support for runaways from slavery.³⁷

During the same term, "Henry Hooper, a negro slave" was charged with "unlawfully taking from the city of Washington a negro woman slave named Mary and her two children, the property of Miss Adelaide Douglass." Hooper is said to have taken them "on board a vessel of which [he] had charge" and to have conveyed them "to the State of Delaware."³⁸ He was the only enslaved underground railroad activist to have emerged in new indexes of the court record; others like him were more likely to have appeared before local magistrates and punished by those holding them in slavery.

An examination of the District Court record also reveals that schools for African Americans were sometimes centers for underground railroad activity. At least four teachers at such schools were tried for aiding runaways. Two of these teachers were African Americans, John W. Prout and Joseph Farrell, and two were white, Elijah Shay and Stephen Potter.

The case of *U.S. v. Stephen Potter* offers historians a comprehensive file that is unusually rich in details.³⁹ Potter was

charged in May 1818 with “aiding and assisting a certain slave by the name of William in making his escape.” The accused was a Georgetown resident who may have been related to Henry Potter, an Englishman who began a school for African Americans at Seventh and G Streets in 1809.⁴⁰ In 1810 Stephen had authored *A New Grammatical System of the English Tongue in Three Parts...Both in Prose and Verse, Adorned with Cuts in Order to Incline Children to Study with Delight*.

On April 24, 1818, Commodore David Porter advertised a \$150 reward for William, “a bright mulatto” about 24 years old and 5’9”, who “formerly belonged to General John Mason, and was brought up a waiter in his family, where he has a wife residing; his mother lives with Mr. McKenney, at the back of Georgetown.”⁴¹ William would have waited on descendants of George Mason at his son’s Georgetown residence, and on the many eminent summer visitors to Analostan Island. William’s experience with sophisticated blue-bloods was no doubt valued by Commodore David Porter, a Navy Commissioner and veteran of the War of 1812, whose lavish country seat, later known as Meridian Hill, became noted for “generous and constant entertaining.”⁴²

Porter’s runaway advertisement provided detailed descriptions of some of the clothing William had taken, including a “new livery surtout, trimmed with black velvet and a strip of gold lace on the collar.” A plain, dark corduroy coat, along with a “blue striped coatee or jacket,” would become part of the primary evidence against Stephen Potter. These coats were found in Potter’s home following the execution of a search warrant. In his deposition, Mason acknowledged giving them to William “while he belonged to me, and taken with him when he was delivered to Commodore Porter,” which had occurred “some time during the last fall.”⁴³

Mason continued that Porter had visited William in the Washington Jail, where



William Cranch, Chief Judge of the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Columbia, presided over local trials of underground railroad activists during his 54 years on the bench. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

William “confessed to him that a man named Potter who lived in Georgetown had written [a manumission] paper for him and had furnished it to him for a compensation, which he had made him in some of his [William’s] clothes.” Potter vehemently denied the charge. He wrote he had found the “two old coats” in his “necessary house” and added, “not knowing who they belong’d to, I threw them into the house, supposing that they belong’d to some of the neighbours & that they would come for them.” Potter attempted to explain his role in William’s escape in a pleading letter to the grand jury from his “loathsome” jail cell:

A yellow man came to my door at a late hour in the evening & requested me to set him across the River. I replied that I could not & that he must go to the ferry — he sayd it was late in the evening, & he knew not where to find the ferry-man and again requested me to set him across—saying he

One Hundred and Fifty Dollars Reward.

RAN away from the subscriber last night, a bright mulatto slave named William, formerly belonged to General John Mason, and was brought up a waiter in his family, where he has a wife residing; his mother lives with Mr. McKenney, at the back of Georgetown.

William is about 24 years of age, five feet eight or nine inches high, rather slender make, and likely; has the habit of frequent sniffing, a slight impediment in his utterance; has a remarkable black mole under one of his eyes (believed to be the right,) throws his head forward in his walk, and is very much addicted to telling falsehoods.

He took with him a variety of clothing, among which are one new livery surtout, with large capes of grey cloth, trimmed with black velvet and a strip of gold lace on the collar; (the trimming and lace he will undoubtedly take off;) one London brown broad cloth surtout coat, with velvet collar of the same colour, and one bottle green close bodied coat, both half worn; ribbed grey stockinet pantaloons, one pair of Kerseymere, fawn colour, ornamented at the flaps, and one pair of green cloth nearly new; beaver hat, but little worn.

There are strong reasons for believing that he intends making his way to Pennsylvania, but may probably lurk for some time about Georgetown.

The above reward, and all reasonable charges, will be paid to whoever will deliver him to me in the district of Columbia, or lodge him in any jail so that I can get him.

DAVID PORTER.

April 24—2w

The Baltimore Patriot, Alexandria Herald, the Democratic Press, and Fredericktown Examiner, will insert the above two weeks and send their accounts to

D. P.

was one of the hands belonging to a Schooner that was gone to Alexandria which would sail the next morning, & that he had some of the Capt. clothes, & must get on board before she sail'd- Then shew me a paper on which was written the names of the Capt.- Mate and Schooner, and promised me a reward if I would set him on the other shoar [sic] - I repli'd that I wanted no reward for such a favour, if he was telling me the truth - he said he was, & that the Capt. had sent him for his clothe that had been in the was [sic - wash?] & that he had been dillatory [sic], which was the cause of the vessel leaving him - I made no further scruple, but sat him across and returned [in a small boat].

Intriguingly, General John Mason was the owner of the ferry in question.

Whom William contacted on the other

Commodore David Porter's runaway slave advertisement from the April 24, 1818, National Intelligencer. "William Smith" was named in Porter's April 22 advertisement in the Alexandria Gazette, which offered a lesser reward of \$100 and added, "Masters of vessels and others are warned from harboring him at their peril, as the law will be enforced against all such offenders." Runaway ads are often good sources of information, like this one is, about the material culture, occupations, skills, physical appearance, and family ties of enslaved African Americans.

side of the river is unknown. He may have embarked on the unnamed vessel at Alexandria for New York, where he was arrested and returned to Washington. He had forged manumission papers with him, transmitted by his captor to Porter, that attested and certified that George Rinsel, "a yellow man aged about twenty one," had been manumitted on May 10, 1817, by Henry Carberry of Georgetown. The papers were certified with the purported signature of John Ott, a justice of the peace, and witnessed by Nathan Moore, a City constable. ⁴⁴

Potter denied any complicity, writing, "I know no more who wrote that Instrument than the man in the Moon—but what little I saw of it I make no doubt, but that it was written by some one who has been taught by me the use of the Pen." Was Potter admitting that his script was suspiciously similar, or perhaps that his pupils were likely sources for such forged documents? Mason took it upon himself to closely compare Potter's writing with the forgery:

By permission of the officer [Constable Rezin B. Offutt] I took Potter into another room by him self & questioned him as to the manner by which he came by the clothes... Desirous of seeing his hand writing — I put a pen and Ink before him, and asked him to give me a minute of the facts in relation to the matter & ...when he came to his part of the country, &c. — he took up the pen ... but having wrote his name only he desisted & said he would write no more — but told me if I wished to see his hand writing the constable in the other room had some accounts...which he had



The waterfront locations of Georgetown, shown here, and Alexandria provided access to transportation out of slavery for some African Americans, like William, who could stow away or perhaps even gain employment on ships heading north. Courtesy, HSW.

written a few days before. I applied to Offutt immediately in the presence of Potter and received from him the four accounts which I have marked with my initials & I have the paper before mentioned purporting to be the Instrument of manumission.

Mason's actions contributed to Potter's indictment; the grand jury decided that a "strong similarity" existed between the penmanship exhibited on the assembled documents. The grain of their papers was also suspiciously similar.

Stephen Potter's letter from jail charged William with being a "lying rascal," a trait listed in the runaway ad. But Potter was accused of much worse in a prosecution document submitted to the grand jury:

after the advertisement offering a large reward for the apprehension of the said slave... Potter called on a certain [Constable] Nathan Moore with a proposi-

tion to inform Him where the Negro was if a compensation could be had – together with other facts of a conclusive character could they be admitted - but being persons of colour their testimony could not be allowed & also from preexisting transactions of a similar character on the part of the said Stephen Potter shewing Him a dangerous person.⁴⁵

The jury did not agree, and returned a verdict of not guilty on June 20, 1818,⁴⁶ but by this time Potter had experienced considerable hardship. He testified from jail that he was "without money and almost without friends, and a sick family at home almost in a state of perishing." He was "an old feble [sic] man," he wrote, "my lamp of life almost spent."⁴⁷ Potter's fate after 1818 is unknown; his name does not appear in census or directory listings. Whether he was "a dangerous person" to the slave system remains unclear. The "other facts of a con-

To all to whom these Presents may come
or to whom it may concern, be it known,
that I Henry Carbery of Georgetown County
of Washington in the District of Columbia,
for divers good causes and considerations me
thereunto moving, have released from Slavery,
Liberated & Manumitted & set Free, and by
these Presents do hereby release from Slavery,
Liberate and set Free my Yellow man
called George Kinsel, aged about twenty one
Years, and able to work and gain a
sufficient livelihood - and him the said
George I do declare to be henceforth Free &
Manumitted and discharged from all man-
ner of servitude or service to me, my Execu-
tors or administrators forever - In testimony
whereof I have hereunto set my hand and
affixed my seal this tenth day of May in the
Year of our Lord one thousand, ~~one~~ ^{eight} hundred
and seventeen - Henry Carbery
Signed sealed &
delivered in presence
of Nathan Moore
& Daniel Young.

William used this certificate of freedom to aid in his unsuccessful escape from slavery. He confessed that a Georgetown resident and school teacher named Stephen Potter had forged the pass for him in exchange for a few articles of clothing. Potter denied the charge and after a harrowing investigation and trial was found not guilty. Courtesy, National Archives, D.C. District Court Records.

clusive character" and the "preexisting transactions of a similar character" noted above may reveal a pattern of subversive behavior or associations, and other occasions when Potter had few scruples about rowing a person of color across the Potomac and towards vessels heading north.

Another white teacher of African Americans was charged with abetting an escape in *U.S. v. Elijah Shay*, a case that came before the District Court during its May term, 1826. Shay was indicted for forging a pass for John, "the property of Major George Peter," on December 8, 1825.⁴⁸ The forged pass used the assumed name of "Robert Jenkins," described as free born and "a coloured man of dark complexion, about twenty six years old and about five feet nine inches high." John was enslaved by Major George Peter, another very wealthy and powerful man. He was a military hero who served both in Congress and the Maryland General Assembly, and was also heir to the fortune of Robert Peter, first Mayor of Georgetown.

In some histories, Elijah Shay is misidentified as "Daniel" Shay, a teacher who is said to have gone to jail for "helping slaves to freedom" in about 1830.⁴⁹ Shay is further portrayed as an Englishman who had opened "Round Tops" as a school for African Americans in about 1822, and who had formerly taught with Mary Billings, an Englishwoman who established a similar school in 1810. Elijah Shay was described as a "laborer" in the indictment—but this was the common description attached to accused persons (including Drayton and Sayres). Few details of his trial are available. Shay pled guilty; he was imprisoned for six months and fined \$10. Whether Shay had accomplices and belonged to an underground railroad network is unclear.

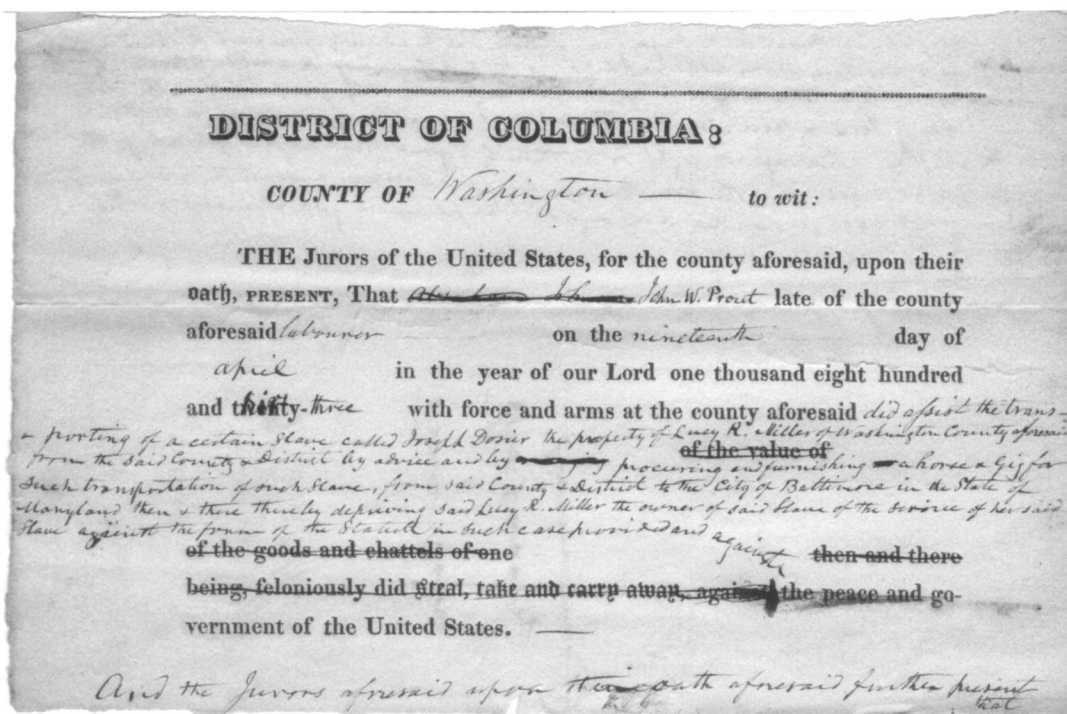
A case that involved teamwork and another teacher came before the March 1833 term of the District court. John W. Prout, an African American (described as a "laborer"), was initially accused of forging a pass for Joseph Dosier, enticing or per-

suading him to run away from Miss Lucy R. Miller, and assisting his transportation by horse and gig to Baltimore on April 19, 1833.⁵⁰ The indictments against Prout must have been a blow to the African-American community. Since 1825, he had been running the Columbian Institute, an important school for African Americans on H Street, N.W. (It had opened as the Smothers Schoolhouse, was renamed by Prout and taken over by John F. Cook in 1833 after Prout's arrest.) Prout had also been active in the cause of black civil rights. He took a strong public stand against the Colonization Movement in 1831, and served as Corresponding Secretary to the 1832 National Negro Convention.⁵¹

Two other African-American men, Abraham Johnson and John Allen, were also indicted for helping Dosier's escape.⁵² Johnson was charged with assisting Dosier "by advice" and conveying him in the gig to Baltimore. On Dosier's testimony, Allen was charged with "forging & procuring to be forged a certificate of freedom."⁵³

Another man of color named Henry Brown was implicated though apparently not charged. His name was scribbled onto the margin of Dosier's forged pass, where an official attempted to explain the foiled conspiracy: "John Prout: Col Man got his papers charged him \$5. Abram Johnston [sic] brought him here in a gig under a Bargain with Prout. Henry Brown, Col Man gone to Newham [?] has his [unreadable]. Brown brought it on in the Stage."

Johnson and Prout were found guilty and each fined \$50. Allen may not have gone to trial, as no verdict was recorded. Johnson's appeal, filed by former U.S. District Attorney Walter Jones (who later defended Leonard Grimes), triggered precedent-setting rulings that must have assisted the prosecution of those charged with assisting escapes from slavery. The court opined it was unnecessary "to state what the advice was" to a runaway, nor "how it assisted him, nor is it necessary to state a criminal intent, nor that the accused



Indictment of African-American school teacher John W. Prout for forging a pass for Joseph Dosier. The jury found Prout not guilty of the forgery, but of "enticing and persuading" Dosier to run away. Courtesy, National Archives, D.C. District Court Records.

knew he was a slave, and intended to run away."⁵⁴

The fourth case involving a teacher also led to precedent-setting rulings by the District Court. The case of *U.S. v. Negro Joseph Farrell* concluded that "slaves are competent witnesses in Alexandria County against Negroes and mulattoes," and that "a sentence for a second offence while in penitentiary for the first can commence at the end of the first sentence."⁵⁵ Joseph Farrell was charged during the May and October terms of the court in 1837 with forging certificates of freedom.⁵⁶ These were for Sandy and Sam, both of whom were enslaved by Thomson F. Mason, a noted attorney in Alexandria and a grandson of George Mason.⁵⁷ Sandy, who had been captured after running away, was permitted to be a witness for the United States at Farrell's first trial.

Farrell (or "Ferial") was described in his 1834 manumission certificate as "a dark mulatto man about 40 years old, and 5 feet 3½ inches tall."⁵⁸ He is said to have been "a baker by trade," but maintained a school in an alley between Duke and Prince streets in Alexandria, District of Columbia.⁵⁹ In reporting on his trial, the *Alexandria Gazette* noted, "the prisoner had been for many years acting as a preacher, and the keeper of a school in the town of Alexandria for the instruction of colored children."⁶⁰ An historical account of antebellum black schools portrayed him as "a colored man of decided abilities and a leading spirit among the colored people...[who was] sent to the penitentiary for assisting some of his race in escaping from bondage."⁶¹

Farrell pleaded not guilty, but reportedly said nothing in his defense; he was sentenced to four years' imprisonment on May

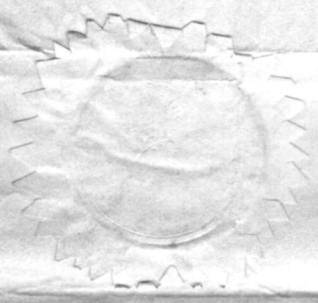
No. 1

District of Columbia County of Washington Feb

I hereby certify to all whom it doth
or may concern that it hath been proved
to my satisfaction that the bearer hereof
Negro Joseph Dosier aged about thirty
two years five feet five inches high or
thereabouts dark complexion regular
features and has a scar on the back of
his right shoulder was born free and
raised in the county and district aforesaid

In Testimony whereof I have
shrub set my hand and
seal of my office this
tenth day of April 1833

W. Prout Clerk
W. C. C.



Joseph Dosier ran away from Lucy Miller of Washington in 1833 using this forged pass. Dosier's escape evinces the central role of African Americans in the operation of the underground railroad: three black men, including school teacher John W. Prout, were charged with assisting Dosier's escape to Baltimore. Courtesy, National Archives, D.C. District Court Records.


13, 1837. In early October, he was brought back into court from the Penitentiary of the District of Columbia to stand trial for forging the certificate for Sam. Farrell had provided the forgery "for the consideration of four dollars," according to Sam, who had run away and been apprehended in the interim. Farrell was then sentenced to an additional three years in prison, to begin at the end of his four-year sentence.

The *Alexandria Gazette* provided details of both forgeries. They were purportedly issued under the seal of the County Court of Prince William and the signature of the presiding justice. The seal (a pair of scales with a tobacco leaf, and the words "Prince William County" in the margin) had been "tolerably well executed," but in both cases the name of the Justice, Mr. Ewell, was misspelled "Uile." The handwriting, "stiff and labored, but perfectly distinct," was testified to be Farrell's by "a gentleman residing in town who had seen him write."⁶²

Further research on Farrell and on other teachers may yield more evidence that African-American schools in Washington, like churches, were heavily engaged in assisting runaways from slavery. People like Joseph Farrell, John W. Prout, and Elijah Shay are unlikely to have recorded for posterity the particulars of their covert activities. District court documents and other archival records can reveal only a small part of the activities that these men worked hard to keep hidden. Usually, they surfaced only in times of disaster and at their peril. Still, District court records offer information on escape routes and strategies, as well as insights into the courage and strength of character required to assist the enslaved. These records enrich and further diversify the story of the opera-

tion of the underground railroad in the District of Columbia.

From the historical record of district court cases, newspaper advertisements, and other primary sources, we can only begin to piece together a picture of underground railroad activities in the District of Columbia. Uncovering clandestine activities in any period is one of the greatest challenges for historians. The history of the underground railroad is still cloaked in myth and legend, and the task of documenting this important chapter in our nation's history is far from complete. We know that some people, both white and African American, put themselves at great risk to assist runaways. But there is much that we don't know about the incentives that motivated them and the strategies they adopted.

Torrey, Chaplin and Bigelow, in succession, were clearly key figures in an abolitionist network that transcended state boundaries and somewhat resembled the kind of organized nationwide conspiracy that gave slaveholders nightmares. But, unconnected to this network, a diverse group of other Washington residents also assisted escapes from slavery, some of them long before Charles Turner Torrey moved to Washington. Some of these activists may have become involved spontaneously as events unfolded, while others intentionally put this work at the center of their lives. They may have worked together in loose coalitions or acted alone. More of these individuals need to be identified and their activities teased out of the historical record. Their stories will contribute to a better understanding of the history of the underground railroad in Washington, D.C., and its connections to the long struggle to put an end to slavery in the nation's capital. 

◆ NOTES ◆

1. Much information was derived from the publications of Stanley Harrold: "On the Borders of Slavery and Race: Charles T. Torrey and the Underground Railroad," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 20, 2 (Summer 2000), 273-79; and "Freeing the Weems Family: A New Look at the Underground Railroad," *Civil War History*, 42, 4 (1996), 289-96. Harrold's forthcoming book is entitled *Subversion on the Potomac: The Washington Antislavery Community, 1828-1865*.
2. Harrold, *Abolitionists and the South* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 70-75; "On the Borders of Slavery and Race," 275.
3. Thomas Smallwood, *A Narrative of Thomas Smallwood (Coloured Man):... Together with an Account of the Underground Railroad, Written by Himself* (Toronto, 1851), 13; National Archives, Records of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia [hereafter D.C. District Court Records] Record Group 21, Entry 6, *Imparlanças*, November 1842, *Thomas Smallwood v. Abraham Cole*, No. 39. Smallwood explained that he had been "bequeathed" to the wife of the Rev. J.B. Ferguson, who was "no friend of slavery." The Minister paid \$500 for Smallwood in order to free him, though not before the payment had been "worked out," when Smallwood was about thirty years old in 1831. Confusing the issue is a record of Smallwood's manumission in 1842 by John Ferguson "for a consideration of \$5" in *Free Negro Registers*. Dorothy S. Provine, *District of Columbia Free Negro Registers 1821-1861*, (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1996), v. 2, 439-40.
4. Smallwood, *Narrative*, 18. See also the new edition, Richard Almonte, ed., (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 2000).
5. Daniel A. Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, 1891), 38; John W. Cromwell, "The First Negro Churches in the District of Columbia," *Journal of Negro History*, 7, 1 (Jan. 1922), 70-71.
6. See James Brewer Stewart, "Joshua Giddings, Antislavery Violence and Honor," in John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold, eds., *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 172-73.
7. Harrold, "On the Borders of Slavery and Race," 276.
8. See Richard Sylvester, comp., *District of Columbia Police: A Retrospect of the Police Organizations of the Cities of Washington and Georgetown and the District of Columbia, with Biographical Sketches, Illustrations, and Historic Cases* (Washington, D.C., 1894), 29; Smallwood, *Narrative*, 18.
9. Smallwood, *Narrative*, 20-21, 25, 29.
10. Harrold, "On the Borders of Slavery and Race," 276.
11. *Ibid.*
12. See Joseph C. Lovejoy, *Memoir of Rev. Charles T. Torrey, Who Died in the Penitentiary of Maryland, Where He was Confined for Showing Mercy to the Poor* (Reprint 1847 ed., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); William Weston Patton, *Freedom's Martyr: A Discourse on the Death of the Rev. Charles T. Torrey* (Hartford, Conn., 1846); Almon Underwood, *A Discourse on the Death of the Late Rev. C.T. Torrey, a Martyr to Human Rights. Delivered in Newark, N.J., June 7, 1846* (Newark, 1846); Edmund Worth, *A Martyr to the Truth: A Sermon in Commemoration of the Death of Rev. Charles T. Torrey, in the Maryland Penitentiary, May 9, 1846...* (Fishersville? N.H.: 1846?).
13. Harrold, "Freeing the Weems Family," 295; Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South*, 70.
14. Webster had purchased Jennings in order to free him, allowing him to "work off" the payment at the rate of \$8 a month. The promised manumission was imminent. See G. Franklin Edwards and Michael R. Winston, "Commentary: the Washington of Paul Jennings—White House Slave, Free Man and Conspirator for Freedom," *White House History*, 1 (1983), 58.
15. John Henry Paynter, *Fugitives of The Pearl* (Reprint of 1930 ed., New York: AMS Press, 1971); Provine, *Free Negro Registers*, 279; Mary Kay Ricks, "Escape on The Pearl," *Washington Post*, Aug. 12, 1998, H1, H4-5.
16. Catherine M. Hanchett, "What Sort of People and Families...': The Edmonson Sisters," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* (July 1982), 586 fn 7.
17. Daniel A. Drayton, *Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton: For Four Years and Four Months a Prisoner for Charity's Sake in a Washington Jail. Including a Narrative of the Voyage and Capture of the Schooner Pearl* (Boston, 1855), 23.
18. *Daily Union* (Washington D.C.), Apr. 19, 1848.
19. See Samuel Gridley Howe, *Narrative of the Heroic Adventures of Drayton, an American Trader, in The Pearl, Coasting Vessel, which was Captured by American Citizens, near the Mouth of the Potomac, Having on Board Seventy-seven Men, Women, and Children, Endeavoring to Escape from Slavery in the Capital of the American Republic* (London, 1848); Harrold, "The Pearl Affair: The Washington Riot of 1848," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 50 (1980), 140-60.
20. D.C. District Court Records, RG 21, Entry 45,

- Appearances, June Term 1848, *U.S. v. Daniel Drayton*, No. 119; *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (Rochester, N.Y.), Oct. 15, 1852.
21. D.C. District Court Records, RG 21, Entry 45, Trials, October Term 1848, *Daniel Drayton v. The U.S.*, No. 428.
 22. *The Case of William L. Chaplin: Being an Appeal to All Respecters of Law and Justice, Against the Cruel and Oppressive Treatment to which, Under Color of Legal Proceedings, He has been Subjected, in the District of Columbia and the State of Maryland* (Boston, 1851); *Daily National Intelligencer*, Aug. 10, 1850. Garland and Allen were each enslaved to a powerful Georgia congressman who would rise to great heights in the Confederate governments: Garland to Robert A. Toombs and Allen to Alexander Stephens.
 23. Ralph Harlow, Gerrit Smith, *Philanthropist and Reformer* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), 292.
 24. Quoted in Harrold, "Freeing the Weems Family," 294.
 25. See Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1898, 1967), 117; Harrold, "Freeing the Weems Family," 294.
 26. William Still, *The Underground Rail Road. A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c....* (Reprint of 1871 ed., Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1970), 150.
 27. See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 330.
 28. Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, *A Study of Historical Sites in the District of Columbia of Special Significance to Afro-Americans* (Washington, D.C., 1974), 54-55; Nina Honemond Clarke, *History of Nineteenth-Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington, D.C.* (New York: Vantage Press, 1983), 17, 40; Charles L. Blockson, *Hippocrene Guide to the Underground Railroad* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 38; James Oliver Horton, "The Genesis of Washington's African American Community," in Francine Cary, ed., *Urban Odyssey: A Multicultural History of Washington, D.C.* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 33, 37-38.
 29. Blockson, *Hippocrene Guide*, 35.
 30. Sandra Fitzpatrick and Maria R. Goodwin, *The Guide to Black Washington* (Rev. ed., New York: Hippocrene Books, 1999), 45.
 31. Provine, *Free Negro Registers*, 185; Shaw Ad-Hoc Coalition to Save the Anthony Bowen "Y", *A Community Response* [Washington, D.C., 1982?]; Clarke, *History of Nineteenth-Century Black Churches*, 16.
 32. John Blassingame et al., eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Ser. 1, Vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 441n; Kathryn Grover, *The Fugitive's Gibraltar: Escaping Slaves and Abolitionism in New Bedford, Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 189.
 33. William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (Reprint of 1887 ed., Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1970), 663; see also Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1921), 180-81.
 34. *Alexandria Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, Mar. 17, 1840, 3. See also Fanny Lee Jones, "Walter Jones and His Times," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 5 (1902), 139-50.
 35. Library of Virginia, Virginia Executive Papers, Letters Received, Rejected Claims, 1842; Pardon Petition for Leonard Grimes. Philip Schwarz of Virginia Commonwealth University generously made available transcribed documents relating to Grimes's trial and incarceration.
 36. D.C. District Court Records, RG 21, Entry 2, *Minutes*, November Term 1836.
 37. D.C. District Court Records, RG 21, Entry 6, November Term, 1836, Criminal Appearances, *U.S. v. Alexander Vincent*; No. 126, *U.S. v. Jane Steiner*, No. 127.
 38. D.C. District Court Records, RG 21, Entry 6, November Term, 1836, Criminal Appearances, *U.S. v. Henry Hooper*, No. 167.
 39. D.C. District Court Records, RG 21, Entry 6, Criminal Appearances June term 1818, *U.S. v. Stephen Potter*, No. 80.
 40. See Lillian G. Dabney, *The History of Schools for Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1807-1947* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1949), 16.
 41. Clipping of April 24, 1818 runaway ad from the *National Intelligencer* (included in the case papers of *U.S. v. Stephen Potter*).
 42. Of the two, Mason (a militia general, banker, and businessman) was the more considerable slaveholder: in the 1820 census returns he had 32 to Porter's nine. See Harold Donaldson Eberlein and Cortlandt Van Dyke Hubbard, *Historic Houses of George-town and Washington City* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1958), 451; Charles Paullin, "Virginia's Glebe near Washington," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 42-43, (1940-1), 229; 1820 U.S. Census, District of Columbia.
 43. This quotation and those that follow are from documents included in the case file of *U.S. v. Stephen Potter*.
 44. Frederick P. Todd, "The Militia and Volunteers of the District of Columbia, 1783-1820," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 50 (1948-50), 427; Judah Delano, *The Washington Directory...* (Washington, D.C., 1822); Ronald Vern Jackson et al., eds., *District of Columbia 1810 Census Index* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Accelerated Indexing Systems, 1981); District of Columbia Census Index, 1820-1830

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- (Bountiful, Utah: Accelerated Indexing Systems, 1976, 1977).
45. District Court Records, RG 21, Entry 6, Criminal Appearances June term 1818, *U.S. v. Stephen Potter*, No. 80.
 46. D.C. District Court Records, Entry 2, *Minutes*, June Term 1818.
 47. District Court Records, RG 21, Entry 6, Criminal Appearances June term 1818, *U.S. v. Stephen Potter*, No. 80.
 48. D.C. District Court Records, RG 21 Entry 6, Criminal Appearances, May Term 1826, *U.S. v. Elijah Shay*, No. 56.
 49. Lillian Dabney attached the name "Daniel" to Shay, a name she acknowledged that she located in an 1830 Georgetown directory. Dabney, *The History of Schools*, 7, 16. See also Jane Freundel Levey, "Segregation in Education: A Basis for Jim Crow in Washington, D.C., 1804-1880," M.A. Thesis, George Washington University, 1991, 119.
 50. D.C. District Court Records, RG 21, Entry 6, March Term 1833, Criminal Appearances, *U.S. v. John W. Prout*, Nos. 92, 94, 100. See also William Cranch, *Reports of Cases Civil and Criminal in the United States Circuit Court of the District of Columbia, from 1801 to 1841* (New York, 1852-53), Vol. 5, 301.
 51. Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Village and Capital 1800-1878* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 146; Howard Holman Bell, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions 1830-1864* (New York: Arno Press, 1969) 8-9; Letitia Woods Brown, *Free Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1790-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 75-76.
 52. D.C. District Court Records, RG 21 Entry 6, Criminal Appearances, March Term 1833, *U.S. v. Abraham Johnson*, Nos. 93, 95, 101; see also Provine, *Free Negro Registers*, 70, 146.
 53. National Archives, RG 21, Entry 6, Criminal Appearances, March Term 1833, *U.S. v. Negro John Allen*, No. 113.
 54. Cranch, Vol. 4, 303.
 55. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, 311.
 56. *Ibid.*, 311.
 57. Attorney Thomson F. Mason of Alexandria was the grandson of both George Mason of Gunston Hall and William Cranch, Chief Justice of the District's Circuit Court. He became Judge of the newly established Criminal Court of the District of Columbia in 1838, but died six months later.
 58. Dorothy S. Provine, *Alexandria County, Virginia Free Negro Registers, 1797-1861* (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 1990), 61
 59. U.S. Office of Education, *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education on the Condition and Improvement of Public Schools in the District of Columbia*, (Washington, 1871), 283-4.
 60. *Alexandria Gazette*, Oct. 17, 1837.
 61. *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education*, 284.
 62. *Alexandria Gazette*, Oct. 17, 1837; see also District of Columbia Circuit Court for Alexandria County Minute Books, Arlington [Alexandria] County Records, Library of Virginia. Extracts kindly provided by Tim Dennee.