



John Brown's Last Moments

This idealized artist's rendition depicts John Brown leaving jail moments before his execution in 1859 after his failed raid on the U.S. Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Notice the African American woman portrayed holding her baby up to kiss him. Etching by Thomas Hovenden (1885). Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division (LC-USZ62-5533).

John Brown's Transformation: The Springfield Years, 1846-1849

JOSEPH CARVALHO III



Introduction: When radical abolitionist John Brown moved to Springfield, Massachusetts from Ohio in 1846, his goal was to represent the interests of the western sheep farmers in their dealings with the powerful New England wool merchants in order to provide the farmers with a fair market value for their product. With Simon Perkins, a sheep farmer he had met in Ohio, Brown began Perkins & Brown in an old warehouse. Springfield was chosen due to its central location. Eventually, the Brown family settled in a modest house around the corner from their warehouse on Hastings Street, then later moved to 31 Franklin Street. According to Dr. Arlene Rodriguez, "Springfield is one of the few locations in the country where John Brown has consistently been honored as a hero."¹

Although the company failed, the three years that Brown spent in Springfield were crucial to the evolution of both his thought and anti-slavery activism. Brown's relationship with Springfield's strong and militant African American community, along with key leaders in that community, was important to the evolution of his strategy. Moreover, it was during his time in Springfield that Brown first met Frederick Douglass. It was here that Brown developed close ties with leading abolitionists throughout the state (five of whom became members

of the “Group of Six” who helped fund his 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry). Brown first shared his ideas for an armed uprising with Thomas Thomas, a former slave and trusted friend, in Springfield in the late 1840s. In addition, the creation of his League of Gileadites with local African American leaders (whose goal was to physically resist the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act) along with his plans for a more effective and organized Underground Railroad (designated as a “Subterranean Pass Way” through the south) were all developed in Springfield and contributed to making Brown’s life there an important turning point. Local historian Joseph Carvalho III concludes that “most of all, his sojourn in this community opened his eyes and mind to the possibility of effective resistance.”

Interestingly, few national historians have made this argument or drawn these connections as directly. Most biographers of John Brown focus primarily on the business side of his years in Springfield. For example, in his classic study To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown (1970), historian Stephen B. Oates spends four pages on Brown’s failed business career in the city and devotes only two pages to his anti-slavery activism. In a more recent work, John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War and Seeded Civil Rights (2005), historian David S. Reynolds notes that Brown had always “immersed himself in black culture, learning much from it and giving much back to it” and comments in passing that it was in Springfield that this immersion “reached new depths.”² However, although Reynolds spends nine pages on the business and personal side of Brown’s time in Springfield, he says nothing more about the impact of the local African American community on the evolution of his thought and strategy.

In another recent biography, Patriotic Treason: John Brown and the Soul of America (2009), historian Evan Carton points out that “For the first time in his life, the small-town frontier tanner and abolitionist now lived among significant numbers of black men and women.”³ African Americans in Springfield lived in two small sections of the city referred to as Hayti and Jamaica. Although Brown did not live there, he became friends with many of the residents, spent significant time in their neighborhoods, and worshipped in a black church. Brown was remarkable among abolitionists for his lack of racism and his ability to treat African Americans as equals and comrades. Carton notes that:

Before dawn and again after business concluded for the night, the office of Perkins & Brown housed black men in animated conversation about the evils of slavery in the south and prejudice in the north. Even during the work day . . . John Brown and his eldest son often huddled in the counting room, examining the slavery question for hours on end.⁴

Although Carton acknowledges the uniqueness of John Brown's years in the city, he never provides the names of the African American community members whom he interacted with there, other than those of the most famous (such as Frederick Douglass) or widely known (Thomas Thomas). In contrast, Carvalho identifies key local leaders and influences on Brown's career and highlights the significance of his time in Springfield. Joseph Carvalho is the former president and executive director of the Springfield Museums and one of the founders of the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History and is intimately familiar with the city's history.

— L. Mara Dodge

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When John Brown (1800-1859) left Springfield, Massachusetts after closing his wool business in 1850, he bid farewell to his fellow parishioners at the Sanford Street "Free Church," his many friends in the growing African-American community, and his respected cohorts involved in the local anti-slavery movement. At age fifty, he left with full confidence that the leaders in both the local black and white communities had become remarkably effective in helping individuals seeking to escape slavery in the South. Brown felt the need to move on to other communities to continue his work, knowing that Springfield was in good hands with the likes of strong-minded and dedicated African American leaders such as Rev. John Newton Mars, Thomas Thomas, William H. Montague, Eli S. Baptist and Alexander Du Bois, the grandfather of W. E. B. Du Bois; and white community abolitionists such as businessmen Marvin and Ethan Samuel Chapin, newspaper publisher Samuel Bowles II, Chief Justice Reuben Atwater Chapman, and Rev. Samuel Giles Buckingham.

Since the end of the eighteenth century, Springfield had become one of the safe havens for African Americans escaping slavery from parts of the Northeast, including neighboring New York, where slavery was still legal until 1828, as well as the mid-Atlantic and Southern states. The 1840s saw a preponderance of new arrivals coming from Maryland and Washington, D.C., while lesser numbers arrived from Virginia and Pennsylvania. In the 1850s, Hampden County witnessed a dramatic increase in the black population in the developing urban center of Springfield.⁵ Drawn by the city's reputation for tolerance, a number of fugitive slaves chose to make a home in Springfield rather than continuing on to Canada. The Massachusetts State Census of 1855 listed 392 African American residents in Springfield, which was ten times the total black population of the towns of Agawam, Holyoke, Longmeadow, West Springfield, Westfield, and Wilbraham combined.

African Americans were 2.8% of Springfield's population, which was 13,780 in 1855.⁶

SPRINGFIELD'S ANTI-SLAVERY ACTIVISM

A vital step in the development of the black community in Springfield was the establishment of the region's first African American church, the "Free Church," in 1844 (also known as the Sanford Street Church, Zion Methodist Church, Free Congregational Church, and today as St. John's Congregational Church). The church became the focal point of the religious, cultural, and political activism within the African American community.⁷ This institution created opportunity for black leadership and a forum for the free exchange of ideas among blacks in Springfield while also serving as a rallying point for anti-slavery activity. Abolitionist John Brown was a frequent worshipper and member of the "Free Church" during its first decade.⁸ The church's website explains its historic role. St. John's Congregational Church:

is one of the oldest and active Black Churches in New England. . . . In 1848 the church was known as "Free Church" and its first pastor, the Rev. Leonard Collins vigorously defended Blacks' right to organize their own churches in a public debate against the legendary abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. The debate appeared in the printed pages of Douglass' *North Star* newspaper. Douglass eventually came to accept the importance of establishing Black churches and attended services at the "Free Church."⁹

During John Brown's residency in Springfield from 1846 to 1849, he witnessed firsthand how effective safe-haven status had become. In fact, his years in Springfield helped to confirm his thoughts about the evils of slavery and the pervasive influence of the "Slave Power" on American national government. But most of all, his sojourn in this community opened his eyes and mind to the possibility of effective resistance. In Springfield, Brown found a community whose white leadership—from the community's most prominent churches, to its most wealthy businessmen, to its most popular politicians, to its local jurists, and even to the publisher of *The Republican* (one of the nation's most influential newspapers)—was deeply involved and emotionally invested in the anti-slavery movement.

As early as 1808, the Springfield community began to exhibit a concern for enslaved African Americans when sympathetic residents purchased the freedom of Jenny Williams, who had escaped from slavery in New York. Rev.

Bezaleel Howard of Springfield's First (Congregational) Church organized this important community effort.¹⁰ During the tenure of Rev. Samuel Osgood from the early 1830s, Springfield's First Church became "the most active station" or hiding place for escaped slaves.¹¹ In 1921, local historian Charles H. Barrows wrote, "When a runaway came before daylight, he was given breakfast and put to bed in a little back room which Osgood called 'the prophets' chamber' [and] at night, the man seeking freedom resumed his journey [to freedom]." Barrows also reported that in one year "as many as fifty slaves were sheltered by the minister" in this way.¹² A fugitive from slavery in Maryland, William Green wrote of his escape in 1844-45 with fellow fugitives north through Hartford, at which time, "We were forwarded to Springfield [and were] directed to Dr. Osgood, who appeared pleased to see us. We remained with him for a few days when we got us a place and went to work."¹³

Rev. Osgood was also one of the few white Congregational ministers who presided over a significant number of African American marriages in Springfield prior to the establishment of the African American-led Sanford Street "Free" Church, situated a mere block away from First Church, located on the town common ("Court Square"). He and a fellow Congregational minister from Springfield, Rev. Samuel Giles Buckingham, were two of the only white ministers in the region willing to preside over interracial marriages.¹⁴

Local ministers weren't the only ones taking risks helping those fleeing slavery. "Uncle" Jerre and "Aunt" Phoebe Warriner, white owners of the United States Hotel in Springfield (sometimes referred to as Warriner's Tavern), were well-documented Underground Railroad "conductors."¹⁵ The Warriners frequently provided a safe haven for African Americans escaping slavery and often hired them to work as waiters, maids,



Sanford Street Church, c. 1911

The church was later renamed St. John's Congregational Church; some say this was partly in honor of John Brown. Source: Wood Museum of Springfield History.



Marvin Chapin (1806-1899) (left)

Ethan Samuel Chapin (1814-1889) (right)



Massasoit House, Site on the Underground Railroad

Owned by Marvin and Ethan Chapin

and laborers if they chose to remain in Springfield.¹⁶ Similarly, in an 1893 memorial, Louisa Burns Chapin recalled that her father Ethan Samuel Chapin and uncle Marvin Chapin, owners of the Massasoit House, “were also active conductors of the Underground Railroad and used their hotel to hide many fugitive slaves.” Louisa concluded that, “Those were days when the principles and the courage of anti-slavery men were put to the most severe test.”¹⁷ The location of the Massasoit House, a prominent hotel built in 1843 adjacent to the railroad station in downtown Springfield, was ideally suited for this purpose.

Local efforts to help slaves and former slaves varied in philosophy and effectiveness and mirrored efforts being made in other parts of the state. The Hampden County Colonization Society was organized on August 11, 1825 and functioned for a number of years.¹⁸ In 1833, the society sponsored three African Americans from Springfield as colonists to Liberia as part of a larger effort coordinated by the American Colonization Society.¹⁹ As a sign of its declining popularity, however, the Hampden County Chapter of the American Colonization Society was only able to send \$60.50 “for the purchase of land in Africa (Liberia)” in 1843.²⁰ In 1838, a group of citizens created the Hampden County Anti-Slavery Society as an alternative moral and political position. This society met at various locations throughout the county, most often in Monson, Westfield, and at the town hall in Springfield. This new organization quickly grew to overshadow the competing efforts of local colonization advocates. The enmity between the two groups also grew, which was clear at the second annual convention of the Hampden County Anti-Slavery Society on January 9, 1838 held at the First Church in Springfield. One of the society’s most pointed criticisms of colonization supporters was voted in a motion that day: “Resolved, that Colonization is a scheme of deception . . . calculated to perpetuate slavery, incapable of benefiting Africa, and unworthy of the patronage of the Christian public.”²¹

The cumulative effect of all of these efforts had taken root in the culture and leadership of the community. Through individual efforts, community and church-led initiatives, and organizations such as the colonization and anti-slavery societies, Springfield had become established by 1845 as a major haven for blacks who had escaped from slavery. Ominously, slave catchers were well aware of this fact.²²

It was in this local context that John Brown came to Springfield in 1846 and opened a wool grading business in partnership with Simon Perkins.²³ In Springfield, his business venture “differed notably from his previous ones” in Ohio. Brown’s biographer, David S. Reynolds, noted that “This time, Brown was driven by a deep bitterness against what he regarded as exploitative

corporations.” As a long-time shepherd and farmer, Brown thought that warehousing wool in Springfield would fetch higher prices for the wool from fellow farmers.²⁴ Brown rented part of a warehouse near the railroad depot at the corner of Water Street and Railroad Row, which soon became a hiding place and vital way station for runaway slaves. As an example, the *Westfield News Letter* reported in 1847 that “the underground railroad via Springfield is doing a stiff business . . . five fugitives arrived by this thoroughfare on Thursday [Nov. 18] having parted with 20 comrades in New York, all from the Old Dominion [Virginia]. Friday night another freight came in consisting of a father, mother and three children on their way to Canada.”²⁵

Seth Hamilton Moseley, born in Sixteen Acres of Springfield in 1826, was employed by the Chapins when the hotel opened in 1843. Interviewed in 1893 by the *Springfield Republican*, he “distinctly” remembered John Brown from the time he boarded at the Massasoit House in the late 1840s. This was before Brown moved his family from Ohio to Springfield. Moseley claimed that he “used to talk with him a good deal,” and that Brown, whom Moseley referred to as “the old man,” showed his nature now and then “in a striking way.” Moseley recalled a particular incident that he remembered vividly: “It was a very cold March day, and John Brown walked into the hotel office from out of the bitter cold. His trousers were short, and showed bare legs over his stockings; he wore no overcoat, and through his open shirt front was exposed the skin of the rugged breast.” Moseley related the following exchange between them: “Mr. Brown, I should think that you would freeze to death.” Brown replied, “Freeze to death? Why, keeping warm is a mere act of will!” Moseley remarked that Brown was “never known to joke” and when Brown said that keeping warm was a mere act of will, “he meant it.”²⁶

After the Civil War, Louisa Burns Chapin revealed the roles her father (Ethan S. Chapin) and uncle (Marvin Chapin) played with John Brown in the antebellum Underground Railroad. She reports that her father:

help[ed] the negroes to escape in the dark and unsettled days before the war. On more than one occasion, with the knowledge of but a few in the city, he concealed, either on his own premises or nearby [such as John Brown’s warehouse part of the same block on Railroad Row “within a stone’s throw of” the Massasoit House] parties of these negroes, whom he fed and cared for until arrangements were completed for sending them farther north.²⁷

Remarkably, fugitive slaves even “hid in plain sight” as servers and porters to Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, future president of the Confederacy, when

he stayed at the Massasoit House hotel during his inspection visits to the U.S. Armory prior to the Civil War.²⁸

BROWN'S IMMERSION IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

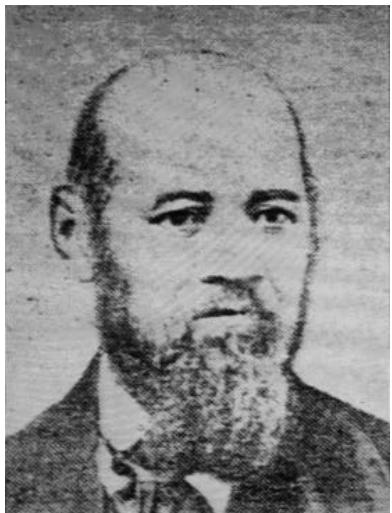
Just as important and perhaps more so in the transformation of John Brown's thoughts about the evils of slavery was that he lived within Springfield's African American community. He attended their church, hired fellow parishioners for his wool business, and notably developed a close friendship with his employee Thomas Thomas, even gifting his rocking chair to Thomas's mother as a measure of respect when he left Springfield in 1849.²⁹ Thomas Thomas recalled this about John Brown:

When he was here he was smooth-faced and had black, heavy hair brushed straight up from his forehead. He always dressed in plain browns, something like a Quaker. He wasn't tall, nor anything of a giant, as some represent, and he wasn't at all fierce or crazy looking. He was medium in height and he was quiet and agreeable to talk with. He was a gentleman and a Christian.³⁰



African American Leaders, c. 1864

Thomas Thomas (1817-94) standing on the left in the doorway of his restaurant on Worthington Street with Mrs. Mary Ann Jones Jenkins and Edgar Lee. Alexander Du Bois (1803-87), grandfather of scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois, is seated in the window to the right. Source: Springfield Picture Collection of the Wood Museum of Springfield History.



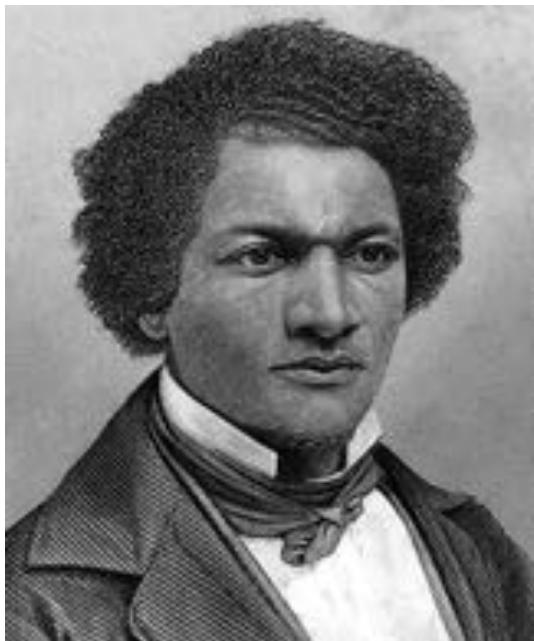
Eli S. Baptist
(1820-1905)

Source: *Springfield Republican*, 1893



Rev. John Newton Mars
(1804-1884)

Source: *1885 New England Conference*



Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), c. 1850

Brown's close association with the community provided him with a living example of what a free black community could be. In church and at meetings, and in his philosophical and political conversations with African American friends such as Thomas Thomas, B. C. Dowling, and Eli Baptist, John Brown personally experienced the impressive intellectual capabilities and leadership qualities of the key figures in the black community led by Rev. John Newton Mars, African-American pastor of the "Free Church." Through the passion of their rhetoric, sincerity of their prayer, and logic of their reasoning, he was inspired to redouble his efforts against the pernicious institution of slavery.

When the young abolitionist Frederick Douglass came to Springfield in 1847, he met John Brown and was impressed. Douglass would later write that Brown "had been mentioned to me by several prominent coloured men, among whom were Rev. Henry Highland Garnet and J. W. Loguen" and "in speaking of him their voices would drop to a whisper, and what they said of him made me eager to see and know him." Douglass was pleased by his reception: "Fortunately, I was invited to see him at his own house . . . and I was kindly received as an expected guest. My welcome was all I could have asked." He added that "every member of the family, young and old, seemed glad to see me, and I was made much at home in a very little while." Douglass was deeply impressed that: "Though a white gentleman, he is in sympathy with the black man and as deeply interested in our cause, as though his own soul had been pierced with the iron of slavery."³¹

Douglass spent an entire evening with Brown—an evening that transformed Douglass' own perspective on the future direction of the national debate on slavery. Douglass later wrote, "From this night spent with John Brown in Springfield, Mass. 1847 while I continued to write and speak against slavery, I became all the same less hopeful for its peaceful abolition. My utterances became more and more tinged by the color of this man's strong impressions." Douglass also recalled that Brown had spread out a large map of the Appalachian mountain chain and freely discussed his ideas for a military strategy with him in Springfield during those meetings.³²

THE 1850 FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT AND THE LEAGUE OF GILEADITES

In November of 1849, Brown moved his family to North Elba, New York, to live within its local black community. He was sensing progress in the fight against slavery, although he saw a long, hard road ahead until abolition. He was truly encouraged by the growth and development of these enclaves where

free blacks could live their lives away from the shadows of slavery. Imagine how distraught Brown must have felt when the Fugitive Slave Act was passed on September 18, 1850 as part of the Compromise of 1850. For all the opinions offered on the national stage about the eventual demise of slavery through gradual means, here was proof positive that the Slave Power was not going away. In fact, with the Fugitive Slave Act, it had actually tightened its grip by giving slave owners the force of federal law behind them. The real and imminent threat of slave catchers reaching out into the former safe havens like Springfield in order to drag African Americans back into slavery became a catalyst for action.

By September 17, local African American community leaders had already begun to prepare themselves for what was to come. The *Springfield Republican* gave a full account of a meeting chaired by John N. Howard with Perry F. Adams serving as recording secretary. Rev. C. W. Gardner stated the object of the meeting to the gathering of “Colored Citizens of Springfield.” Free Church’s Rev. John Newton Mars, along with John B. Smith and B.B. Young had been appointed as a committee of three to prepare the “Preamble and Resolutions” of the assembly. This extraordinary document called for armed vigilance, arguing that “resistance to tyrants is obedience to God.” Resistance was to be immediate and direct: “[W]e feel ourselves justified in using every means which the God of Love has placed in our power to sustain our Liberty.”

The full text of this resolution was reported nationally in the *The Liberator* two weeks later. Action quickly followed. On September 26, 1850, the *Springfield Republican* reported that “our colored friends in town are getting excited in regard to the new fugitive slave law. We understand most have armed themselves and are determined to do valiant battle for their rights.”³³ Soon after, two slave hunters returning empty handed after an unsuccessful attempt to claim an escaped slave in Boston stopped briefly at the Springfield railroad station as they were passing through the city and “were lucky to have escaped unharmed.” A group of African Americans from Springfield descended upon the United States Hotel in downtown Springfield “to carry out a room-to-room search for those slave hunters but the men had already left.”³⁴

It was in this context that John Brown drafted the founding document of the “Springfield Branch” of the “U.S. League of Gileadites,” most likely with the aid and influence of his associates in the African American community.³⁵ Indeed, Brown’s biographers have missed this crucial connection. Springfield’s African American leaders had already begun to meet and had drawn up their own plans for militant and vigilant direct action in September of 1850 in

Colored Citizens of Springfield Sept. 17, 1850

"Whereas, A Bill entitled the Fugitive Slave Bill, has recently passed both Houses of Congress of the United States, the object of which is to enforce more stringently, that Article of the Constitution of the United States, which relates to the reclamation of persons escaping from Labor &c. but the effect of which Bill, will be disastrous not only to those who are now enjoying a state of nominal Freedom, but also to every free colored person and many of the whites, being liable at any moment to be claimed and forced off into perpetual bondage, upon the oath and affidavit of any Slave owner, who may be disposed to perjure himself by swearing to a false *Identity*."

"Therefore *Resolved*, that in the event of this Bill becoming a Law, we the citizens of Springfield feel called upon to express in the most decided manner, and in language not to be misunderstood, our disapprobation of the same, or of any further Legislation having a tendency to oppress mankind.

2d. *Resolved*, that we will repudiate all and every Law that has for its object the oppression of any Human Being, or seeks to assign us degrading positions.

3d. And, *Whereas* we hold to the declaration of the Poet, 'That he who would be free, himself must strike the Blow,' and that resistance to Tyrants is obedience to God. Therefore *Resolved* that we do welcome to our doors every one who feels and claims for himself the position of a man, and has broken from the Southern house of Bondage, and that we feel ourselves justified in using every means which the God of Love has placed in our power to sustain our Liberty.

4th. And *Whereas* active vigilance is the price of Liberty, we resolve ourselves into a vigilant Association, to look out for the panting Fugitive, and also for the Oppressor, when he shall make his approach, and that measures be taken forthwith to organize a Committee to carry out the object of the Association.

5th. *Resolved*, that should the Task Master presume to enter our dwellings, and attempt to reclaim any of our brethren whom he may call his slaves, we feel prepared to resist his pretensions.

6th. *Resolved*, that as the passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill is an encroachment upon the sovereign rights of the Free States, and as the soil of the State of Massachusetts is thereby made Slave hunting ground, and her citizens Slave hunters, that it behooves her as a Free Sovereign State to exercise her legal authority in sustaining herself against being made a participant in so disgraceful an act."³⁶

anticipation of the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. Some accounts of the founding of the League of Gileadites four months later tend to convey the misleading impression that Brown acted on his own as the de facto white savior to a confused, demoralized, and passive black community.

The league's name is a reference to Mount Gilead, where Gideon was led by God to save the Israelites. In Brown's first significant action after the act was passed, he returned to Springfield in January of 1851 and immediately sought out his friends from "Free" Church, and in particular, Thomas Thomas. Among those meeting with Brown were John N. Howard, Perry F. Adams, and John B. Smith, all leaders of the September 17th meeting of the "Colored Citizens of Springfield." Brown met with them to determine what to do to ensure that communities like Springfield remained safe havens and to establish an extra-legal counterforce to the actions of slave catchers.

As for Rev. Mars, Methodist historian Bishop Martin McLee wrote that "whether in the pulpit or in the public square, it is clear Mars was not afraid to confront authority." His presence at numerous abolitionist gatherings, planning sessions, and public forums during the 1840s and 1850s is well documented.³⁷ From the pulpit of the "Free Church," Rev. John Newton Mars enjoined his congregation that the time had come to resist the slave powers, "And he that had no sword, let him sell his garments and buy one" to defend their families and their freedom.³⁸ Rev. Mars' leadership and views from the pulpit had a profound influence on his parishioners. His congregation had already prepared itself for resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act and they were quick to respond to John Brown's proposal.

The "Springfield Branch" of the U.S. League of Gileadites was founded on January 15, 1851 and appears to have been the only branch of the League ever organized. The constitution's preamble stated:

As citizens of the United States of America, trusting in a just and merciful God, whose spirit and all-powerful aid we humbly implore, we will ever be true to the flag of our beloved country, always acting under it. We, whose names are hereunto affixed, do constitute ourselves a branch of the United States League of Gileadites. That we will provide ourselves at once with suitable implements, and will aid those who do not possess the means, if any such are disposed to join us. We invite every colored person whose heart is engaged in the performance of our business, whether male or female, old or young. The duty of the aged, infirm, and young members of the League shall be to give instant

notice to all members in case of an attack upon any of our people.³⁹

The opening paragraph continued, stating that the organization should have no officers (except a treasurer and secretary pro tem) “until after some trial of courage and talent of able-bodied members shall enable us to elect officers from those who shall have rendered the most important services.” It concluded that wisdom, undaunted courage, efficiency and general good conduct should be the key characteristics for elected leaders. The constitution contained nine “resolutions” which gave detailed instructions:

1. Resolved, That we, whose names are affixed, do constitute ourselves a Branch of the United States League, under the above name.
2. Resolved, That all business of this Branch be conducted with the utmost quiet and good order; that we individually provide ourselves with suitable implements without delay; and that we will sufficiently aid those who do not possess the means, if any such are disposed to join us.
3. Resolved, That a committee of one or more discreet, influential men be appointed to collect the names of all colored persons whose heart is engaged for the performance of our business, whether male or female, whether old or young.
4. Resolved, That the appropriate duty of all aged, infirm, female, or youthful members of this Branch is to give instant notice to all other members of any attack upon the rights of our people, first informing all able-bodied men of this League or Branch, and next, all well known friends of the colored people; and that this information be confined to such alone, that there may be as little excitement as possible, and no noise in the so doing.
5. Resolved, That a committee of one or more discreet persons be appointed to ascertain the condition of colored persons in regard to implements, and to instruct others in regard to their conduct in any emergency.
6. Resolved, That no other officer than a treasurer, with a president and secretary pro tem, be appointed by this Branch, until after some trial of the courage and talents of able-bodied members shall enable a majority of the members to elect their officers from those who shall have rendered the most important services.
7. Resolved, That, trusting in a just and merciful God, whose spirit and all-powerful aid we humbly implore, we will most cheerfully and heartily support and obey such officers, when chosen as before; and that nothing but wisdom,

undaunted courage, efficiency, and general good conduct shall in any degree influence our individual votes in case of such election.

8. Resolved, That a meeting of all members of this Branch shall be immediately called for the purpose of electing officers (to be chosen by ballot) after the first trial shall have been made of the qualifications of individual members for such command, as before mentioned.

9. Resolved, That as citizens of the United States of America we will ever be found true to the flag of our beloved country, always acting under it.⁴⁰

John Brown provided his own “Words of Advice.” Under the heading “Union is Strength,” he offered very detailed and explicit advice for how to rescue fugitive slaves who had been arrested and captured. Armed vigilance, militance, and uncompromising resistance were his mottos, which had already been demonstrated and embraced by Springfield’s African American community members:

Should one of your number be arrested, you must collect together as quickly as possible, so as to outnumber your adversaries . . . Let no able-bodied man appear on the ground unequipped, or with his weapons exposed to view. . . . Do not delay one moment after you are ready: you will lose all your resolution if you do. Let the first blow be the signal for all to engage; and when engaged, do not do your work by halves, but make clean work of your enemies.

Brown offered an interesting strategy if they were captured:

After effecting a rescue, if you are assailed, go into the houses of your most prominent and influential white friends with your wives; and that will effectually fasten upon them the suspicion of being connected with you, and will compel them to make common cause with you . . .

If the fugitive was brought to court, Brown advised a strategy of distraction to procure their escape:

You may make a tumult in the court-room where a trial is going on, by burning gunpowder freely in paper packages, if you cannot think of any better way to create a momentary alarm, and might

possibly give one or more of your enemies a hoist. But in such case the prisoner will need to take the hint at once, and bestir himself; and so should his friends improve the opportunity for a general rush. A lasso might possibly be applied to a slave-catcher for once with good effect.

He concluded with an admonition to maintain solidarity and an uncompromising stand even in the face of death:

Hold on to your weapons, and never be persuaded to leave them, part with them, or have them far away from you. Stand by one another and by your friends, while a drop of blood remains; and be hanged, if you must, but tell no tales out of school. Make no confession.

He further proposed that: "Your plans must be known only to yourself, and with the understanding that all traitors must die, wherever caught and proven to be guilty."⁴¹

Thus, the League of Gileadites was established as an anti-slavery, armed militia with its goal of self-defense against slave catchers.⁴² In the eyes of the federal government and federal law, this organization clearly promoted illegal civil and, most remarkably, armed resistance. From Springfield, Brown wrote to his wife Mary in North Elba two days after the founding of the league, reporting to her that he had been working "with the colored people here, in advising them how to act, and in giving them all the encouragement in my power." He added sympathetically:

They very much need encouragement and advice; and some of them are so alarmed that they tell me they cannot sleep on account of either themselves or their wives and children. I can only say I think I have been enabled to do something to revive their broken spirits. I want all my family to imagine themselves in the same dreadful condition.⁴³

SPRINGFIELD'S WHITE ABOLITIONISTS ORGANIZE

However, it should be noted that Springfield's African American community was not completely bereft of supporters. Abolitionist sentiment and anti-slavery activism had always been strong in the city. Immediately after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, white abolitionists also rallied



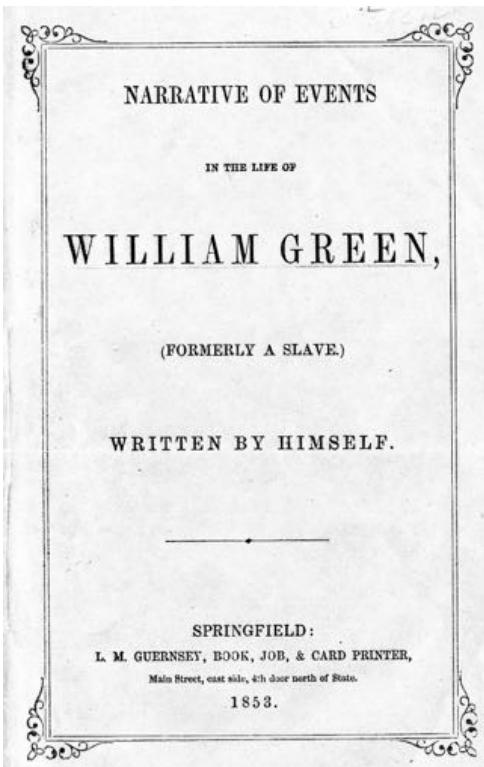
**Ruth Cox Adams
(a.k.a. Harriet Bailey)
(1818-1900)**

A runaway slave, she was the “adopted sister” of Frederick Douglass and lived in Springfield from 1847-68, except for the years she and her husband joined Eli Baptist at the American émigré “colony” of Drurea, Haiti during the Civil War. She and her husband were close associates of John Brown.

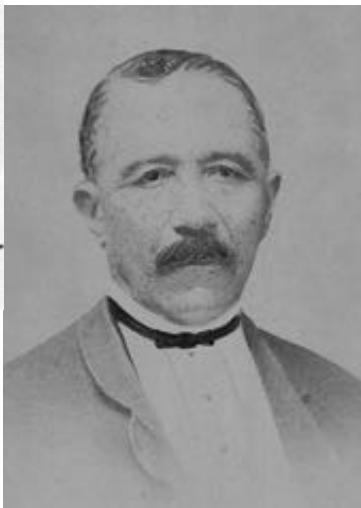
**William Wells Brown
(1814-1884)**

A fugitive slave who escaped in 1834, he became a leading abolitionist lecturer as well as a novelist, playwright, and historian. He settled in Boston in 1854 after five years lecturing and living in England. He occasionally visited and lectured in Springfield.



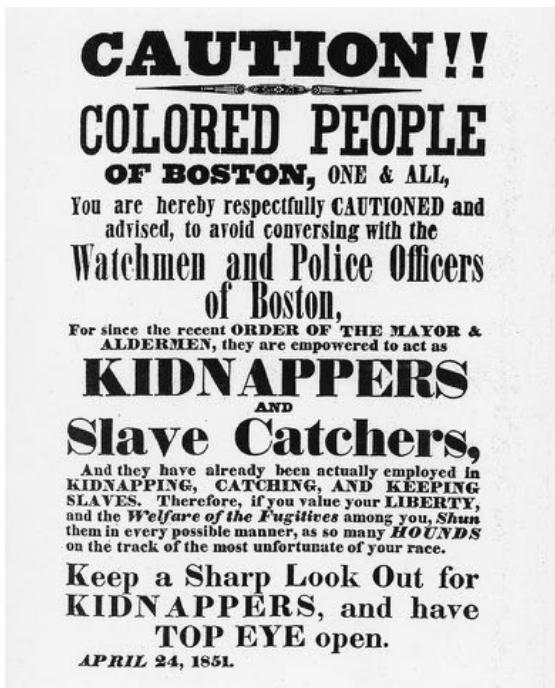


Left: Pamphlet by William Green (1819-95) describing his escape from slavery; published in Springfield in 1853. Green joined the League of Gileadites.



Alexander Du Bois (1803-1887)

Alexander Du Bois (grandfather of W. E. B. Du Bois) was first listed in the *Springfield City Directory* as an employee of the steamboat *Hero* as a steward. He left Springfield in 1851 and returned c. 1860. From 1861 to 1863, he was listed as a barber at the Pynchon House hotel. He was a member of the "arrangements committee" for the January 13, 1863 celebration in Springfield of the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1865, he operated his own restaurant "saloon" on Main Street. In 1866, he returned to his former employ as a steamer steward. For more on his life, see endnote 7. Photo source: Archives of the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield Museums, Springfield, MA.



Poster of the Boston Vigilance Committee,
1851

Thomas Thomas
(1817-94)

A leading abolitionist, Thomas was a confidant, employee, and "Friend of Capt. John Brown." Source: Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield, MA.



quickly to defend their black brethren. On October 1, 1850, only two weeks after the “colored citizens” meeting, a town hall meeting organized by white abolitionists passed nine resolutions of its own. Their declaration began: “Resolved, that resistance to tyrants is obedience to God.” The meeting went on to uphold “the inalienable right and solemn duty of all men . . . to emancipate themselves.” Those who had done so were “worthy of all honor . . . and protection of all true lovers of liberty.” They declared that fugitives who had successfully escaped from slavery had “become free and independent, and have a right to dwell with us upon free soil” and were “justified in using such means for the protection of themselves and families as God and Nature have given them.”⁴⁴ More importantly, these white abolitionists pledged to actively assist in their protection and defense:

Resolved, That we hold in utter abhorrence the recent act of Congress known as the fugitive slave bill—that it shall have no effect to shut up our bowels and compassion towards the fugitive, *but we will aid and shelter him as heretofore* (emphasis added).

The final resolution defiantly proclaimed:

Resolved, That we here pledge ourselves to our fellow citizens to stand by each other in determined resistance to this law, and to fugitives from the South to protect them from their pursuers, and we will if necessary, suffer the consequences.

The meeting concluded by appointing a “Vigilance Committee” of fifteen and a finance committee of five.⁴⁵ Despite the militance of these resolutions, Springfield’s African American community did have reason to worry about their safety and the white community’s commitment. The resolutions generated intense controversy. Even the anti-slavery *Springfield Republican* editorialized strongly against active resistance, writing that:

Many of the details of this fugitive slave law we hold in utter detestation, but we regard it as extremely *silly and foolish to raise a hand in resistance* to the execution of the law . . . Our only hope is in its repeal or material modification. The way to bring about this repeal is *not by resorting to arms* and appealing to the passions of the multitude in excited assemblies. It is *not* by publishing hand bills and getting angry . . . A calm discussion . . . and the creation of a strong and

just public sentiment against them will reach legislation and do the work. *Armed interference with its operations will only bring about disaster upon those who make it . . .* (emphasis added)⁴⁶

On October 15 the editor of the *Springfield Republican* was pleased to report that at a third town hall meeting the “speeches were mostly moderate in tone” and the chairman himself had suggested that the “resolutions passed at the first meeting might be reconsidered” due to the fact that the current sentiment “seems to be against ‘organized resistance.’”⁴⁷ There are no other newspaper reports from fall 1850 that might shed light on the ongoing activities, if any, of the newly formed Vigilance Committee. Such committees were formed throughout the north; many had existed for years. The biracial Boston Vigilance Committee was among the most active and long lasting, operating from 1841 to 1861.⁴⁸

All throughout the fall of 1850, the *Springfield Republican* was filled with vociferous debates over the Fugitive Slave Act as well as accounts of southern attempts to claim fugitive slaves. Springfield’s African American community had good reason to be nervous. In January of 1851, with the newspapers ablaze with stories of fugitive slaves being sought, John Brown’s League of Gileadites would have provided encouragement and inspiration. Militant and direct, it did not seek to be biracial but instead deepened the black community’s own efforts at self-organization and self-defense.

THE LEAGUE OF GILEADITE’S LEGACY

None of John Brown’s many biographers appear to have been aware of the September 17, 1850 set of resolutions adopted by Springfield’s “colored citizens” at their “indignation meeting” which predated the League of Gileadites. African American community leaders including Rev. John Newton Mars, John N. Howard, Perry F. Adams, John B. Smith, B. B. Young, and Rev. C. W. Gardner had already prepared and drafted a manifesto that called for the formation of a “vigilant association.” Their set of resolutions asserted in no uncertain terms, “[W]e feel ourselves justified in using every means which the God of Love has placed in our power to sustain our Liberty.”⁴⁹

In his nuanced study, “*Fire From the Midst of You”: A Religious Life of John Brown*” (2002), historian Louis A. DeCaro writes that, “Whether or not Brown’s document [the League of Gileadites] was aligned completely with the ideology of the fugitives and the black community is open to discussion.” The fact that most of Springfield’s leading African American leaders had already come together and issued a public, militant, and uncompromising

statement of resistance to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, proclaiming that “he who would be free, himself must strike the Blow,” suggests that Brown was following their lead and reflecting their own deeply held convictions.⁵⁰

In his important work, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (2005), historian David S. Reynolds suggests that Brown “realized his league could only be ephemeral, since many of its members were on their way to Canada,” and posits that Brown “appears to have formed the group as an immediate shot of confidence for Springfield’s blacks, not as a long-term project.”⁵¹ Whether Brown’s expectation was that it was only a temporary association cannot be ascertained. However, Springfield’s African American leaders continued to act self-confidently over the next decade in their own defense.

Because these activities were necessarily clandestine and illegal, little record remains. The historian must scour the limited sources in the hopes of finding references, which are often frustratingly obscure.⁵² Various types of self-defense and “vigilance associations” may have operated simultaneously. Marvin Lincoln, an “agent of the underground railroad” who lived in Springfield from 1844 to 1859, recalled in an 1889 interview his membership in a biracial “league of Massachusetts freemen.” Its purpose was to “help emancipation” and “help negroes on their way to Canada.” He reported that “when the League was organized it was obliged to keep all of its meetings secret.” In order to avoid notice, “they met in a room in the African Methodist church on Sanford Street [Free Church], mingling with the members on the nights of their evening meetings and so escaping detection.” He explained that “he himself was obliged to keep his membership a secret from his family, and they never knew till afterward where he spent his evenings when he went to the meetings of the league.” He concluded that, “It was as much as a man’s life was worth to be known as a member of the league at that time.”⁵³

William Wells Brown, the famous black orator who traveled throughout the North recounting his own harrowing escape from slavery, commented how Springfield was remarkable for its open defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act. He noted that while “passing through” in 1854, he was taken to the African American section of the city where he was permitted entry to a large house. Here he encountered eight black women busily boiling a concoction they called the “King of Pain,” intended to scald slave hunters. Upon questioning, some of the women responded in thick southern accents. Several were fugitives. One had lost six children and two husbands “all sole to de speculators afore I run away.” Another responded that if slavecatchers entered the building, “We’ll all fling hot water on ‘em, and scall dar very harts out.” The League of Gileadite’s four female signatories—Jane Fowler,

Eliza Green, Ann Johnson, and Jane Wicks—may well have been among these determined women.⁵⁴

On his way home to board the train at Springfield's Union Station, Williams Wells Brown later met “ten or fifteen” African Americans “all armed to the teeth” and “swearing vengeance upon any slave catcher who attempted to capture them.” He concluded: “True, the slave-catchers had been there. But the authorities, foreseeing a serious outbreak, advised them to leave the city; and, feeling alarmed for their personal safety, these disturbers of the peace had left in the evening train for New York. No fugitive slave was ever afterward disturbed at Springfield.”⁵⁵

One of Springfield’s most respected African American community leaders, Eli S. Baptist, gave a public lecture years later entitled “Personal Reminiscences of John Brown.” A friend of Brown, Baptist spoke of the “commanding appearance and impressive sternness of character” when he first heard Brown deliver an anti-slavery speech to parishioners. Baptist praised Brown for his work in “organizing secret lodges among the Springfield negroes for the purpose of resisting the capture of fugitives.”⁵⁶ He also recalled an incident in which Brown “went to the Sanford street church and distributed Bowie knives among the colored congregation.” The “excitement of that period never ceased to impress him.”⁵⁷

Perry F. Adams shared a similar experience. Perry was the husband of Ruth Cox Adams (a.k.a. “Harriet Bailey”) who was Frederick Douglass’ “adopted sister” (he had initially thought she was his long-lost sibling). Ruth and Perry had married in Springfield in 1847. Perry was a parishioner at the “Free Church” and became a close friend with John Brown. In fact, when Brown returned to Springfield in December 1850 after the Fugitive Slave Act was enacted, Perry and Ruth Adams were among the first to welcome him back to town. Fully aware that Ruth Adams was an “unemancipated fugitive” from Southern slavery, Brown presented Perry and Ruth with a “dirk” (small knife) to defend themselves against any slave catchers who might attempt to re-enslave Ruth.⁵⁸ For his part, Perry Adams was one of the first recruits to join John Brown’s newly established League of Gileadites.⁵⁹ Although the Springfield Branch of the League of Gileadites was the only branch that was organized, it reportedly operated even after John Brown was hanged, and right up until the start of the Civil War. During that time, no fugitive slaves were captured in Springfield by slave catchers.

1856 “BLEEDING KANSAS”: SPRINGFIELD CONNECTIONS

For John Brown, “Bleeding Kansas” and the famous raid on Harpers Ferry were to follow, two flash points that led to the Civil War and eventually emancipation. Between 1855 and 1859, Brown frequently stopped in Springfield when he visited New England to raise money for equipment and arms for his Kansas “Free State” efforts. Both the *Springfield Republican* and Franklin Sanborn’s *Life and Letters of John Brown* provide ample testimony to the ongoing support Brown received from his Springfield associates during these years.⁶⁰ On January 7, 1857 the *Republican* reported that Governor Robinson and “old John Brown” of Kansas were both in Boston; Brown was to speak before a joint committee of the Massachusetts state legislature. The paper noted sympathetically that “besides being robbed of the lives of some of his family by the pro-slavery raid, he was stripped of all his worldly possessions” and was in town to “get help to start himself again in the territory.” It reported approvingly, “His old friends at the Massasoit House quietly put a hundred dollars into his empty pockets, besides cheering him with their generous fare.” The paper commented that, “Mr. Brown is particularly deserving of such practical sympathy, and it is to be hoped he will find much more of it, and be sent back to the territory with soul strengthened, heart comforted, and body invigorated by his visit to the East.” Brown’s “boldness, bravery and desperation” in helping to fend off the attacks of the pro-slavery, Missouri “border ruffians” during their attempted “invasions” of Kansas was praised. The article ended with the claim that “his exploits in Kansas rival the most brilliant exploits of our revolutionary heroes.”⁶¹

In April of 1857 Brown appears to have spent a month in Springfield. It was here that he received notice that the “State Kansas Aid Committee of Massachusetts” had voted to provide him with 100 rifles and \$500 in funds “for the relief of Kansas.” Another \$400 contribution was reported to have come “from Springfield.” And it was during this stay that he received his first order of a dozen pikes destined for his 1859 attack on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry.⁶²

Massasoit House proprietors Marvin and Ethan Chapin were both members of a secretive anti-slavery group who referred to themselves as “The Club,” consisting of some of the most influential men in Springfield. A number of them including the Chapins, Massachusetts Chief Justice Rueben Atwater Chapman, Rev. Samuel Giles Buckingham, and Connecticut River Railway President Daniel Harris helped provide guns for Brown’s Kansas efforts. Daniel Harris is said to have kept weapons in his office, where they were dismantled and hidden in railroad cars for shipment to Kansas.⁶³

Working at the Massasoit House for the Chapins until 1858, Seth Moseley claimed to have witnessed a meeting between Brown and Marvin and Ethan Chapin “in the office of the Massasoit House” where they gave Brown money: “the first money given him in furtherance of his scheme of warfare down South.” Moseley recalled that Brown met with the Chapins after his violent anti-slavery foray in Kansas.⁶⁴ The so-called “Pottawatomie massacre” occurred during the night of May 24 and the morning of May 25, 1856 in reaction to the sacking of Lawrence, Kansas by pro-slavery vigilantes. W.E.B. Du Bois reported that John Brown returned to Springfield in 1857 for a brief time in order to hide out from Federal officers among his black comrades and Gileadites, probably referring to this particular event. (This author speculates that Du Bois heard this account from his grandfather Alexander Du Bois, who lived in Springfield at that time and was a parishioner of the “Free Church” and a good friend of Thomas Thomas, former employee and close friend of John Brown.)⁶⁵

John Brown soon received substantial support for his plans from the “secret six.” Five members of this important group of abolitionists who offered financial support to Brown and his planned insurrection at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, were from Massachusetts. These were Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Samuel Gridley Howe, Theodore Parker, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, Gerrit Smith, and George Luther Stearns. All but Smith were active in the abolitionist movement in Massachusetts. (Smith was from New York state.)

CONCLUSION

It is important to reflect upon Springfield’s place in John Brown’s life and how the relationships formed during his stay here influenced the dramatic actions he took in the 1850s.⁶⁶ He had come to Springfield, a community known for its anti-slavery sentiments. He consciously located his business where he could participate in Underground Railroad activities. It was not a coincidence that he rented his first warehouse close to the railroad crossroads of New England and adjacent to a hotel and livery stable operated by anti-slavery owners who employed African American fugitives. Brown quickly turned his warehouse into a haven and way-station for new fugitives arriving from the South. He even used a very large cabinet-desk in which he purportedly temporarily hid fugitives.⁶⁷

As the home of the region’s only African American church, Springfield held a special attraction for Brown, and he soon became a worshipper amongst its black congregation. It was there that passionate sermons by pastors such

as Rev. John Newton Mars and intense political discussions with fellow parishioners who had recently escaped Southern slavery reinforced Brown's views on the evils of slavery. Even more significantly, his views on slavery intensified while he was in Springfield. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and the expansion of slavery in the western territories led Brown to even more extreme acts of resistance in Kansas on May 24-25, 1856 at Pottawatomie Creek, and on August 30, 1856 at the "Battle of Osawatomie," and ultimately at the federal arsenal Harpers Ferry in 1859.

To the very end, John Brown had many supporters in high places back in Springfield. Samuel Bowles II, the *Springfield Republican's* famed editor/publisher, wrote in his editorial the day before Brown's execution:

John Brown is to be publicly strangled on the gallows, and to make the event more significant it is to be done with rope of South Carolina cotton. The calmest man in all Virginia today will be he who knows that he will be in another world before the sun has reached its meridian. It were well if those who witness the spectacle and assist at it were as truthful, as unselfish, as conscientious, and in every way as well prepared to die as John Brown.

No execution that ever occurred in this country has been attended by such remarkable circumstances as this. A brave old man goes to the gallows for what he considered a patriotic and Christian deed, in which he had no personal objects to accomplish, but sacrificed property and life to a benevolent purpose . . . While the closing scenes of this tragedy are proceeding in Virginia, in hundreds of towns and cities throughout the free states, congregations of people of color and others sympathizing with the oppressed will be holding solemn meetings for prayer, for sympathy with the bereaved family of Brown, and for the expression of their detestation of the system of American slavery . . . Slavery can gain nothing by the death of such men as John Brown and his associates.⁶⁸

The time for compromise over the issue of slavery had come to an end. The Civil War would soon follow.



John Brown (1859)

"I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood," John Brown wrote in a note just before he was hanged on December 2, 1859. (Library of Congress.)

Editor's Note: This article represents a significantly expanded, revised and updated version of material that author Joseph Carvalho III has published in various sources over the decades, for example, in his meticulously-researched *Black Families in Hampden County, Massachusetts, 1650-1865* (1st edition 1984; 2nd revised edition 2011). Digitization of newspaper archives and primary sources now makes it far easier to verify and fact check quotations and references. The editor reviewed all primary source references and corrections have been made. Over the past two decades nearly a dozen major works about John Brown have been published that provided additional material. Most secondary source references and sections were added by editor L. Mara Dodge.

Aftermath: Springfield Commemorates John Brown

In all Northern cities African Americans held memorial services. On December 2, 1859, the day of John Brown's hanging, the *Springfield Republican* reported that "considerable feeling was manifested." Church bells tolled. At noon Brown's friends and supporters "gathered at the Sanford street (colored) church" nearly filling it. There were speeches and prayers. A letter from Brown to a local resident (written from prison) was read which "drew tears of grief and sympathy from eyes unaccustomed to weeping." That evening, a second gathering occurred and the church was again "filled to its utmost" and many were unable to enter. A collection was taken that raised \$25 for Brown's widow and children (approximately \$800 in 2019 dollars). Throughout the month of December, the paper reported various gatherings and events at the Sanford street "colored" church commemorating John Brown's trial and execution. On December 16th, two hundred supporters again gathered to "express their opinions and sympathies" after the hanging of Brown's associates.

In interviews over the next five decades, Springfield's African American leaders and former associates expressed deep admiration and reverence for Brown's character and anti-slavery activism. The *Springfield Republican* and the northern public quickly embraced Brown as a heroic martyr. In Springfield his memory was widely celebrated and honored long after the national sentiment turned against Brown. By the mid-twentieth century, he was more likely to be denounced as a fanatic and madman. During the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, his image began to be rehabilitated. Most historians today credit Brown with playing a major role in the coming of the Civil War, the growth of anti-slavery sentiment, and the eventual abolition of slavery.

His anti-racism and dedication to the cause of black freedom was unparalleled. Frederick Douglass offered this assessment in an 1881 speech: "*His zeal in the cause of my race was far greater than mine—it was as the burning sun to my taper light—mine was bounded by time, his stretched away to the boundless shores of eternity. I could live for the slave, but he could die for him.*"

(*Springfield Republican*, "City Items" column: Nov. 30, 1859, p. 6; Dec. 3, 1859, p. 8; Dec. 17, 1859, p. 8).



John Brown (1800-1859)

Daguerreotype by Augustus Washington, c. 1848.

John Brown's Portraits, c. 1848

This small portrait (3.5 x 4") is the earliest known image of John Brown. It was made by pioneering African American daguerreotypist and fellow abolitionist Augustus Washington. In a pose that dramatizes his anti-slavery activism, Brown stands with one hand raised as if repeating his public pledge to dedicate his life to the destruction of slavery. With his other hand, he grasps what is believed to be the standard of his "Subterranean Pass Way"—the militant alternative to the Underground Railroad that Brown sought to establish in the Allegheny Mountains more than a decade before his ill-fated raid on Harpers Ferry.

The daguerreotype's creator is as intriguing as his subject. Augustus Washington (1820/21–1875), was the son of a former slave. Born in Trenton, New Jersey, he vowed while still a teenager to "become a scholar, a teacher, and a useful man." He took up the camera to help pay his bills while studying at Dartmouth College (which he was admitted to in 1843) and taught at a school for black students in Hartford, Connecticut, before establishing a studio there. He advertised widely in the local abolitionist press. This portrait, taken in his Hartford studio, exudes intensity.

Washington made at least three images of Brown that day in Hartford. There's no record that this now-famous image was ever published until 1921. Ann Shumard, curator at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, explains that, "At the time Brown sat for Washington he was not by any means a public figure—he was a wool broker. There wouldn't have been any reason to publish it. . . . The picture, so significant now, was really intended as a personal testament to Brown's commitment to his cause."

In another image made that day, Brown posed with his close associate Thomas Thomas. It featured the two men in a brotherly pose with Brown's hand resting on Thomas' shoulder. Unfortunately, this remarkably symbolic image of an interracial friendship has not survived, but only comes down to us through a description (DeCaro, 153-54).

Washington eventually came to believe that emancipation alone would not eliminate the country's racial barriers. In 1853 he sailed to Liberia seeking a new life for his family. He later became a sugar cane grower and politician, serving in the Liberian Congress. Ironically, no images exist of him. (Source: Owen Edwards, "John Brown's Famous Photograph," *Smithsonian Magazine*, Sept. 20, 2009).



Historic Dwelling Is Doomed



Abolitionist John Brown's home at 31 Franklin St., now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. William F. Brewster, will be demolished soon by the Springfield Redevelopment Authority. Brown is said to have lived here between 1866 and 1869 while he was in the wool business.

John Brown's Home in Springfield

John Brown lived with his family in this two-story, wooden home located at 31 Franklin Street, then known as Hastings Street (he also lived briefly at several other locations). Originally a single-family home with three columns, by the time of these photographs it had been divided into two separate apartments. The newspaper article noted that, "when the [Brown] family moved into the Franklin St. home, 'Brown took a vote . . . to see if they would furnish the parlor or use the money to buy clothing for fugitive Negroes in the colony of North Elba, N. Y. and it is needless to say that the decision was unanimously in the favor of the Negroes.'"

The building was torn down in 1963. The last residents of the John Brown house were Mr. and Mrs. William F. Brewster, an African American couple, who lived there from 1955-1963. The *Springfield Republican* article that described its eventual demise (due to urban renewal in the city's North End) noted that the current owners recalled that "years ago, a plaque in front of the house memorialized Brown, but it [had] disappeared before the Brewsters moved in." The sign had stated simply: "Here Lived John Brown—The Abolitionist."

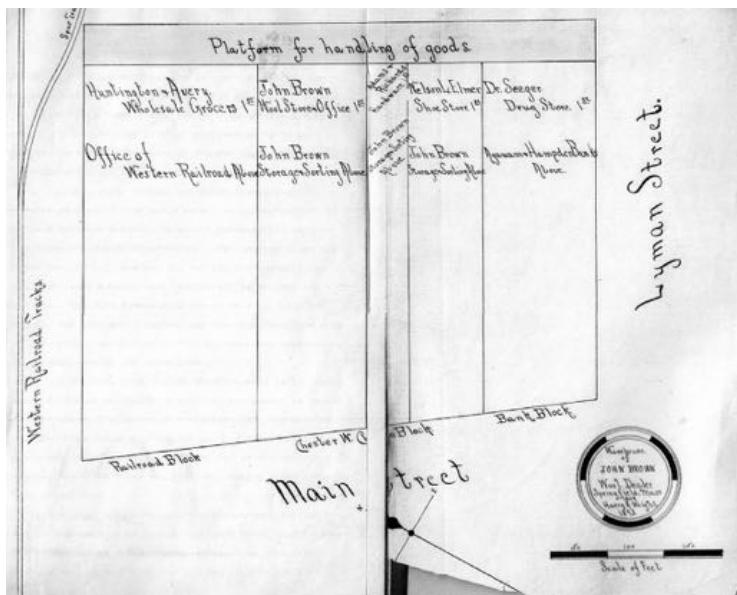
During the century after his sojourn in Springfield, Brown continued to be commemorated as a local hero. For example, on July 4, 1908, a citywide pageant was held and he was lionized by the *Springfield Republican* as "an ever-shining example of self-sacrificing and heroic Christian life" (June 12, 1908). In the early 1940s, a remarkably progressive Springfield school curriculum (known as "The Springfield Plan") encouraged teachers to take school children on field trips to the site of his house.

Sources: Top photo from the West Virginia State Archives, Boyd B. Stutler Collection, c. 1930s. Stutler created one of the most important John Brown collections in existence. The archive has digitized much of this material and it is available online. Newspaper image from "John Brown's Ghost Might Shudder At His Old Franklin St. Neighborhood," *Springfield Sunday Republican*, July 21, 1963, p. 10B.



John Brown's Springfield Warehouse

The warehouse is the second building from the corner of Water Street and Railroad Row. It is believed that this image has not been identified before. Source: Detail from *Springfield 1875 Bird's Eye View* (O.H. Bailey & Co., 1875). The map below depicts his second warehouse on Lyman Street. Photo courtesy of Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield Museums, Springfield, MA.





John Brown's rocking chair gifted to Thomas Thomas' mother
Collection of the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History.



**John Brown's bible owned by St. John's Congregational Church
(formerly Sanford Street "Free" Church)**

Photo courtesy of *The Republican*.

Notes

1. Arlene Rodriguez, “Resisting Slavery: John Brown” at www.ourpluralhistory.stcc.edu/resistingslavery/johnbrown.html (accessed May 10, 2019). For an older, local source see the chapter on John Brown in Harry Andrew Wright, *The Story of Western Massachusetts*, Vol. I (NY: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1949), 406-22.
2. David S. Reynolds, *John Brown Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Random House, 2014), 118.
3. Evan Carton, *Patriotic Treason: John Brown and the Soul of America* (Boston: Free Press, 2009), 103.
4. Carton, 104.
5. Joseph Carvalho III, *Black Families in Hampden County, Massachusetts, 1650-1865*, second edition (New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2011), 14-20. This is a major source of information on the African American activists mentioned in this article. Each individual has a detailed biographical entry.
6. “Population of Springfield,” *Springfield Republican*, October 2, 1855, p. 1. In comparison, there were 2,234 “natives of Ireland” in Springfield in 1855 comprising 16% of the city’s population. Springfield’s black population increased rapidly: 1830 – 48, 1840 – 101, 1850 – 267, 1855 – 392. In 1850, 14.6% acknowledged that they had been born in a southern slave state. One should treat these figures cautiously: some fugitives may have failed to accurately report their state of birth or have hidden themselves from census takers. Karl Conway Helms, “Ethnohistorical Research Methodology for Classroom Use; Development of a Social Portrait of Springfield, Massachusetts, 1850 to 1880” (Ph.D. diss., Oregon State University, 1974), 79 and 88. Helms provides an in-depth study of Springfield’s African American community, 1850-80. However, his date references for the *Springfield Republican* are incorrect in several key places. See also Joseph P. Lynch, “Blacks in Springfield, 1868-80: A Mobility Study,” *Historical Journal of Western Massachusetts* 7 (June 1979), 15-24.
7. Alexander Du Bois, grandfather of famed scholar and African American political activist W. E. B. Du Bois (born in Great Barrington in 1868), already had experience in organizing an independent church before moving to Springfield. In 1842, New Haven’s Trinity Episcopal Church had relegated black church members to four pews at the rear. Outraged, the black members, led by Alexander Du Bois, began proceedings to institute an independent black Episcopal church. On June 7, 1844, these leaders officially established Saint Luke’s Episcopal Church of New Haven, making it the fourth-oldest black Episcopal Church in the U.S. Du Bois was among the original church officers. Sources for information on Alexander Du Bois: U.S. Census for Springfield, MA, 1850 and 1860; *Springfield City Directories*, 1849-50, 1861-67; David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*

(New York: Holt & Co., 1993), 20-22, 40-47, 161, 165, 287; *Springfield Republican*, January 10, 1863: 8(6); Papers of W. E. B. Du Bois, University of Massachusetts Library, Amherst, MA.

8. N. Cummings, M. McLean, S. Humphrey, M. Cobb, and D. Pryor, *History of St. John's Congregational Church* (Springfield: St. John's Church, 1962), 22. This source states that the church was named after Apostle John, but adds that some believed that the name was also chosen in order to honor John Brown (39).

9. From the website of St. John's Congregational Church at www.sjkb.org (accessed April 14, 2019). John Brown's bible is on display at the church and remains one of its "prized possessions." To this day it remains one of the Northeast's most prominent black churches.

10. "Bill of Sale . . . for the purpose of freeing Jenny (Williams) from Servitude," manuscript in the archives of the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield Museums, Springfield, MA; see also the full story of Jenny Williams in Wayne E. Phaneuf, "Abolition Vs. King Cotton: 1800-1840," in Joseph Carvalho III, Wayne E. Phaneuf, and Todd Robinson, *Struggle for Freedom: The History of African Americans in Western Massachusetts* (Springfield, MA: The Republican/Masslive, 2013), 23-25.

11. Clifton Johnson, *Hampden County, 1636-1936*, Vol. I (American Historical Society, Inc., 1936), 356. Johnson was a member of Springfield's First Congregational Church and the Connecticut Valley Historical Society and accessed their records for the writing of his multivolume set.

12. Charles H. Barrows, *History of Springfield for the Young* (Springfield, MA: Connecticut Valley Historical Society, 1921), 136-137.

13. William Green, *Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green, (Formerly a Slave.) Written by Himself* (Springfield, MA: L. M. Guernsey, 1853), 21. William Green started his own business in Springfield, Green and Adams Whitewashers, and later owned and operated Green's Barbershop in the city.

14. See Carvalho, *Black Families*, 36, 140-1, 162, 170. A few examples: *Springfield Weekly Republican*, May 27, 1837, p. 3 for Andrew Armstrong m. Lydia Wooding (white) May 7, 1837; *Massachusetts Vital Records* (MVR), Springfield, 1858, entry #103 for Levi Jenkins m. Harriet C. Hough (white) July 26, 1858; MVR 1853, Vol. 69, p. 402 for James Madison m. Mary Jane Brown (white) February 13, 1853; also *Records of the First Church of Springfield*, and "Springfield Families," typescript extracts from town, city and ministers' vital records, Archives of the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield Museums, Springfield, MA.

15. Wayne E. Phaneuf, "The Struggle for Freedom: This Railroad's Cargo Was Freedom," *Springfield Union-News*, February 3, 1999, A12.

16. Johnson, *Hampden County*, 354.

17. Louisa Burns Chapin, *Ethan Samuel Chapin: A Memorial, 1814-1889* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1893), 24-25.
18. *Hampden Register* (Westfield), November 22, 1826, p. 3; *Westfield Register*, June 16, 1830, 3.
19. "Roll of Emigrants that Have Been Sent to the Colony of Liberia, Western Africa, by the American Colonization Society . . . to September 1843," *Congressional Record*, 28th U.S. Congress, 2nd Session, Sen. Doc. 150, serial 458; *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Vol. 18 (July 1842): 235-36; Charles S. Johnson, *Bitter Canaan: The Story of the Negro Republic* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1987), 69-76.
20. *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Sept. 1843, p. 291.
21. "Minutes of the Annual Convention of 1838," *Journal of the Hampden County Anti-Slavery Society*, manuscript in Archives, Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield Museums, Springfield, Massachusetts.
22. Some internet sources state that Brown heard Sojourner Truth talk while he was in Springfield. However, there is no evidence of this. Although Truth was living in nearby Northampton, she is not known to have spoken at the "Free Church" that Brown attended. At that time, she was hosted by "Millerites" in Springfield and they did not generally intermingle with other denominations. In the 1840s she also believed that slavery could be ended by peaceful means, an opinion that changed by 1860. *The Republican* only reported talks by Truth in Springfield after Brown had left town (April 14-15, 1851) and a single talk at the Free Church on Jan. 2, 1855. Truth moved to Michigan in 1857.
23. Historian and archivist Cliff McCarthy of the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History writes in "Freedom Stories of the Pioneer Valley: League of Gileadites" that "True to his affinity for the underdog, the purpose of the business was to represent the interests of the western sheep farmers in their dealings with the powerful New England wool merchants. Perkins & Brown brought into Springfield wool from all over Ohio, Pennsylvania, and western Virginia and figured out that, by sorting the wool into different grades, they could command a higher price from the manufacturers. Perkins & Brown would take a commission of 2% and the profits would go back to the farmers. Finding the New England manufacturers unreceptive to the plan which would cost them more, the company then tried to broker deals [directly] with English manufacturers and elsewhere in Europe, but these also never came to fruition. The business closed down its operation in 1849." Most importantly, McCarthy opines that, "Much has been made over John Brown's failures as a businessman and its importance to his story; even that is a point of disagreement. But that is not the distinguishing feature of his time in Springfield. The real importance of this short period of his life is in the development of his relationships with the anti-slavery community, both blacks and whites." (October

- 22, 2017) www.freedomstoriespv.wordpress.com
24. Reynolds, 82.
25. *Westfield News Letter*, November 24, 1847, 2.
26. "Massasoit's Semi-Centennial History of the Famous Hostelry," *Springfield Republican*, June 6, 1893, 9.
27. Chapin, 24.
28. Massasoit Hotel Guest Registers, 1850s, Archives, Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield.
29. Thomas Thomas (1817-94) was one of the city's most well-known abolitionists. He was born a slave in Oxford, Maryland in 1817, the son of Joseph and Sophia (Giles) Thomas. As a young man, he worked on Mississippi River steamboats, where he eventually earned enough to buy his freedom. He continued to work the Arkansas and Mississippi river trade and also operated as an entrepreneur, buying vegetables and dairy products cheap and selling them at a profit in the cities. He was jailed once in Louisiana for violating its laws against free blacks entering the state and he was forced to leave that state. He eventually landed in Springfield, Massachusetts around 1843-44, where his mother and sister had already settled. He went to work in the Hampden Hotel. In 1846 he began working for Brown. He was one of the first people outside of his family with whom Brown discussed his military plans during his time in Springfield.

In 1853 Thomas moved to Springfield, Illinois, where he worked at the American House, directly across from Abraham Lincoln's law office, whom he served frequently. In 1855 the hotel closed and Thomas returned to Massachusetts. According to Franklin Sanborn, a close friend and supporter of John Brown, in July of 1855 Brown met with Thomas when he visited Springfield to purchase arms and "urged him to join in the Kansas expedition." Thomas declined because he had already made arrangements to "join a company of men" going to California. They never met again. Sanborn, *Life and Letters of John Brown: Liberator of Kansas and Martyr of Virginia* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1885), 133 and 194. Sanborn thanks Thomas in his introduction for his assistance (vii).

In 1858 Thomas left California when he was "called back to Springfield, Ill. by his former employer." According to local lore, he was among the crowd of men who first heard of Lincoln's nomination and went about town to find and inform him of it. The *Springfield Republican* claimed that he was so well known to Lincoln that he "could have been steward of the White House had not his wife's illness prevented it" (although there is no way to verify this story). In 1862 Thomas returned to Springfield, MA, where he opened a successful restaurant. At his death in 1894, the *Republican* described him as a "really remarkable man" and a "noble specimen of the negro race; gentle, courtly, and with an integrity and genuineness of character which made him prized" (March 10, 1894, 2). See also Carvalho, *Black Families*, 130-31.

30. "Thomas Thomas' Retirement From the Famous Eating House," *Springfield Republican*, January 8, 1893, p. 5; "Death of Thomas Thomas," *Springfield Republican*, March 10, 1894, p.2; "A John Brown Observance," *Springfield Republican*, May 10, 1904, p. 7; and McCarthy, "Freedom Stories of the Pioneer Valley," (October 22, 2017).
31. Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: From 1817 to 1882* (London: Christian Age Office, 1882), 240.
32. Douglass, 238.
33. "Editorial Notes," *Springfield Republican*, September 26, 1850, 2 (3).
34. Wayne E. Phaneuf, "Slave Law Prompted Bitterness," *Springfield Daily News*, April 4, 1975; *Springfield Republican*, Oct. 28, 1850, 2 (1) and Oct. 31, 1850, 2 (3) .
35. The actual "League of Gileadites" document has not survived. The text was first published by abolitionist, orator, and ex-fugitive slave William Wells Brown in "John Brown and the Fugitive Slave Law," in *The Independent* (March 10, 1870). Two years later Franklin Sanborn published it in "John Brown in Massachusetts," in *The Nation* (April, 1872) and later reprinted it in his edited *Life and Letters of John Brown* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1885 and 1891). Franklin was one of six influential men who supplied Brown with support for the raid on Harpers Ferry. Sanborn included a partial list of the members of the League of Gileadites. Sanborn, who resided in Concord, MA, later became a correspondent for the *Springfield Republican* (1868-1914). Through its pages, he helped preserve and highlight John Brown's memory locally.

Editor's Note: William Wells Brown's account lionized John Brown's role. He wrote that, "In Springfield, Mass., where a large number of fugitives had taken up their residence, the excitement appeared intense. The blacks left their employment, and were seeking more secluded hiding-places in the surrounding towns, or preparing to leave the country. At this period John Brown, who had formerly resided at Springfield, hearing of the state of affairs, returned, called the fugitives together, organized them into a body for mutual defense, *inspired them with hope and self-reliance, and thus saved these frightened and helpless people from suffering and poverty* (emphasis added)." Although understandably frightened, Springfield's African American community was far from helpless and had already begun organizing for mutual self-defense, including open calls for armed resistance which were reported in the local newspaper.

36. The entire text was published in the *Springfield Republican*, September 21, 1850, 2 (4), and reprinted in *The Liberator* on October 4, 1850 (2) under the headline: "Liberty or Death!" No other biographer has quoted or referred to this pivotal meeting or militant declaration of Springfield's "colored citizens."
37. Martin McLee, Patricia J. Thompson, and David White, "The Reverend John Newton Mars (1804-1884): New England Cleric and Celebrated Standard Bearer

in the Wesleyan Tradition," *Methodist History* 54:1 (October 2015): 71-82 and Carvalho, *Black Families*, 156-57.

Rev. John Mars had an illustrious career. In 1863 he became one of the army's first commissioned black officers as chaplain of the 35th Colored Infantry Regiment. He wrote about his life in "Battles with Bondage: My Life for Three Quarters of a Century," *New England Methodist* 1 (Aug.-Oct. 1879). His brother, James, was also a minister who wrote an autobiography, *Life of James Mars, a Slave Born and Sold in Connecticut*, that went through six editions. Mars was involved in the 1837 landmark case *Jackson v. Bulloch*, in which the Connecticut Supreme Court granted freedom to an enslaved woman who had been brought north by her southern master. He lived in Pittsfield for twenty years.

38. Quotation from Luke 23:36; see Cummings et al., *History of St. John's Congregational Church*.

39. Sanborn, ed., *Life and Letters of John Brown* (1891), 124.

40. Sanborn, 124-27.

41. Sanborn, 127.

42. Carvalho, *Black Families*, 321. Known members of the Springfield Branch of the U.S. League of Gileadites, signatories to the founding documents in 1850 (all members were African-American except John Brown): Joseph Addams, Eli S. Baptist, John Brown, William Burns, Samuel Chandler, Beverly C. Dowling, Jane Fowler, C.A. Gazam, William Gordon, Eliza Green, William Green, Henry Hector, George Washington Holmes, John N. Howard, Ann Johnson, Henry Johnson, Reverdy Johnson, H.J. Jones, James Madison, William H. Montague, Charles Odell, Henry Robinson, Charles Rollins, John [B.] Smith, John Strong, Cyrus Thomas, Thomas Thomas, Lovelis Wallace, Scipio Webb, and Jane Wicks. Perry F. and Ruth Adams were also known to be members according to their later accounts.

43. Louis Ruchames, ed., *John Brown: The Making of a Revolutionary: The Story of John Brown in His Own Words and in the Words of Those Who Knew Him* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971), 83.

44. "Meeting in Relation to the Fugitive Law," *Springfield Republican*, Oct. 2, 1850, 2 (4). The full nine resolutions were printed. The following white abolitionists were named as participants: Rufus Elmer (chairman), Alanson Hawley, E. W. Twing, Rev. Dr. Osgood, Dr. White, Rev. Arms, Mr. Munger, and Mr. Elmer. At the third, more "moderate" town hall meeting, additional names were listed: Judge Morris, Rev. Seeley, and Justice Williard. See also "Fugitive Slave Meeting at the Town Hall" on the same page (column 1) for editorializing against the resolutions.

45. *Springfield Republican*, Oct. 2, 1850, 2 (4).

46. "Fugitives Arrested in Springfield—Almost," *Springfield Republican*, Oct. 2, 1850, 2 (1). On Oct. 9 *Republican* editor Samuel Bowles had a direct exchange of letters with Rev. Osgood in which Bowles again decried "open resistance to the

law." However, Rev. Osgood also declared that he was not an advocate of "forcible resistance," although he appears to equivocate somewhat. "Dr. Osgood on the Fugitive Slave Law," *Springfield Republican*, Oct. 9, 1850, 2-3.

Editor's Note: Throughout 1851 the *Republican* editorialized repeatedly against active resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act and referred to anti-slavery activists as "terrorists" for allegedly inciting "unwarranted terror" in the "ignorant" and "excitable" fugitive slave community. The paper denounced abolitionists who advocated resistance and counseled instead: "Say to the Fugitive Slave thus: 'My friend, you are in danger. You may possibly be claimed, though the probabilities are that you will not. You are, nevertheless, in danger, and in the event of your being claimed by your legal master, it will be impossible for us to rescue you, as the law forbids it. . . . if you really fear that you may be claimed, you can do nothing better than to retire to some obscure town . . . or to go to Canada.'" (March 11, 1851, 2) The paper also repeatedly dismissed or belittled reports of slave catchers and was gleeful when it could expose them as unfounded, such as in the Ringgold libel case that involved a fugitive slave from Chicopee who was mistakenly feared to have been kidnapped and returned south. The case went to the Mass. Supreme Judicial Court. (See Feb. 11, 1851, 2; Sept. 5, 1851, 2; and Feb. 2, 1852, 2). Although no fugitive slaves were ever captured and returned to the south from Springfield, or from Massachusetts after 1854, an unknown number fled to Canada. For example, in 1857 John N. Howard, a member of the League of Gileadites, was "forced to sell his property at a nominal value and flee to Canada to keep his liberty." He returned after the Civil War began. (Carvalho, *Black Families*, 129).

47. "Fugitive Slave Meeting," *Springfield Republican*, Oct. 15, 1850, 2 (4).
48. In the 1840s and 1850s, vigilance committees were often an integral part of underground railroad organizing efforts. For example, David Ruggles (1810-1849), who moved to nearby Florence in 1842, had been secretary of the New York Committee of Vigilance, a radical biracial organization to aid fugitive slaves. See Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Massachusetts also saw the creation of the "Anti-Man Hunting League" in 1854 as well as a "League of Massachusetts Freemen."
49. *Springfield Republican*, Sept. 21, 1850, 2. This news item carries no headline. It begins with the sentence, "At a meeting of the Colored Citizens of Springfield, Mass. held in the Free Church on Tuesday evening, Sept. 17th, 1850."
50. Louis A. DeCaro, *"Fire From the Midst of You": A Religious Life of John Brown* (NY: NYU Press, 2002), 195-96. DeCaro provides a useful listing and thoughtful description of the Springfield Gileadite members (192-94). *Editor's Note:* Of Brown's recent biographers, DeCaro provides one of the most thorough and nuanced accounts of his time in Springfield and Brown's relationships with local figures and

anti-slavery activists (146-72).

51. Reynolds, 124.

52. One such tantalizing reference appeared in 1894. James C. Hamilton claimed that the League of Gileadites "had some members in Western Canada." It is possible that African Americans who had worked with Brown in Springfield or North Elba before their flights to Canada may have carried the league with them. For example, fugitive slave Walter Hawkins, who had been at North Elba, moved to Canada in 1852. He later became a presiding bishop in the British Methodist Episcopal Church. See James C. Hamilton, *John Brown in Canada: A Monograph*, originally published in the *Canadian Magazine* (December 1894), references on pp. 2 and 8. Hamilton wrote extensively on Afro-Canadian history. See also Fred Landon, "Canadian Negroes and the John Brown Raid," *Journal of Negro History* (April, 1921), 174-182.

53. Marvin Lincoln quoted in "Abolitionists at the Front: How They Recall the Old Days," *Springfield Republican*, Sept. 24, 1889, 4. Lincoln reported that the League of Massachusetts Freemen was organized by Henry Bowditch of Boston during a trip to Springfield (year not given). In 1854 Bowditch was also an organizer of the Massachusetts Anti-Man Hunting League, see: Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston Anti-Man Hunting League Records and Daniel Bever, "The Higher Court of Heaven: Dr. Henry Ingersoll Bowditch and Violent Abolition," Honors Thesis, College of William and Mary, May 2011.

Marvin Lincoln (1813-1909) was the inventor of the "Lincoln arm," a patented wooden prosthetic arm he began developing when he lived in Springfield as a carpenter. It was a great benefit to wounded Civil War soldiers. He had lived near John Brown and had helped Brown hide fugitives and assisted in their escape to Canada. See "A Friend of John Brown, Marvin Lincoln, Once a Local Abolitionist," *Springfield Republican*, Feb. 13, 1909, 6 (1-2).

54. The use of boiling water as a weapon appears have been commonly associated with women. After passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, John Brown urged all of his "colored friends" in North Elba to arm themselves. His daughter, Ruth, recalled that the Brown women were prepared to use "hot water" as their weapon. Ruth Brown Thomas quoted in Sanborn, *Life and Letters*, 132. See also Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz, *The Ties that Bound Us: The Women of John Brown's Family and the Legacy of Radical Abolitionism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

55. *Editor's Note:* William Wells Brown (1814-84) first recounts this story of women boiling huge pots of water to scald potential slave catchers in his 1870 article, "John Brown and the Fugitive Slave Act" (op. cit.). However, its veracity can be questioned. He tells the exact same story two years later, but in this second telling the incident described took place in 1863 and occurred after the New York city anti-black draft riot. The two tales are virtually identical, including the dialogue that he purportedly

had with the women, depicted in a heavy, black southern dialect. See Brown, *The Rising Son, Or, The Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race* (Boston, A.G. Brown & Company, 1872), 384-86.

Biographer Ezra Greenspan, author of *William Wells Brown: An African American Life* (NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), writes that Brown, similar to many nineteenth-century writers, frequently embellished and repeated stories: “That was his characteristic literary practice, adapting quotes, anecdotes, newspaper passages—you name it—for use wherever it struck him as suitable. The line between fact and fiction is always permeable. That said, I don’t recall any other tellings of this particular story.” William Wells Brown frequently lectured in Springfield and “presumably knew a fair number of people in the black community.” Although in 1848 he had been prevented from lecturing due to hostility, see *The Liberator* (June, 2, 1848), 871.

However, Greenspan reports that Brown was in the British Isles until September of 1854 “which leaves little time for the event he attributes to Springfield that year. I also see no Springfield lecture in my chronology of his travels that fall. The list is not exhaustive, but it reinforces my skepticism that the story he tells has a factual basis in Springfield.” Yet Brown does not claim that he had been lecturing in Springfield that day, only that he was “passing through” during “the week following the rendition of Anthony Burns.” However, this journey could not have taken place in relation to fugitive Anthony Burns’ capture and trial, since Burns was shipped south on June 2, 1854 when Wells Brown was still in England. (Greenspan email to editor Mara Dodge, Dec. 15, 2019.)

It is possible that Brown’s memory may have been clouded and he confused the dates; he was a prolific traveler and abolitionist speaker who lectured widely during the antebellum period. However, poor memory cannot account for why he repeated the same account two years later, but this time attributed it to African American women in New York city after the 1863 anti-black draft riots. [Note: Wells Brown himself never used the phrase “Gileadite House” in his writings.]

This article’s author, Joseph Carvalho III, acknowledges that Wells Brown “repeatedly used and embellished material on his stump speeches.” However, he suggests that this description “so aptly fits the circumstances and layout of Springfield that the story may well have originated from his experience in Springfield.” (Carvalho email to editor, Dec. 16, 2019).

56. Baptist quoted in “John Brown’s 100th Birthday,” *Springfield Republican*, May 10, 1900, 4. For more on Springfield’s black abolitionists, see Imani Kazini, “Black Springfield: A Historical Study,” *Contributions in Black Studies*, Vol. 1. (1977), 1-10.

57. “Death of Eli S. Baptist, Notable Colored Resident,” *Springfield Republican*, May 25, 1905, 4. See also, “Eli Baptist Dead: Well-Known Colored Man of Springfield and Early Friend of John Brown,” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 27, 1905, 2.

58. The story is referred to in the following correspondence: Frederick Douglass to Harriet Bailey/Ruth Cox Adams, March 9, 1894, and March 20, 1894, Cedar Hill, Anacostia; and Harriet Bailey/Ruth Cox Adams to Frederick Douglass, May 1, 1894, Norfolk, Nebraska, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; See also Harriet Bailey/Ruth Cox Adams correspondence in Alyce McWilliams Hall Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Editor's Note: Ruth Cox Adams' (c. 1820-1900) close relationship and correspondence with Frederick Douglass is described in David W. Blight's definitive biography *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 163-66. See also Tekla Ali Johnson, John R. Wunder, and Abigail B. Anderson, "Always on My Mind: Frederick Douglass's Nebraska Sister," *Nebraska History* 91 (2010), 122-135. Douglass had initially opposed their marriage due to Perry F. Adams' status as a common laborer with little education. Douglass worried that he was not "worthy" of her and wrote, "You ought not to marry any ignorant and unlearned person—you might as well tie yourself to a log of wood as to do so. You are altogether too refined and intelligent for any such marriage."

However, Perry F. Adams had leadership skills and quickly earned the respect of the local black community. He was among the conveners of the Sept. 17, 1850 meeting and in 1854 was elected a vice president of the Massachusetts State Council, part of the black convention movement. Unfortunately, his death from typhoid in 1868 received only a two-line notice in the *Springfield Republican* (March 20, 1868, 10) and no obituary. No other mention of Perry or Ruth Adams could be found in the local paper. Ruth moved to Nebraska in 1882. She was buried in an unmarked grave in 1900. In 2008 a bronze grave marker was dedicated to her in Wyuka.

59. *Springfield Republican*, May 27, 1905, 4; Carvalho, *Black Families*, 30-31 (Adams) and 42-3 (Baptist).

60. For example, a Sept. 22, 1856 letter to Brown informed him that the "Messrs. Chapin" of the Massasoit House sought information on how they could "contribute \$50 or \$100 dollars . . . as a testimonial of their admiration of your brave conduct during the [Kansas] war." Sanborn, *Life and Letters*, 343.

61. "From Boston," *Springfield Republican*, Jan. 6, 1857, 2 (2).

62. Sanborn, *Life and Letters*, 377, 380, 385, 389, and 392. (These letters were all addressed to John Brown at the Massasoit House. However, he may have only been receiving his mail there.)

63. Johnson, *Hampden County*, 36; "Massasoit's Semi-Centennial," *Springfield Republican*, June 6, 1893, 9.

64. *Springfield Republican*, June 6, 1893, 9.

65. W. E. B. Du Bois, *John Brown* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Company, 1909), 98.

66. Joseph Carvalho III, "John Brown and Frederick Douglass Have a Transformative Springfield Meeting," in Carvalho, Phaneuf, and Robinson, *The Struggle for Freedom*, 41-45.
67. Information about the desk and its use by Brown is found in the Curatorial Records. Brown's Desk is part of the permanent collection of the Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield, MA.
68. Samuel Bowles II, "It is Hanging Day in Virginia," *Springfield Republican*, December 2, 1859, 2. For an in-depth analysis of Brown's historical impact, legacy, and public memory see Reynolds, *John Brown*, 402-506.

<p>LIBERTY OR DEATH!</p> <p>¶ A meeting of the Colored Citizens of Springfield, Mass., was held in the Free Church, on Tuesday evening, Sept. 17th, 1850. The meeting was organized by appointing Mr. J. M. Howard to the Chair, and Mr. Perry F. Adams Secretary. The Rev. C. W. Gardner, by permission of the Chair, stated the object of the meeting. A committee of three was chosen to prepare business for the meeting, when the following preamble and resolutions were presented, and after some discussion, were fully adopted.</p> <p>Whereas, a Bill entitled the Fugitive Slave Bill has recently passed both Houses of Congress of the United States, the object of which is to enforce more stringently that Article of the Constitution of the United States which relates to the reclamation of persons escaping from labor, &c., but the effect of which Bill will be disastrous not only to those who are now enjoying a state of nominal freedom, but also to every free colored person, and many of the whites, being liable at any moment to be claimed and forced off into perpetual bondage, upon the oath or affidavit of any slave owner who may be disposed to prefer himself by swearing to a false identity; therefore,</p> <p>1. Resolved, That in the event of this Bill becoming a law, we, the citizens of Springfield, feel called upon to express, in the most decided manner, and in language not to be misunderstood, our disapprobation of the same, or of any further legislation having a tendency to oppose mankind.</p> <p>2. Resolved, That we will repeal all and every law that has for its object the oppression of any human being, or seeks to assign us degrading positions.</p>	<p>"We do, on this occasion, declare, ourselves, with one voice, that he who would be free, himself must strike the blow;" and that resistance to tyrants is obedience to God, therefore,</p> <p>3. Resolved, That we do witness to our duty every one who feels and claims for himself the position of a man, and has broken from the Southern house of bondage, and that we feel ourselves justified in using every means which the God of love has placed in our power to sustain our liberty.</p> <p>4. And, whereas, active vigilance is the price of liberty, we resolve ourselves into a Vigilance Association, to look out for the passing fugitive, and also for the oppressor, when he shall make his approach, and that measures be taken forthwith to organize a committee to carry out the object of the Association.</p> <p>5. Resolved, That should the taskmaster presume to enter our dwellings, and attempt to reclaim any of our brethren whom he may call his slaves, we feel prepared to resist his pretensions.</p> <p>6. Resolved, That as the passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill is an encroachment upon the sovereign rights of the Free States, and as the soil of the State of Massachusetts is thereby made slave-holding ground, and her citizens slave-holders, that it behoves her, as a free sovereign State, to exercise her legal authority in resisting herself against being made a participant in so disgraceful an act.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">J. N. MARR, JOHN B. SMITH, } Committee. H. B. YOUNG,</p>
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Colored Citizen's Resolutions (Springfield)

The Liberator, Oct. 4, 1850, 2(2)

Lyrical History: “John Brown's Body”

Great songs sometimes seem to have a life of their own and survive by adapting to changing times. The song we now know as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" has endured for more than 150 years and during that time underwent several dramatic changes. The original source was a religious camp meeting song written in the 1850s. When the abolitionist John Brown was executed in 1859, a new and fiercer set of lyrics evolved that joined the old tune to a more militant cause. The new song proudly declared: "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave. His soul is marching on!" By the time the Civil War began in 1861, the John Brown song had spread throughout the Union army. Soldiers added new verses as they marched through the South, including one that promised to hang Confederate president Jefferson Davis from a tree. Meanwhile, Confederate soldiers answered back with their own version, in which John Brown was hanging from a tree.

"Battle Hymn of the Republic" was created when abolitionist author Julia Ward Howe overheard Union troops singing "John Brown's Body." Howe, who had known Brown well, was inspired to write lyrics that would dramatize the rightness of the Union cause. Within a year this new hymn was being sung by civilians in the North, Union troops on the march, and even prisoners of war held in Confederate jails. Howe's lyrics have remained popular for over a century. Meanwhile, many versions of the "John Brown's Body" song emerged. Below is a powerful, more literary rendition commonly attributed to William Weston Patton; the image on the next page reveals a simpler version.

Old John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
While weep the sons of bondage whom he ventured all to save;
But though he lost his life in struggling for the slave,
His truth is marching on.

Chorus:
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on!

John Brown was a hero, undaunted, true and brave;
Kansas knew his valor when he fought her rights to save;
And now though the grass grows green above his grave,
His truth is marching on.
Chorus

He captured Harpers Ferry with his nineteen men so few,
And he frightened "Old Virginny" till she trembled through
and through,
They hung him for a traitor, themselves a traitor crew,
But his truth is marching on.
Chorus

John Brown was John the Baptist for the Christ we are to see,
Christ who of the bondsman shall the Liberator be;
And soon throughout the sunny South the slaves shall all be
free.
For his truth is marching on.
Chorus

The conflict that he heralded, he looks from heaven to view,
On the army of the Union with its flag, red, white, and blue,
And heaven shall ring with anthems o'er the deeds they mean
to do,
For his truth is marching on.
Chorus

Oh, soldiers of freedom, then strike while strike you may
The deathblow of oppression in a better time and way;
For the dawn of old John Brown was brightened into day,
And his truth is marching on.





Above Left: The Rev. Howard-John Wesley holding the bible owned by John Brown. He stands next to a church window dedicated: "In memory of John Brown, 'Hero of Harper's Ferry'" ("Springfield Church Steeped in History of Abolition," *Republican*, Feb. 3, 1999, A12. Photo by Michael S. Gordon).

Above Right: Joseph Carvalho III standing next to the new "John Brown, Abolitionist" exhibit at the Wood Museum of Springfield History (*Republican*, Nov. 29, 2009, A1. Photo by Mark M. Murray).

Mural: "Springfield Sanctuary" (1st section)

Opposite Page: In 2019 artist Ryan Murray painted this extraordinary mural in Springfield's renovated Union Station. The banner declares: "Not a single slave shall be carried from Springfield, law or no law!" An intricate stencil design, it depicts over 50 people and places that made Springfield an important stop on the Underground Railroad and commemorates those who carried on that legacy, including many African American community leaders. Murray comments that, "Streets, buildings, and awards honor William Pynchon, despite the fact that he owned possibly the most slaves and indentured servants of anyone in Springfield's history." The mural is temporary (and seeking a permanent location). It was sponsored by Fresh Paint Springfield; the artist was supported by Art for the Soul Gallery. Victoria Palmatier and staff from the Wood Museum of Springfield History assisted with the research.

The banner's quote comes from 1850: "Great excitement here on account of the supposed presence of slave catchers. The colored people are arming. The Town Hall is thronged by thousands of excited people, determined that not a slave shall be carried from Springfield, law or no law. There will be hard fighting if it is attempted. About 50 fugitive slaves reside here [Springfield]." *Vermont Patriot & State Gazette*, Oct. 10, 1850: 2(4).