

SAT FEB 2 2002

# Underground Railroad Movement brought

## DIVING INTO HISTORY

By VIVIAN A. TAYLOR

I was recently given an official copy of *The Jamestown Centennial*, celebrated 75 years ago. The year was 1927. African Americans were not listed with the rest of the racial groups, but they were given a role in a pageant giving the history of the **Underground Railroad** in the city. No mention was given of Catherine Harris, the only Negro person to run a station of the Underground Railroad in Jamestown and Chautauqua County. Black Americans were in Jamestown from its beginning. They had contributed to the city's growth, development, and prosperity as slaves and as free men and women.

Those taking part in the pageant 75 years ago were Miss Jerrie Hall, who later became a successful business woman; Louis Roberts, father of Louis Roberts Jr., a nationally known scientist; and Rev. and Mrs. Julius Young. Rev. Young was the founder of Emmanuel Baptist Church, and the father of Mrs. Etta Williams and the late Boots and Ned Young.

Other participants were Mrs. Fannie B. Ware, mother of the late local artist Holland "Flip" Ware; William Washington, father of Walter Washington, the first African American mayor of Washington, D.C.; William Wharton, who later became chairman of the city Republican Party; and the late J.Q. Elias, later the pastor of Blackwell Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church.

The pageant begins as the pageant chronicler cries out "In the land of the South, the colored man was held in captivity and in bondage, and he was oppressed. In that day cities of refuge arose in the North. Whither the enslaved people might flee for safety."

How true were these words, spoken so eloquently?

For this reason, I wrote this story rounding out the edges of the facts while creating a plausible chronicle of the day.

By VIVIAN A. TAYLOR

Circus Day in Jamestown in the fall of 1851 was a beautiful day. The month was October, the circus people couldn't have asked for anything better.

People converged on Jamestown from miles around. There were men, women and children in the festive spirit. Rice Brothers Circus had come to town. A steady stream of people filled South Main Street. They walked across the bridge to the circus grounds in what is now called Brooklyn Square. Circus time was a major event in the community.

Never before had there been seen so many colored people on the streets of Jamestown.

Most of the white people gazed at the Negroes as if they had never seen a colored person before, and they probably had not. People were puzzled as to where they came from. Where did they live?

Young people thought they were part of the circus. These black people lived in a settlement on the northwest side of Jamestown called "Little Africa." Some

of them were free, some of them were runaway slaves from the south. A few of them had been the slaves of the Prendergast family.

The colored community had not been the same since the hated fugitive slave law of 1850 was passed. Slave hunters could enter the free states and capture fugitive slaves. The Underground Railroad that operated in "Little Africa" was no great secret anymore. The runaway slaves lived in constant fear of

being recaptured. Nothing was more fearful than the thought of being returned to a life of slavery and the beatings by the slave master.

Slave catchers had been spotted on the streets of Jamestown.

One of the safest havens for fugitive slaves was the town of Busti. The Abolitionist Movement was very strong out there. In Busti runaway slaves were used as farm workers by the abolitionists.

Conditions were soon to change. The unexpected happened in a matter of minutes.



Above, the Allen House was located on Main Street in 1860. This view was seen from the corner of Main and Third streets. At right is the West Second Street crossing of the Erie Railroad in 1870. The water in the foreground was used as a skating pond.