NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION
NPS Form 10-900   USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)   OMB No. 1024-0018

JOHNSON HOUSE   **Page 1**
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service   National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: **JOHNSON HOUSE**

Other Name/Site Number: JOHNSON HOUSE HISTORIC SITE

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 6306 Germantown Avenue   Not for publication:__

City/Town: Philadelphia   Vicinity:__

State: PA   County: Philadelphia   Code: Zip Code: 19144

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property	Category of Property
Private: X	Building(s): __
Public-Local: __	District: __
Public-State: __	Site: X
Public-Federal:__	Structure: __
	Object: __

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
2	__ buildings
__	__ sites
__	__ structures
__	__ objects
2	__ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 2

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

_____   _____

Signature of Certifying Official   Date

_____

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

_____   _____

Signature of Commenting or Other Official   Date

_____

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ Entered in the National Register
___ Determined eligible for the National Register
___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
___ Removed from the National Register
___ Other (explain): _____

_____   _____

Signature of Keeper   Date of Action

NPS Form 10-900   USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)   OMB No. 1024-0018

JOHNSON HOUSE   **Page 3**
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service   National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: DOMESTIC   Sub: Residence
              SOCIAL   Meeting Hall

Current: RECREATION/CULTURE   Sub: Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: COLONIAL--Georgian

MATERIALS:
Foundation: stone
Walls: ashlar stonework; pointed rubble
Roof: asbestos shingles
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Johnson House was built in 1765-68 by John Johnson (or Janson) Sr. (1709-1794) as a wedding gift for his son John Johnson, Jr. (1748-1810) who married Rachel Livezey (1749-1818) in 1770 at the Germantown Friends Meeting. Architectural evidence indicates that the builder was Jacob Knorr, the same master carpenter who built Cliveden, a nearby National Historic Landmark residence of the same period. Today the Johnson House is believed to be the oldest residence built for year-round living still standing in Germantown.[1]

From 1770 to 1908 the Johnson House functioned as a residence for five generations of the Johnson Family. John Johnson, Jr. operated a tannery on the property and lived in the house until 1805. In that year John Johnson, Jr. relinquished the property to his son Samuel (1777-1847) at the time of Samuel's marriage to Jennet Rowland (c.1784-1876). Samuel also took over the tannery business and continued its operation until 1832. A bark house for the tannery survived on the site at least as late as 1912; a small stone 18th-century outbuilding, which in the mid-19th century housed a leather goods store (among other functions), is still standing immediately west (behind) the main house.

The house stood vacant from 1908 to 1917 when it was sold to the Woman's Club of Germantown for use as a club house. For more than 50 years the house was the meeting place and social center for hundreds of clubwomen. However, by the 1970s membership in the Club had declined, and title was transferred to the Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust, Inc. on condition that the Johnson House be maintained as a museum open to the public. Since 1980 the Johnson House has been owned and managed by the Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust. The Johnson House is entered in the National Register of Historic Places, is marked by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and is cited as a contributing building in the Colonial Germantown National Historic Landmark District.

The Johnson House is a rectangular five-bay, two-and-a-half-story stone house with full cellar, a rectangular two-and-a-half-story back wing with partial cellar. A rectangular two-story stone shed-roofed outbuilding is located behind the ell. The main house is essentially as it was when erected in the 1760s: it retains nearly all of its original 18th-century features intact, both exterior and interior. The present back wing was originally one-story and connected to the main house by a semi-open piazza; it has been substantially altered several times and is now

---

[1] The description of physical appearance is based on three research reports: Martin Jay Rosenblum, et alia. "The John Johnson, Jr. House: Historic Structures Report" Philadelphia: Martin Jay Rosenblum & Associates, April 1995; Lauren A. Goldberg, "Johnson House Final Report" Philadelphia: Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust, December 1994; and Avi Y. Decter, et alia. "Agenda for Action: A Plan for Institutional Development at the Johnson House Historic Site" Haddonfield, NJ: History Now, January 1997. In addition to architectural and engineering inspection of the site, paint analysis, and study of the hardware, studies of the Johnson House have made use of the 1934 HABS drawings, deeds and indentures, insurance surveys (1839, rev. 1848; 1859, rev. 1861), maps and atlases, reminiscences and descriptions, and a remarkable series of photographs dating from the 1850s to the present. Copies of all three studies are on deposit at the Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust and at Cliveden of the National Trust.

directly linked to the main house. The 18th-century outbuilding to the rear largely retains its mid-19th century appearance.

The Site

The Johnson House's prominent location at the intersection of Germantown Avenue and Washington Lane places it at the heart of the Colonial Germantown National Historic Landmark District on the principal artery of the community (see Figs. 1a-c below). The house faces east onto Germantown Avenue, and is bordered on the south by a garden that runs along Washington Lane. A fence to the west separates the Johnson House from a large three-story stone building erected in this century as a meeting place by the Woman's Club, and now owned and occupied by the Germantown Mennonite Church. A fence to the north separates the Johnson House from another Johnson Family dwelling, substantially altered, that has been sub-divided into apartments. A third associated house, formerly owned by the Dorseys who were relatives of the Johnsons, is located directly to the east across Germantown Avenue.

The Style

The Johnson House is a vernacular colonial Georgian house with distinctive German features. The plan of the house--central hall double-pile--is characteristically English Georgian as is the symmetrical front (east) elevation. Other Georgian features include the fully-paneled fireplace walls, the window sashwork, and the panel configuration on the doors and shutters. German construction features in the house include its stonework and pent roofs. The front (east) door was originally flanked by benches (removed after 1934), also typical of German house design. In addition, both the front door and the southern side door are six-panel Dutch doors (divided into two horizontally). The back wing, now attached, was originally connected to the main house by a semi-covered piazza, a typical feature of Germantown colonial houses.

Architectural hierarchy is evident in both the exterior and interior of the main house. The main house has a symmetrical facade, including the chimney placement, with the best stonework and a pent across the front (east) side. The pent has a slightly projecting triangular pediment over the front door. The remaining walls have no symmetry. The left or southern wall is somewhat more formal than the other two walls, having a pent and slightly better details. Inside the stair hall of the main house, architectural screens separate the more formal spaces at the front from the less formal spaces at the back. Molding subtleties occur in the first floor central hall: only the first floor central hall door architraves have backbands with ovolos, while the others have ogees. Principal rooms have chair rails, while lesser rooms lack chair rails.

The Exterior

The Johnson House consists of a rectangular main house 41' 6" by 35' 7.5" facing roughly eastward, a contiguous rectangular back wing facing southward, and a detached rectangular outbuilding also facing southward (see Figs. 6-9).

The exterior of the main house is exposed Wissahickon schist (also known as Chestnut Hill

mica stone). The front (east) wall is ashlar stonework with ribbon pointing which accentuates the rectangular shape of the stonework. At the northeastern corner the ashlar stonework continues around the northern side as quoins. At the southeastern corner the ashlar stonework continues around the southern side up to a doorway and window above, and rises only to the height of the bed molding of the roof cornice. The remaining stonework is pointed rubble with predominantly horizontal lines. Some original or early pointing survives for both the ribbon and rubble stonework (see Figs. 4-6).

Above the pent roof on the front and southern side is a stone drip course of ashlar stones functioning as flashing. Around the entire main house is a stone water table. At the front the water table and base below are ashlar stonework. Along the south side the watertable stones are ashlar on top, ends, and face, but irregularly shaped on the bottoms. On the back the watertable stones are less regular than on the south side. On the northern side the first two watertable stones are like the stones on the southern side; the rest of the watertable stones are like the back (west) side.

On the roof of the main house are two brick chimneys and three dormers, The chimneys and two front dormers are symmetrically placed in relation to the facade; the rear dormer is to the south of the back wing. The roof and dormer cheeks are covered by unpainted asbestos shingles, installed between 1939 and 1952. The front dormer windows (c. 1859) were originally covered with clapboards or flush boards; all of the roof shingles were cedar and painted in 1859 and 1861. The present shingles have an exposure of seven inches; the oldest shingles found loose in the loft have an exposure of 8 7/8 to 9 1/8 inches. The roof rafters of the main house are notched every ten inches for shingle lath, indicating that the original wooden shingles were about 36 inches long and had an exposure of 10 inches.

The two chimneys rise through the roof of the main house at the ridge (peak). The southern chimney contains four flues and is deeper than the northern, two-flue chimney. An 1850s photograph shows both chimneys relatively short and without rain water caps while a sketch dating between 1863 and 1888 shows a rain water cap on the southern chimney. Later photos show the chimneys taller and with stone rain water caps. One form of cap appears c. 1902 and lasted until c. 1913; the second form, which continues to the present, probably dates from 1919-20 when all three chimneys were rebuilt. The current form of extended chimneys has a slate rain water cap on brick piers followed by an upper course band and a lower one-course band separated by two courses of brick. There was a roof hatch in 1859, but this disappears sometime after 1920.

The first floor windows of the main house are nine-over-nine, the second floor six-over-nine, and the garret six-over-six. Many of the frames are original, and nearly all the sash are original. Eight of the first and second floor window frames were replaced in three phases; these later frames are double hung; the originals were single-hung. All original sash, including those of the back wing, have 8 inch by 10 inch panes. The cellar windows originally had stone jack (flat) arches with five ashlar stone voussoirs without keystones; two of these survive intact. On the southern side is a segmental arch of rubble stone which was probably for a window replacing an original, wider bulkhead opening. The front (east) facade has a central door. On the southern side there are a ground-level doorway which originally had a deep

pediment supported by columns and a blocked-in bulkhead opening in the cellar. On the western side there is a cellar door with a 19th-century frame.

The Interior

The main house has a full cellar with four spaces; first and second floors each with a central hall and two rooms to each side of it (except for the north side of the first floor which is now one
meeting room, but was originally two rooms); and a garret with a hall and four rooms. Stairs go from the cellar to the garret. The main house and the back wing are connected at the first and second floors by doorways (see Figs. 6-9).

The cellar of the main house is divided into four rooms. A stone partition separates the front rooms from the back rooms; a stone partition divides the two front rooms; and a wood partition divides the two rear rooms. Originally the southern two rooms each had an exterior doorway, but the door in the southeastern room has been blocked. A door with slide bolt enabled the rear (western) half of the cellar to be secured from anyone entering the cellar from the exterior door. The two southern rooms have brick floors; floors in the two northern rooms are dirt. The ceilings of all four rooms have exposed joists with plaster and split lath between the joists. The stone walls in all cellar rooms are plastered and whitewashed.

The first floor of the main house consists of a central hall running from front to back (east to west) with two rooms on either side. The two right-hand rooms are now opened as one space. The central hall is divided into two parts by an architectural screen consisting of a Doric entablature and two pilasters. The back hall is somewhat wider than the front hall to accommodate staircases to the cellar and second floor, with the additional space for the staircases taken from the northwestern rooms. The hall is lighted by a four-light transom over the front door and originally by a window at the stair landing. The stairs from the first floor to the second consist of two straight flights of stairs separated by a landing. All original woodwork survives in the first-floor central hall.

The first floor rooms incorporate substantial interior woodwork. Both the northwestern and northeastern rooms retain original tall, built-in corner cupboards with two-part doors. The southwestern room has a fireplace centered on the eastern wall with a closet on either side. In the southwestern corner of the room is a Federal corner cupboard with a nine-light door for the upper part and a single panel door for the lower part.

The second floor plan is essentially a duplicate of the first except for the addition of four more closets, a front hall window and a rear hall window (later converted to a Federal doorway). Virtually all of the original woodwork survives in the second floor hall and in the second floor rooms. All the second floor windows in the main house have interior shutters.

The garret originally had only one finished but unheated space in the southeastern corner. The floorplan was changed four times over the years, each time creating another chamber. Today the garret consists of an L-shaped central hall and a chamber in each corner. Between the two
front chambers in a walk-in closet accessible from the hall.

The Back Wing

The back building has a partial cellar with one room; first floor with two rooms including a modern kitchen plus a powder room and laundry room; second floor with three rooms including a modern bathroom plus a stair hall; and a garret with two rooms. The back wing was built originally as a one-story kitchen with cellar separated from the main house by a semi-covered piazza.

In the Federal period a second story and new garret were added above the kitchen and piazza and the semi-open piazza was totally enclosed, necessitating the creation of a new open work area. The 1859 insurance survey refers to a porch or "shed," enlarged by 1861 and documented in the 1934 HABS drawings. Under the piazza is only a crawl space. The interior has been substantially altered: the original second level of the back building was a garret over the kitchen and a loft (crawl space) over the piazza; the second floor now consists of three rooms and a stair hall. Numerous interior details have also been altered. For example, the large cooking fireplace was replaced with a "Cook Range & Gas Oven Boiler, Iron sink and hot & Cold water" by 1859.

The Outbuilding

A two-story, stone-walled, shed-roofed outbuilding, 16 ft. by 20 ft., stands about 40 feet behind the back wing to the west. On the ground floor the outbuilding is divided into three rooms; it has a loft above. The outbuilding consists of rubble stone exterior walls and partitions, oak loft floor joists, and a relatively modern roof frame. Doorways to the ground level are located in the southern and eastern walls. A second storage level is framed into the stonework. A channel or trench runs from the kitchen (with its well) into the outbuilding and continues westward.[2]

The outbuilding was erected in the late 18th century. The construction sequence for this small building is complicated. First, a stone outbuilding to its north was demolished except for its southern gable wall. Then the walls of the new building were built up to the bottom of the loft floor frame. Sawn oak joists were laid on the walls and the walling continued up. The stonework was originally one and a half stories, but was raised to two stories between 1839 and 1848. A frame extension of this outbuilding, shown in mid to late 19th century insurance surveys and atlases, was demolished early in the 20th century (see Figs. 2-3).

---

[2] The outbuilding was the subject of intensive study in 1996. Garry Wheeler Stone, Ph.D., past president of the Society for Historical Archaeology; structural engineer Nick Gianopulos; and preservation architect William Brookover, Historical Architect at Independence National Historical Park (NPS), conducted site inspections. Their field work was complemented by study of the mid-19th-century insurance surveys (1838, rev. 1848; 1859, rev. 1861) which describe the outbuilding and its functions. See Avi Y. Decter, et alia. "Agenda for Action: A Plan for Institutional Development at the Johnson House Historic Site" Haddonfield, NJ: History Now, January 1997, pp. 66-76 and 45-48. Copies of this report are on file at the Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust and Cliveden of the National Trust.

The 1798 Direct Tax Lists describe the outbuilding as a one-story stone woodhouse. In the mid-19th century, it was used as a smokehouse, wood house, leather store, spring house, and privy.

The Johnson House outbuilding is an important element of the site. It is a physical reminder that the Johnson House was a working farm where cows were milked, hogs slaughtered, and wood, vegetables, and fruit were stored for the winter. By preserving part of the work-a-day structure of the yards the outbuilding opens the way to interpretation of the worklife of household servants and farm laborers.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide:__ Locally:__

Applicable National
Register Criteria: A X B_ C_ D_

Criteria Considerations
(Exceptions):   A_ B_ C_ D_ E_ F_ G_

NHL Criteria: 1

NHL Theme(s):   II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements
                                    1. reform movements

Areas of Significance: Social history
                            Ethnic heritage/Black

Period(s) of Significance: 1830- 1870

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Jacob Knorr

NHL Comparative Categories: XXXI. Social & Humanitarian Movements
                                      D. Abolitionism

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Summary

The Johnson House is nationally significant for its role in the antislavery movement and the Underground Railroad. Philadelphia was a center of the 19th-century American movement to abolish slavery, and the Johnson House is one of the key sites of that movement. The house was the family home of Rowland Johnson (1816-1886), a Progressive Friend who achieved national prominence as a Vice-President of the American Anti-Slavery Society, of Israel Howell Johnson (1818-1894), an Orthodox Friend who was a leader of numerous antislavery and freedman's organizations, and of several siblings who were active in various antislavery causes including the Underground Railroad. Working closely with black and white abolitionists and assisting fugitive slaves and freedmen on their journeys to freedom, the Johnson family were significant participants in one of the great chapters in the story of American freedom. The Johnson House is a representative station on the Underground Railroad and the Johnsons among the leading abolitionists of their generation. Although abolitionists, including Quaker abolitionists, were a small minority among Philadelphians in the 1850s, the Johnson family were typical of the conscience reformers who participated in the Underground Railroad.

The Antislavery Movement in America

For more than 200 years, slavery defined the relations of blacks and whites in what is now the U.S. The organized struggle to abolish slavery in America--which began in Germantown in 1688 and culminated in 1865-66--was long, arduous, and contentious. Even after the final abolition of slavery through Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, the condition of previous bondage continued to be a powerful influence in American society and culture.[3] The antislavery movement is a subject of fundamental importance, central to the story of America.

Resistance to slavery began with the enslaved. From the earliest records of African bondage in the North American colonies, historians have found evidence of slave dissatisfaction with their condition. Their resistance to slavery took many forms, among the most common of which were what historians have termed "silent sabotage," day-to-day behaviors that included shirking work, feigning illness, misunderstanding orders, breaking equipment, and stealing from the master. Far less frequent were local insurrections and rebellions, all of which were crushed in short order. A third form of resistance, flight, directly challenged the slave owners and occurred with great frequency. While the overwhelming majority of runaways absented

---

[3]Robert W. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989, p. 11 and passim; see also Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. XIff., 194ff.

NPS Form 10-900   USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)   OMB No. 1024-0018

JOHNSON HOUSE   **Page 12**
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service   National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

themselves for short periods to avoid work or visit family or evade punishment, some runaways fled with the intention of liberating themselves from slavery.[4]

Opposition to African bondage was not limited to the enslaved. During the colonial period many individuals--including slaveowners--reflected privately on the inhumanity of slavery, though public protest was quite rare until well into the 18th century. The earliest known organized protest in what is now the continental U.S. took place in Germantown in 1688 when a small group of German Quakers--meeting just a few blocks from the site of the Johnson House--declared that slavery was contrary to Christian principles. This early Quaker protest was tabled by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and bore no fruit. But the Germantown protest provided a symbolic starting point and touchstone for the antislavery movement which--in fits and starts--led to the abolition of slavery, first within Quaker congregations, then in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and other states of the North.[5]

The Society of Friends (Quakers), centered in Philadelphia, were the first American denomination to assume an unequivocal antislavery stance. Strongly influenced by a succession of antislavery advocates, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting cautioned members against importing Africans in 1695, then ruled that importers of slaves would be excluded from meetings (1755), and finally prohibited Friends from owning slaves (1758). This "journey over unmarked ground," as historian Jean Soderlund terms it, was neither easy nor direct; the decision was reached in a divided spirit and for different reasons--humanitarian concern for the slave, a drive for congregational purity, and economic pressures. Moreover, once the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting accepted abolition, work towards the ending of American slavery moved from the denomination to individual Quakers. "Under their influence, the white abolitionist movement continued forward into American history the gradualist, segregationist,and paternalistic policies developed for almost a century within the Society of Friends."[6]

The principal vehicles for antislavery activism after the American Revolution were local anti-slavery societies, of which the model and exemplar was the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, founded in 1775 and based in Philadelphia. Gradual abolition of slavery was legislated first in Pennsylvania (1780), followed by Connecticut and Rhode Island (1784), New York (1785), New Jersey (1786), and the Northwest Territory (1787). Immediate abolition arrived in Massachusetts by judicial decree in 1783. Meanwhile, the movement against the slave trade culminated in the anti-slave trade provision of the U.S. Constitution and Federal legislation in 1808. Interestingly, in the first decades of the new republic, the primary impulse for slavery reform came from the South: as late as the 1820s two-thirds of

---

[4]Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South.* New York: Vintage Books, 1956, passim; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1993. Paperback edition 1994, pp. 157ff.

[5]John Witt, "Development of an Abolitionist Consciousness: The 1688 Germantown Antislavery Petition," *Germantown Crier,* 46 (1995): 22-29; Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

[6]Jean B. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 187 and passim and Thomas Drake, *Quakers and Slavery.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

NPS Form 10-900   USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)   OMB No. 1024-0018

JOHNSON HOUSE   **Page 13**
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service   National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

the emancipation societies in the U.S. were in that region.[7]

The 19th century antislavery movement was multiform and encompassed a number of distinct impulses ranging from humanitarian concern to racial segregation to sectional politics. One wing of organized antislavery, exemplified by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, agitated for gradual manumission, protection of freedmen's rights, and provision of education and welfare. Another impulse, grounded in the conviction that whites and blacks could not live together in one society, was expressed in the movement to colonize former slaves in Africa, spearheaded by the American Colonization Society (1817). Beginning in the 1830s, however, militant, immediatist antislavery organizations came to the fore, exemplified in the American Antislavery Society (1833) and the American and Foreign Antislavery Society (1840). The antislavery movement before--and after--1860 remained disparate, and few white Americans, North or South, were advocates of racial equality: throughout the antebellum period racism and discrimination were prevalent in the North as well as the South. Even committed abolitionists often lacked a vision of social reconstruction that would have offered blacks equal footing with whites in America.[8]

Nevertheless, in the 1830s the slavery issue became increasingly sectional, ideological, and political, fanned by the militant abolitionists' effective use of lectures, pamphlets, newspapers, public meetings, mass mailings, symbolic gestures (including adoption of a potent emblem, what was now termed the Liberty Bell), demonstrations, and organizational networks. As sectional feelings intensified, established national organizations, notably the major Protestant denominations, split, and new sectional organizations were established including the Liberty Party (1840) and the Republican Party (1856). Despite efforts at compromise and reconciliation, sectional controversy, fueled by competing ideologies, led to secession and civil war.[9]

Throughout the antislavery struggle, Philadelphia played a central role. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was the pivotal group in the decision to ban slaveholding among members of the Society of Friends, the first denomination to adopt an antislavery stance.[10] Philadelphia was the home of the first (and most enduring) antislavery organization, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, which was at the forefront of the antislavery movement for

---

[7]Richard B. Morris, ed., *Encyclopedia of American History*, Rev. and Enl. Edition. New York: Harper & Row, 1961, pp. 542-45, 175f., 179f., 182.

[8]Robert W. Fogel, *Without Consent*, pp. 238-387; Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, Ch. 7, esp. p. 202; Leon Litwack, "The Abolitionist Dilemma: The Anti-Slavery Movement and the Northern Negro," *New England Quarterly*, 34 (March 1961): 50-73.; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1968; and Henry J. Cadbury, "Negro Membership in the Society of Friends," *Journal of Negro History*, 21 (1936): 151-213.

[9]Fogel, *Without Consent*, Chs. 9 and 10; Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860*. New York: Harper, 1960; John L. Thomas, ed., *Slavery Attacked: The Abolitionist Crusade*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965; Eric L. McKitrick, ed., *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963; see also, Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

[10] Arthur Zilversmit. *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967, William J. Frost. *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*. Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1980.

NPS Form 10-900   USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)   OMB No. 1024-0018

JOHNSON HOUSE   **Page 14**
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service   National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

three generations, as well as numerous local antislavery organizations and groups.[11] In the antebellum period, the free black community of Philadelphia was among the largest and most prominent in the U.S., and its leaders were influential abolitionists.[12] The city was also the scene of momentous events in the antislavery crusade, including the burning of Pennsylvania Hall (1838), headquarters of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, and the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society (1833). In these momentous affairs the Johnson family of Germantown played notable roles from the 1830s through the 1870s.

`Apostles of Freedom': An Antislavery Family

Dirck Jansen [Johnson] (d. 1753) was one of the first European settlers in Germantown; his descendants were prominent leaders in religious, business, and civic affairs, allied with an extended clan including the Livezeys, Ridgways, Knorrs, Rowlands, and other notable Quaker families.[13] In 1805, Samuel Johnson (1777-1810), the fourth generation of Germantown Johnsons, married Jennett Rowland (1784-1818) of Lewes, Delaware, and took up residence in the Johnson House. Six of Samuel and Jennett's children--Joshua, Sarah, Rowland, Israel, Ellwood, and Elizabeth--together with their nephew and neighbor William M. Dorsey, were the generation of Johnsons who played important roles in the antislavery movement and the search for social justice during the antebellum period (see Figs. 13-18).

Jennett (Rowland) Johnson, the family matriarch and a resident of the Johnson House until her death in 1876, brought to the Johnsons a legacy of Quaker abolition: in 1778 and 1779 her father, John Rowland, manumitted his three slaves in keeping with his Quaker convictions.[14] The abolitionist impulse ran deep in her children. Rowland Johnson (1816-

---

[11] Charles Blockson. *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*. Jacksonville, NC: Flame International, c1981; "Historical Sketch," *Microfilm Guide to the Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, n.d., pp. 7-18; Ira V. Brown, "Cradle of Feminism: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1833-1840," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 102 (April 1978): 143-166.

[12] Gary B. Nash. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988; Julie Winch. *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988; Winch, "You Have Talents--Only Cultivate Them: Philadelphia's Black Female Literary Societies and the Abolitionist Crusade," in Jean Fagan Yellen and John C. Van Horne, eds. *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women;s Political Culture in Antebellum America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994. Ch. 6.; and Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

[13] Samuel Johnson (1777-1847), father of the abolitionist Johnsons, was "gifted with an acute intellect and sound judgement. His opinions on all local subjects were justly and duly appreciated by his fellow townsmen. Strictly just, honest, and conscientious in his dealings with men, yet it was by the best of suffering and at the house of mourning, where his attentions were kind, constant, and untiring, that his true worth was felt and gratefully acknowledged." (*Germantown Telegraph*, 10/6/1847); he was a leader in the Germantown Friends Meeting (Horace Mather Lippincott. *An Account of the People Called Quakers in Germantown, Philadelphia*. Burlington, NJ: Enterprise Publishing Corp., 1923, p. 11; he was a trustee of the Concord School (Concord School Minutes, 5/25/1885; Notes of Mrs. Norwell W. Cullom, n.d., Johnson House Files, Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust); a director of the Bank of Germantown (Naaman Keyser et alia. *History of Old Germantown*. Germantown, Horace F. McCann, 1907, pp. 338f.), and a director of the Germantown Perkiomen Turnpike Road Company (Notes of Mrs. Norwell W. Cullom, n.d., Johnson House Files, Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust).

[14] Elizabeth Neall Justice, et alia. "Copy of Book of Deeds of Manumission of Slaves, 1774-1792 Kept of Record by Duck Creek Monthly Meeting of Friends, in Kent, Delaware," pp. 155, 117, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

1890) described himself as an "infidel abolitionist" and he endorsed "the brotherhood of the human family without regard to sex, color or condition;"[15] Israel Howell Johnson (1818-1894) was both an abolitionist and a champion of racial equality.[16] Joshua Rowland Johnson (1812-1900) "with the Abolitionists . . . was a fighter in the cause of humanity"[17], and Ellwood Johnson (1823-1907) was an antislavery activist and Underground Railroad conductor.[18] The Johnson sisters, Sarah Parker Johnson (1814-1890) and Elizabeth Rowland Johnson (1828-1905), supported black causes and were active in the Underground Railroad.[19] The Johnsons' first cousin, neighbor, and co-worker in the Underground Railroad, William M. Dorsey (1810-1874) was a well-known antislavery activist who said of his convictions: "What a blessing I feel it, that everywhere I can speak unchecked the thoughts of my heart on the subject of slavery, the great curse that has so long blighted our country, North as well as South."[20] Dorsey did not reside in the Johnson House, but lived across the street.

The Johnson family's convictions were intense: they began their antislavery activity early and persisted into old age. In 1836 Rowland and Israel Johnson were co-founders (and later successive Secretaries) of the Junior Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia, a militant, Garrisonian antislavery organization, when Rowland was 20 and Israel was just 18; they remained active in causes on behalf of the freedmen during and after the Civil War.[21] Similarly, William Dorsey became a member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in 1833 when he was 23 (other prominent abolitionists who joined the Abolition Society at the same

---

[15] Rowland Johnson to William Logan Fisher, 7/6/1853, ALS, Logan Fisher Fox Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, May 1853*: 5; Henry Whittemore, *The Founders and Builders of the Oranges*, Newark, NJ: L.J. Hardham, 1896, p. 417.

[16] Junior Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia, Minutes, 1836-1846, 6/1/1836, 7/22/1836, 623/1837, and 6/1/1838, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Henry J. Cadbury, "Negro Membership in the Society of Friends," *Journal of Negro History*, 21 (1936): 169.

[17] Newspaper Obituary [died 7/18/1900] in Germantown Scrapbooks, Vol. 2, Thomas Shoemaker Collections, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[18] Edward T. Johnson, "Washington Lane formerly Abington Lane," (ms.), c1910s, pp. 63ff., Germantown Historical Society; Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons, Minutes, 1870, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

[19] For a description of the Underground Railroad at the Johnson House which makes clear the complicity of all residents including Elizabeth and Sarah Johnson see Edward T. Johnson, "Washington Lane formerly Abington Lane," pp. 163ff., Germantown Historical Society; Elizabeth Johnson, member, Germantown Freedman's Aid Association, Minutes of the Meetings, Vol. 1, p. 18, Germantown Historical Society; Elizabeth Johnson is listed as a contributor in *Report of Ladies Union Bazaar Association Fair, May 1864, for Benefit of the Colored Orphan Asylum*, American Negro Historical Society Papers, Leon Gardiner Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[20] Pennsylvania Abolition Society, *Act of Incorporation and Constitution of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery*. Philadelphia, 1860, 12/23/1833, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Diary excerpt published in *Friends Intelligencer*, 32:24 (8/7/1875): 369f.

[21] Junior Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia, Minutes, 1836-1846, 6/1/1836, 7/22/1836, 6/1/1838. Historical Society of Pennsylvania; *First Report of the Trustees of the Emlen Institute for the Benefit of Children of African and Indian Descent*. Philadelphia, 1873, pp. 1,14; Rowland Johnson: John W. Blassingame and Mae G. Henderson, eds., *Anti-Slavery Newspapers and Periodicals*. (5 vols.). Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980-84, Vol. 2, #5639; Israel Johnson: Broadside, Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons, 12/30/1876, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

time included William Lloyd Garrison, John Greenleaf Whittier, Arthur Tappan, and J. Miller McKim); and Dorsey was still active in freedmen's causes at the time of his death in 1874[22]

The range of the Johnson family's antislavery involvements is extraordinary. Rowland Johnson's roles are probably the most prominent: in addition to serving as an officer of the Junior Anti-Slavery Society, he was a member of the Association of Friends Committee on Requited Labor, secretary of the Upper Delaware Ward Anti-Slavery Society, a member of the Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia (who protected freedmen's rights and resisted slave-catchers), a founder of the Longwood Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends (who were militantly abolitionist and whose participants included Oliver Johnson, Sojourner Truth, and Bartholomew Fussell among many others), and a Vice-President of the American Anti-Slavery Society (whose other officers included William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel May, Lucretia Mott, Robert Purvis, Thomas Garrett, and Wendell Phillips among other renowned abolitionists).[23] Israel H. Johnson was also a founder and officer of the Junior Anti-Slavery Society, a manager of the Philadelphia Free Produce Association (which boycotted the products of slave labor), a supporter of the Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, a manager of the Institute for Colored Young Men, an officer of the Friends Association of Philadelphia and Its Vicinity for the Relief of Colored Freedmen, and a manager of the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons.[24] Elizabeth R. Johnson, sister of Rowland and Israel, was a member of the Germantown Freedman's Aid Association and a contributor to the Ladies Union Bazaar Association Fair For the Benefit of the Colored Orphans Asylum[25]; Henrietta (Wolcott) Johnson, M.D., Rowland's wife, was a founder of the Longwood Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends[26]; and Mary (Marshall) Johnson, Israel's spouse (whom he married in 1872), was a supporter of the Colored Orphans Asylum

---

[22] *Act of Incorporation and Constitution of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery.* Philadelphia, 1860, pp. 34f.; William Dorsey diary excerpts, *Friends Intelligencer*, 32:27 (8/28/1875): 420.

[23] Junior Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia, "Preamble and Constitution of the Society," undated bound volume (ms.), Historical Society of Pennsylvania; American Anti-Slavery Society, *Third Annual Report, May 10, 1836*; Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia, Minute Book, 1839-44, July 17, 1839, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, *Proceedings*, 1853, p. 6; 1854, pp. 3,4,6; 1855, p. 3; 1856, pp. 43f.; American Anti-Slavery Society, *Annual Report, 1859.*

[24] Philadelphia Free Produce Association, Minutes of the Board of Managers, 9/20/1845, cited in R.K. Nuermberger, "The Free Produce Movement," p. 36; Home for Destitute and Colored Children, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, No. 1, 1856-1932, 6/23/1858 and 2/18/1870, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College; Friends Association of Philadelphia and Its Vicinity for the Relief of Colored Freedmen, Circular, November 18, 1865, HSP and *Statistics of the Operations of the Executive Board of the Friends Association, etc.* Philadelphia, 1864/65; Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, *Annual Reports of the Board of Managers of the Association*, 1864-67; Emlen Institute for the Benefit of Children of African and Indian Descent, *First Report of the Trustees of the Emlen Institute*, Philadelphia, 1873, pp. 1, 14; Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons, Broadside 12/30/1876, HSP.

[25] Germantown Freedman's Aid Association, Minutes of the Meetings, Vol. 2, p.18, Germantown Historical Society.

[26] Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, *Proceedings*, Philadelphia, 1853, p. 4; see also Albert John Wahl, "The Congregational or Progressive Friends in the Pre-Civil War Reform Movement," unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1951. Henrietta (Wolcott) Johnson was an activist in a range of causes: see, for example, her membership in the American Female Medical Education Society, *The First Annual Report ...of the American Female Education Society.* Philadelphia: James A. Bryson, 1854, p. 2; other members included Lucretia Mott and Joseph Dugdale.

NPS Form 10-900   USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)   OMB No. 1024-0018

JOHNSON HOUSE   **Page 17**
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service   National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

and a "liberal contributor" to the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons.[27]

As is obvious from the density of their involvements, the Johnson family were intimately involved with many national leaders of the abolitionist movement and with some of the most famous figures of the Underground Railroad, both black and white. Robert Purvis and William Still, William Lloyd Garrison and the Tappan brothers, James and Lucretia Mott, the Grimke sisters, the Forten sisters, Oliver Johnson (no relation), publisher of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York), and any number of other abolitionist leaders are linked to the Johnsons. Surviving correspondence, for example, documents the friendship and collegiality of these relationships: in 1853 the noted abolitionist Joseph Dugdale describes Rowland Johnson as a "dear friend," and in 1881 John Greenleaf Whittier writes to Rowland Johnson lamenting the death of their mutual friend Lucretia Mott: "Lydia Maria Child, has also passed away. Our ranks my dear friend are thinning sadly. . ."[28]

The Johnson family were practitioners as well as advocates of racial equality. Rowland and Israel Johnson voted for black membership in the Junior Anti-Slavery Society in 1837 when this issue was debated. Rowland and Henrietta Johnson associated with blacks among the Progressive Friends who were dedicated to racial equality, and it was to Rowland Johnson that Sojourner Truth directed the famous letter describing her 1864 visit with President Lincoln; after his death, Rowland Johnson was described as "a man of strict integrity and self-sacrificing in his devotion to the right, and yet he was aggressive in matters involving not only his own personal rights, but those of his fellow-men."[29] Israel Johnson was known for taking his seat in the section of the Friends meeting reserved for blacks as a protest against segregation.[30] William Dorsey's humanitarian impulses transcended both sect and color: after his death it was said that "His sympathies went forth towards all, embracing the cause of the slave and the freedman..." and in his diaries Dorsey tells how, in 1868, "I had invited a young colored man, who is a Methodist minister, from Washington, Beaufort county, N.C. to be with us."[31] The Johnsons of Germantown were unusual even among Quakers in their time and place, being advocates and activists not just for human rights, but also for racial equality.

The Underground Railroad, 1830-1865

Flight was a strategy for many slaves long before antislavery activists organized to help the

---

[27]*First Report of the Trustees of the Emlen Institute for the Benefit of Children of African and Indian Descent.* Philadelphia: 1873, p. 16; see also 1874 and 1875. *Friends Intelligencer and Journal,* 7/21/1894, p. 472.

[28]Joseph Dugdale to William Logan Fisher, 6/3/1853, ALS, Logan Fisher Fox Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; John Greenleaf Whittier to Rowland Johnson, 1/7/1881, ALS, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

[29]Carleton Mabee, *Sojourner Truth--Slave, Prophet, Legend.* New York: New York University Press, 1993, pp. 120ff.; John W. Blassingame and Mae G. Henderson (eds.), *Anti-Slavery Newspapers and Periodicals.* (5 vols.). Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980-84, Vol. 5, #2987; Henry Whittemore, *The Founders and Builders of the Oranges.* Newark: J. L. Hardham, 1896, p. 417.

[30]Henry J. Cadbury, "Negro Membership," p. 169.

[31]*Friends Intelligencer,* 33:16 (6/10/1876): 242 and 32:18 (6/26/1875): 274.

NPS Form 10-900   USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)   OMB No. 1024-0018

JOHNSON HOUSE   **Page 18**
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service   National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

runaways: the impulse for self-liberation outran the impulse for social justice. From the earliest period of African slavery in America, flight was a common form of resistance among the enslaved. As noted previously, most runaways fled only briefly--to avoid work, visit with family, evade punishment, etc. But even in the Colonial period some slaves, women as well as men, children as well as adults, sought their freedom by fleeing to areas beyond their masters' reach. The fugitives who succeeded in escaping took refuge in isolated areas, in free African American and Native American communities, in cities where they might disappear into a larger population, and in border countries most notably Canada and Mexico. In this sense, enslaved Africans and African Americans were the first abolitionists: it was they who made the first and most continuous efforts to resist their constraints and to secure their own freedom.

In Germantown, for example, runaways were common. In June 1753 Phillis, a 25-year old woman "of middle stature, well-set, much marked about the neck and back with large whales or lumps . . . [and] a shrill voice . . ." fled from her master in Germantown.[32] Forty years later, in April 1793, a newspaper ad announced: "Ran away, from the subscriber, living at the lower end of Germantown, a mulatto boy, named William Narrengang, but passes by the name of James Narrengang. - Rachel Lesher."[33] Even after slavery was abolished in Pennsylvania, the children of slaves were bound to lengthy service--and resisted by running away: "Ran away from the subscriber, in Germantown, on the 7th inst. [1831], a colored boy by name JAMES CHURCH about 8 years old, firmly made regular features. All persons are forbid harboring said runaway under penalty of the law, and whoever returns him, shall receive the above reward [six cents] but no charges. - James Ford"[34]

For nearly two centuries, fugitive slaves sought and found assistance primarily from other slaves and from free blacks, though some runaways avoided any involvements, relying instead on their own abilities to evade capture. In the 19th century, a growing number of black and white sympathizers extended assistance to the fugitives, especially in the period from 1830 to the end of the Civil War. In these decades, a loose network of escape routes, hiding places, and supporters was organized which came to be widely known as the Underground Railroad. In the three decades before the Civil War, the Underground Railroad became an important element of the 19th-century antislavery movement, perhaps the most dramatic (and, some would argue, the most effective) form of radical protest against the system of African American slavery and successive federal Fugitive Slave Laws.[35]

Because of its inherent drama and mystery, the Underground Railroad became a legend in its

---

[32] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 21, 1753 (No. 1278)

[33] *Dunlap's Advertiser*, April 20, 1793

[34] *Germantown Telegraph*, October 25, 1831

[35]Wilbur Henry Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*. Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1968. Reprint of the 1898 edition; Robert Clemens Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Arno Press, 1969. Reprint of the 1883 edition; Charles Blockson, *Hippocrene Guide to the Underground Railroad*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1994 and *The Underground Railroad*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1988; Barbara Tagger, "The Underground Railroad: National Historic Landmark Theme Study" (Draft). Atlanta: National Park Service, Southeast Field Area, 1996.

own time--and that legend has persisted into the present. Aside from the secrecy with which fugitives were assisted on their flight to freedom--in violation of Federal law and, often, local public opinion--both antislavery and proslavery advocates used the Underground as fodder in their on-going and increasingly strident sectional debate, and, for diametrically opposite reasons, both sides tended to exaggerate and distort its nature, scale, and effectiveness. Both in that time and later, the Underground Railroad has been seen as a highly-organized, systematic, national effort--spearheaded by white Northern abolitionists, usually Quakers--to undermine the Southern slave system by stealing hundreds of thousands of bondsmen away from their legitimate owners and resisting their recovery under Federal law. The exploits of a few heroic figures such as Philadelphia-based Harriet Tubman or the Ohio Quaker abolitionist Levi Coffin have given color to these legends.[36]

The historical realities of the Underground Railroad were quite different. The Railroad was never formally organized and its networks were local or regional. The initiative in most escapes was taken by the runaways themselves, usually without benefit of instigators or guides. Blacks, both free and slave, were the persons to whom the fugitives were most likely to turn for help in their escapes, and assistance to the runaways was often incidental, rather than instrumental. The primary danger of escape lay in re-capture and punishment. Slave-catchers did exist and did pursue their unfortunate quarry into the North and even (illegally) into Canada, but seizures of runaways in the North appear to have been relatively few in number, even if given dramatic attention in the abolitionist and Northern press. Though black and white participants in the Underground Railroad kept few systematic records, in some locales with numerous abolitionist sympathizers, the Underground was an open secret.[37]

Nevertheless, the Underground Railroad was, and is, historically significant. The Underground Railroad functioned as a powerful moral symbol in the abolitionist crusade against slavery and an equally compelling expression of the slaves' yearning for freedom and dignity. Flight from bondage and assistance in that flight were transformative experiences for the participants, black and white, slave and free. While the stakes for the fugitives were much higher than for those assisting them, both the runaways and those providing refuge exemplified courage, even heroism. Most importantly, the Underground Railroad was a signal instance of blacks and whites cooperating in a common cause.[38]

Pennsylvania, and especially Philadelphia, was a pivotal link on the Underground Railroad in the decades before the Civil War. One reason for this is that Philadelphia developed a substantial free black community, and became widely known as a center of black

---

[36]Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad.* Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1967. Originally published 1961.

[37]Barbara Tagger, "The Underground Railroad: National Historic Landmark Theme Study" (Draft). Atlanta: National Park Service, Southeast Field Area, 1996; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1969; Charles Blockson, *The Underground Railroad.* New York: Prentice Hall, 1988; Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad.* Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1967. Originally published 1961; and Richard B. Morris and Jeffrey B. Morris, eds., *Encyclopedia of American History.* Seventh Edition. New York: HarperCollins, 1996, p. 748.

[38]Tagger, op cit. Blockson, op cit., Gara, op cit.

NPS Form 10-900   USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)   OMB No. 1024-0018

JOHNSON HOUSE   **Page 20**
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service   National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

opportunity and culture.[39] Lunsford Lane, a free black from North Carolina who emancipated his family in the 1830s, vowed that "I will go, and will not stop till I get to Philadelphia, for freedom is all over that place."[40] Although Philadelphia also had the reputation of being the most "Southern northern city," it remained a prime destination for runaways from the Upper South, particularly from Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia (see Fig. 12).[41]

Runaway slaves arrived in Philadelphia on foot, by wagon, boat, and railroad. C.H. Hall, who was born a slave in Maryland in 1811, described her flight to freedom in 1836: "I went to sleep . . . and dreamed that I was dreaming, & when I woke up, something whispered in my ear, `Come out, if you can; it will be the best for you' . . .I started for the city of Baltimore, which was about 14 miles off. There I stayed from Monday night until Friday night. I walked the streets every day and read my own advertisement--`$100 in the States.' Sunday night I was in Columbia, Penna., where I fell in with a friend, and remained there a week, and then came to Philadelphia. I left Philadelphia on Monday, and Friday evening, I was across Suspension Bridge [into Canada]."[42]

---

[39]Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988; Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*. Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.

[40]*Anti-Slavery Reporter*, III (July 27, 1842), 122-23 quoted in John Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Literature and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1977), p. 148.

[41]Edward Raymond Turner, "The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 36 (1912): 309-18; Charles Blockson, *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*. Jacksonville, NC: Flame International, c1981.

[42]Interview 1863 in Canada, quoted in John Blassingame, ed. *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Literature and Autobiographies*, Baton Rouge, 1977, pp. 417f.

NPS Form 10-900   USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)   OMB No. 1024-0018

JOHNSON HOUSE   **Page 21**
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service   National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

William Still, an African American abolitionist and Underground Railroad activist in Philadelphia during the 1850s, published his records and recollections in 1872. Still's book, *The Underground Railroad*, is unmatched as a source of information about individual runaways and the inner workings of the Underground Railroad in one of its most active centers. Still gives due attention to the most dramatic escapes such as that of "Box" Brown and he profiles some of the most prominent white and black abolitionists. But his book is most valuable for its thumbnail sketches of typical fugitives such as Henry Cromwell. Cromwell, then age 25, left his master, a farmer in Baltimore County, MD, and walked at night "from his home to Harrisburg, Pa., and there availed himself of a passage on a freight car coming to Philadelphia." In June 1855 David Bennett, his wife and two young children, fled from Loudon County, VA, where Martha Bennett had been stripped and flogged. Alexander Munson, an 18-year old man from Chestertown, MD, was to be freed by the will of his original owner, but the will was disregarded, and Munson determined on flight. In December 1855 Munson fled with "the one idea that `all men were born free' pretty deeply rooted in his mind."[43]

William Still's meticulous records are useful not only for understanding the motives and methods of the runaways, but also for clarifying the mechanics of the Underground Railroad in operation. Still served as the representative of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, a group of abolitionists who sought out and aided fugitives in Philadelphia. Because Still was black, he had access to fugitives who sought refuge in the free black community as well as those called to his attention by white abolitionists in Delaware and Southeast Pennsylvania. Based on Still's records, historian Benjamin Quarles has estimated that the Vigilance Committee provided assistance to about 300 fugitives a year at its peak; Still's book documents assistance to 495 fugitives from December 1852 to February 1857, about 125 a year.[44] This suggests that Underground assistance to fugitives involved modest numbers, irregular activity, and limited forms of assistance, even in a junction as important as Philadelphia.

A typical station on the Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania appears to have provided aid to a few runaways on those irregular occasions when fugitives were directed to the door by others in the local network. Historian Edward Turner argues that the stationmasters "did little more than feed and hide the slave, and carry him over the next stage of his journey," and historian Larry Gara emphasizes the sometimes make-shift nature of the Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania.[45] Even when routes were well-established and runaways were directed or conveyed to their next place of refuge, many abolitionists who worked on the Underground Railroad helped out only occasionally, however meritorious and memorable their actions.

---

[43]William Still, *The Underground Railroad*. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1970. Reprint of the 1872 edition, pp. 275, 266, and 346.

[44]Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, pp. 147-156; Larry Gara, "Friends and the Underground Railroad," *Quaker History*, 51 (1962): 12.

[45]Edward Raymond Turner, "The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 36 (1912):406; Larry Gara, "Friends and the Underground Railroad," *Quaker History*, 51 (1962):10f.

The Johnson House: An Underground Railroad Station

Germantown in the mid-19th century was a community sympathetic to the runaways. B. Frank Kirk, whose family was active in the Underground Railroad when he was a boy, points out that "There were scores of other Abolitionists in Germantown..."[46] Another published reminiscence, by "an [anonymous] old gentleman" of Germantown, claims that Germantown before the Civil War was known in some sections of Virginia and Maryland "as a sort of Promised Land, which accounts for the exodus to this locality."[47] B. Frank Kirk recalled that Germantown "had a number of talks and lectures by prominent Abolitionists in the old hall...on Main street [Germantown Avenue]...Henry Ward Beecher, Wendell Phillips, George William Curtis, Lucretia Mott, and young Judge Kelly were among the principal speakers...admission was sometimes charged to hear the `big guns,' to help along the cause. At other times the lectures were free, and the hall was usually crowded."[48]

"Germantown, in old slavery days," says the `old gentleman,' "was a station of the `Underground Railway' for the escape of fugitive slaves. Many a barn in Germantown, and many a house, too, would be used for sheltering these people [i.e., runaways]." B. Frank Kirk, who lived and worked directly across Germantown Avenue from the Johnson House, recalled that the Underground Railroad "extended all through what were known as the Free States...Fearless men would start at towns in the lower tier of [Pennsylvania] counties nearest to the Maryland border, and runaway slaves were piloted through Eastern and Southern Pennsylvania, to Chester, Norristown, sometimes to Germantown, Abington, to New York and friendly Canada, where they were given work and taken care of."[49]

The `old gentleman' remembered that "About the year 1835 or 1840, the agitation of the slave questions became quite animated, and the Quakers in Germantown and Montgomery and Chester counties commenced to secretly assist slaves to escape from their bondage. I remember one case in particular, old Elijah Baynard, who lived on Centre street. He escaped from his master in Virginia, and made his way to Germantown through the efforts of the `Underground Railway.'" "On one occasion," the `old gentleman' continues, "there was a meeting here in Germantown of the secret officers of the `Underground Railway,' I happened to be home that night, and my father introduced me to the big guns. Among the number was William Still, who afterwards sheltered John Brown's wife, daughter and sons, while he was awaiting execution...Another prominent director at that meeting was Harriet Tubman, who made nineteen journeys from Maryland and Virginia to Canada, leading nearly five hundred colored people from the chains of slavery to freedom, some of whom lingered in Germantown and are living with their children here today...The heads of many Quaker families in Germantown were at that meeting and gave substantial aid to help along

---

[46]Newspaper Article, "Recalls Incidents of Slavery Days," c1910, Johnson House Files, Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust.

[47]Newspaper Article, undated, in Germantown Scrapbook, Volume 1, Thomas L. Shoemaker Collections, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[48]Newspaper Article, "Recalls Incidents of Slavery Days," c1910, Johnson House Files, Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust.

[49]Ibid.

the good work ... All these men and women were not only abolitionists but they were all temperance people, and every one a church member. These meetings were opened with prayer and closed with a blessing."[50]

Prominent among these abolitionists were the Johnson family. Edward T. Johnson (1849-1919), a son of Ellwood Johnson, lived in the Johnson House in the 1850s and then moved immediately next door to the Keyser-Johnson House. Edward Johnson has left a very detailed reminiscence of the Johnson House in the 1850s, which seems to dispense with both exaggeration and legend. "This house [the Johnson House], my Father's, and my Cousin['s], William Dorsey's, opposite, during the Abolition Days (before the Civil War) were stations of the `Underground Railroad.' By means of which, runaway slaves were `spirited' along to freedom..." The Johnson House was indeed the center of a complex of family dwellings: it shared a garden with the Keyser-Johnson House next door, the home of Ellwood Johnson after 1858, and it was directly across Germantown Avenue from the Knorr House where William Dorsey resided.[51] Edward Johnson's account is confirmed by another recollection that "The slaves would be driven up the drive which ran along the north side of the Knorr house [across Germantown Avenue from the Johnson House] and hidden in the back buildings to await a chance to be carried onward, usually at night, by some interested neighbor--usually one of the Johnsons."[52]

Fugitive slaves came to the Johnson House at the direction of the local Underground Railroad network. Edward Johnson says that fugitives were "sent out to us by the great Apostles of Freedom, William and Deborah Wharton, James and Lucretia Mott, Miller McKim, and others..."[53] As we have seen previously, the people named by Mr. Johnson were all linked to the Johnson family through at least one antislavery organization, and typically though several such associations with multiple members of the Johnson family. Edward Johnson goes on to say:

> One of my earliest recollections, about the year, 1858 or 59, was been [sic] wakened up very early in the morning, by a furious knocking, at our back door. My Father answered it, and, coming back, said that a big colored man, a slave, was there, with a note, which said, he was trying to escape and please to give him food and clothing and help along to the next station.
>
> I remember our giving him his breakfast; getting the Dearborne wagon; putting him in the back part; covering him with straw and a piece of carpet. We then drove back Washington Lane several miles, to put him on the right road to some Quaker farmer, in Montgomery County, whose name was in the note and whom my Father knew. We afterwards heard, through the

---

[50]Newspaper Article, undated, in Germantown Scrapbook, Vol. 1, Thomas L. Shoemaker Collections, HSP.

[51]Edward T. Johnson, "Washington Lane," pp. 63ff.

[52]*Germantown Journal*, May 1927.

[53]Edward T. Johnson, "Washington lane," pp. 63f.

"Underground" channels that he got safely to Canada, where he was free.[54]

The names and numbers of runaways who passed through the Johnson House are not known. However, we may extrapolate from the records kept by William Still for the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee--our fullest and most reliable body of evidence--and argue that most of the fugitives who came through the Johnson House were from Maryland and Virginia. While we do not know the exact number of runaways whom the Johnsons assisted in their flight to freedom, we do know that it was probably numbered in the tens rather than the hundreds. Jennetta (Johnson) Reeve (1841-1919), who lived at the Johnson House from her birth until her marriage in 1870, "tells how when she was a small girl, she wondered why so many families of black people lived in the attic [of the Johnson House] one night and the next morning they were gone."[55] Edward Johnson's account says substantially the same thing: "I remember my cousin [Jennetta (Johnson) Reeve] saying that she could not understand how so many different colored people were in the back garret [of the Johnson House]. It seemed to her a different family was there every time she went up to it."[56]

Edward Johnson's memoir develops several themes which define the Johnson House's national historical significance. The Johnson house and its immediate neighbors--which were also occupied in the 1850s by members of the Johnson family--served as stations on the Underground Railroad. The Johnson House was part of a regional network of Underground Railroad stations that linked Maryland and Delaware with New York and New England. In their clandestine work, the Johnson family were linked with regional and national leaders of the Underground Railroad and the abolitionist movement. Although abolitionists, including Quaker abolitionists, were a small minority among Philadelphians in the 1850s, the Johnson family were typical of the conscience reformers who participated in the Underground Railroad: their intense commitment to human freedom was matched only by their modesty and their caution. The Johnson House is site of national significance which tells an important chapter in the evolving story of American liberty.

---

[54] Ibid. pp. 64ff.

[55] Note on the back of a City Transit Photograph [Johnson House], 1934, City Transit Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[56] Edward T. Johnson, "Washington Lane," pp. 64f.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bayliss, John F. *Black Slave Narratives*. London: The MacMillan Company, 1970.

Blassingame, John W. and Mae G. Henderson (eds.). *Anti-Slavery Newspapers and Periodicals*. (5 vols.). Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980-84.

Blockson, Charles. *Hippocrene Guide to the Underground Railroad*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1994.

_____. *The Underground Railroad*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1988.

_____. *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*. Jacksonville, NC: Flame International, c1981.

Brown, Ira V. "Cradle of Feminism: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1833-1840," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 102 (April 1978): 143-166.

Cadbury, Henry J. "Negro Membership in the Society of Friends," *Journal of Negro History*, 21 (1936): 151-213.

Campbell, Stanley W. *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968.

Decter, Avi Y. et alia. "Agenda for Action: A Plan for Institutional Development at the Johnson House Historic Site," Haddonfield, NJ: History Now, January 1997.

Drake, Thomas. *Quakers and Slavery*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

Filler, Louis. *The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860*. New York: Harper, 1960.

Fogel, Robert W. *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989.

Frost, William J. "The Origins of the Quaker Crusade Against Slavery: A Review of the Recent Literature," *Quaker History*, 67 (1978): 42-58.

_____. *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*. Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1980.

Gara, Larry. "Friends and the Underground Railroad," *Quaker History*, 51(1962): 3-19.

_____. *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1967. Originally published 1961.

Goldberg, Lauren A. "Johnson House Final Report," Philadelphia: Germantown Mennonite

Historic Trust, December 1994.

Johnson, George Clarence. "Jansen-Johnson Genealogy" [Genealogical Chart], n.p., n.d. (Johnson House Files, Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust].

Johnson, George Clarence (comp.). "Pictorial Germantown Road and the Vicinity" (2 vols.; Germantown Historical Society).

Jones, R. Bruce. *The History of Green Street Monthly Meeting*. Philadelphia: Green Street Monthly Meeting, 1988.

Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1968.

Keyser, Naaman H. et alia. *History of Old Germantown*. Germantown, Horace F. McCann, 1907.

Keyser, Naaman H. "Notes for Volume II of *History of Old Germantown*," (Germantown Historical Society).

Kolchin, Peter. *American Slavery, 1619-1877*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993. Paperback edition 1994.

Lippincott, Horace Mather. *An Account of the People Called Quakers in Germantown, Philadelphia*. Burlington, NJ: Enterprise Publishing Corp., 1923.

Litwack, Leon. "The Abolitionist Dilemma: The Anti-Slavery Movement and the Northern Negro," *New England Quarterly*, 34 (March 1961): 50-73.

Lloyd, Mark Frazier. "The Johnson (Jansen) Family and Their Houses in 18th Century Germantown," *Germantown Crier*, 33 (Spring 1981): 36-43.

Mabee, Carleton. *Sojourner Truth--Slave, Prophet, Legend*. New York: New York University Press, 1993.

Mellon, James (ed.). *Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember*. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988.

Mellor, Elizabeth. "The Woman's Club of Germantown," *The Beehive*, 9 (November 1925): 1-3, 10-11.

Moore, John M. (ed.). *Friends in the Delaware Valley: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1681-1981*. Haverford, PA: Friends Historical Association, 1981.

Morris, Richard B. and Jeffrey B. Morris (eds.). *Encyclopedia of American History*. Seventh
    Edition. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-
    1840*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Nash, Gary B. and Jean R. Soderlund. *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania
    and Its Aftermath*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Nurmberger, Ruth Ketring. *The Free Produce Movement: A Quaker Protest Against Slavery*.
    Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1942.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*. New York: W.W. Norton &
    Company, 1996.

Quarles, Benjamin. *Black Abolitionists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Rosenblum, Martin J. et alia. "The John Johnson, Jr. House: Historic Structures Report,"
    Philadelphia: Martin Jay Rosenblum & Associates, April 1995.

Siebert, Wilbur Henry. *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*. Gloucester,
    MA: P. Smith, 1968. Reprint of the 1898 edition.

Smedley, Robert Clemens. *History of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Arno Press,
    1969. Reprint of the 1883 edition.

Smith, Charles Harper. *The Livezey Family: A Genealogical and Historical Record*.
    Philadelphia: George Buchanan Company, 1934.

Soderlund, Jean R. *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit*. Princeton: Princeton University
    Press, 1985.

_____. "Priorities and Power: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society," in
    Jean Fagan Yellen and John C. Van Horne, eds. *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's
    Political Culture in Antebellum America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994. Ch.
    4.

Stampp, Kenneth M. *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. New York:
    Vintage Books, 1956.

Still, William. *The Underground Railroad*. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1970. Reprint
    of the 1872 edition.

Tagger, Barbara. "The Underground Railroad: National Historic Landmark Theme Study"
    (Draft). Atlanta: National Park Service, Southeast Field Area, 1996.

Tinkcom, Harry M. et alia. *Historic Germantown from the Founding to the Early Nineteenth
    Century: A Survey of the German Township*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical

Society, 1955.

Turner, Edward Raymond. *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery-Servitude-Freedom, 1639-1861*. New York: Arno Press, 1969. Reprint of the 1912 edition.

_____. "The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of   History and Biography*, 36 (1912): 309-18.

Wahl, Albert John. "The Congregational or Progressive Friends in the Pre-Civil War Reform Movement," unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1951.

Wilkinson, Norman W. "The Philadelphia Free Produce Attack Upon Slavery," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 66 (July 1942): 294-313.

Winch, Julie. *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.

_____. "You Have Talents--Only Cultivate Them: Philadelphia's Black Female Literary Societies and the Abolitionist Crusade," in Jean Fagan Yellen and John C. Van Horne, eds. *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women;s Political Culture in Antebellum America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994. Ch. 6.

Witt, John. "Development of an Abolitionist Consciousness: The 1688 Germantown Antislavery Petition," *Germantown Crier*, 46 (1995): 22-29.

Zilversmit, Arthur. *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Archives and Libraries

     Blockson Collection of Afro-Americana, Temple University Library
     Free Library of Philadelphia
     Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College
     Germantown Historical Society
     Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust
     Historical Society of Pennsylvania
     Library Company of Philadelphia
     Library of Congress
     Philadelphia City Archives
     The Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

__ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
 X Previously Listed in the National Register.
__ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
__ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
 X Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # 7-7
__ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

__ State Historic Preservation Office
__ Other State Agency
__ Federal Agency
__ Local Government
__ University
 X Other (Specify Repository):   Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust
     Cliveden of the National Trust

---

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre

UTM References: Zone   Easting   Northing
             A   18   484510   4432360

Verbal Boundary Description:

> Beginning at a point formed by the intersection of the Southwesterly side of Germantown
> Avenue (sixty feet wide) and the Northwesterly side of Washington Lane (fifty feet wide);
> thence extending from said point of beginning Southwestwardly along the said
> Northwesterly side of Washington Lane the distance of one hundred thirteen feet six and
> one-quarter inches to a point; thence extending Northwestwardly the distance of ninety-three
> feet one and three-eight inches to a point: thence extending Northeastwardly the distance of
> on hundred forty-six feet eleven and one-half inches more or less to a point on the said
> Southwesterly side of Germantown Avenue; thence extending Southeastwardly along the
> said Southwesterly side of Germantown the distance of ninety-nine feet ten and one-half
> inches to a point on the said Northwesterly side of Washington Lane, being the first
> mentioned point and place of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

> The boundary includes all the area historically associated with the Johnson House that
> retains integrity.

---

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Avi Decter, History Now

Telephone: 609/429-1903

Date: 2/3/97

Edited by: Kira Badamo
           National Historic Landmarks Survey
           National Park Service
           P.O. Box 37127, Suite 310
           Washington, DC 20013-7127

Telephone: 202/343-5279

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS SURVEY
February 13, 2004