

Lancaster

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I brought forward from childhood my repugnance to human slavery. I look to my father as the source of my strong feelings. When I was a lad of fourteen in 1789, I had occasion to observe my father act on his convictions.

He was then sitting magistrate in Wilmington, Delaware. A colored man was brought before him by a band of kidnappers, who wanted the man jailed, while they attended other business. Despite what the kidnappers considered the justice of their request, my father would have none of it. When they tried to carry their case through bluster, they were told, "If they did not behave themselves he would commit *them*."

I could not contain myself, and yelped in glee. Rather than admonishing me with a look, my father *winked* at me and declared the kidnap victim free. How could a child, after seeing his parent on occasion after occasion demonstrating the ease with which he pursued his convictions, not tread such a path? I would know no other.

I remember one occasion when my wife, Hannah, risked her health in a way I was never called upon to do. On evening we heard a tap at the window, and knew immediately what the sound meant. Our home was one of the first stations on the Underground Railroad east of Columbia. The fugitives had been sent to us by the Columbia colored merchant William Whipper. The fugitives were taken to the barn and in the morning were brought to the house separately where I asked each one his name, that of his master, and the new name he proposed to take. The answers Hannah recorded in a book that gradually swelled into quite a large volume. If we had reason to suspect their masters would come looking for them soon, we moved them on to Philadelphia or to Harrisburg. If possible, we found them work in the area. One poor soul was so weakened and unfocused he couldn't answer any questions. Hannah took charge of him. She administered to his wants and in a few days developed upon the surface of his body the unmistakable appearance of that loathsome disease: smallpox. For six weeks, until he was restored, she attended to him

faithfully, deeming it expedient that none other should have access to him. This she did for eighteen months.