



The Library Company OF PHILADELPHIA

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Jane Johnson Marker Dedication

Philadelphia: July 7, 2009 – On July 18, 1855, one hundred fifty-four years ago, Jane Johnson, an enslaved woman from North Carolina, found herself in Philadelphia on free soil for the first time. She seized the opportunity and fled to freedom with her two young sons Daniel and Isaiah, aided by William Still, the African American head of the Vigilance Committee of the local Underground Railroad, and Passmore Williamson, his white colleague. Johnson escaped from her owner, Colonel John H. Wheeler, while the party was on its way to New York to take ship for his post as American minister to Nicaragua.



"Rescue of Jane Johnson and Her Children." From: The Underground Railroad by William Still. Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872

A dramatic legal battle ensued with proslavery U.S. District Court judge John Kintzing Kane. Johnson was an active participant in the nearly three-month proceedings. Williamson's incarceration for contempt brought about national attention, and he was released in November of 1855. William Still and other defendants were acquitted of riot and assault and battery.

Johnson remained the center of a national whirlwind of publicity throughout her stay in Philadelphia, and she

made a significant contribution to the antislavery cause by speaking out with dignity and courage. After her tumultuous ordeal in Philadelphia, Johnson and her family settled in Boston.

Jane Johnson's stay in Philadelphia and her active participation in the legal battle that ensued after her escape set events in motion that continued to rage in Philadelphia as well as in the national press. Her escape was the focus of a hostile and precedent-setting legal case that inspired the antislavery cause while it further intensified North-South conflict.

On the anniversary of this historic event, the Library Company of Philadelphia will join the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in dedicating an official State Historical Marker commemorating the liberation of Jane Johnson. **The marker dedication ceremony will take place on Saturday, July 18, 2009 near the entrance of the Independence Seaport Museum at Penn's Landing, 211 South Columbus Blvd. and Walnut St. at 4:00 p.m.**

This event is open to the public free of charge. To register, phone 215-546-3181, or e-mail lpropst@librarycompany.org.

Background Information about the Library Company

The Library Company of Philadelphia is an independent research library concentrating on American history and culture from the 17th through 19th centuries. Free and open to the public, the Library Company houses an extensive non-circulating collection of rare books, manuscripts, broadsides, ephemera and works of art. The mission of the Library Company is to preserve, interpret, make available, and augment the valuable materials within our care. We serve a diverse constituency throughout Philadelphia and the nation, offering comprehensive reader services, an internationally renowned fellowship program, an online public access catalog, and regular exhibitions and public programs. Located at 1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, it is open to the public free of charge from 9:00 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Monday through Friday. The Library Company can be found online at www.librarycompany.org.

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