



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

CNY's Role in Black History is a Source of Pride

DAVID J. VALESKY February 12, 2010

Each February, we celebrate Black History Month and recognize the contributions that black men and women have made to the United States.

And each year, I am reminded of the great role that Central New York has played in this history. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this is the abolitionist movement in the 1800s.

After New York State abolished slavery in 1827, Central New York became an important cog in the abolitionist wheel. The area's proximity to Canada and location along the Erie Canal made it an significant stop in the Underground Railroad, and many self-liberated slaves passed through the area on their way to freedom.

Harriet Tubman, one of the Underground Railroad's most famous conductors, settled in Auburn, where she continued her abolition and suffrage efforts.

Gerrit Smith, from Peterboro, was a leader in the abolitionist movement, and drew famous historical figures like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth to Peterboro in Madison County.

Central New Yorkers made their opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law, passed in 1850, very clear. Protests and rallies, and even a famous jailbreak, happened throughout the region.

Because of the efforts of Central New York residents, thousands of people were granted freedom.

Today, we are still reminded of those efforts through museums in Cayuga and Madison Counties. If you haven't visited the Tubman House or the National Abolition Hall of Fame, I encourage you to do so.

When I visit, I am filled with a sense of hometown pride, knowing that the hard work of our forbearers had a positive effect on history. Even today, nearly two hundred years later, we see the fruits of their labor.

So, throughout February, as we celebrate important milestones in Black History, it is fitting to pause and reflect upon the sacrifices and commitment of these leaders in Central New York, and to be thankful for their efforts.