

John Brown's Philadelphia

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To listen to this tour, dial 215-399-9898. You will hear a brief introduction to Civil War Philadelphia; enter the tour stop number at the prompt.*

Introduction (stops 13-16):

This cell phone tour offers a look at the years preceding the Civil War, as the nation continued to break apart over slavery. The sites and stories featured tell the ways John Brown is connected to Philadelphia and how the City became an important indicator of the nation's fissures over slavery. Interestingly, this tour also reveals that the stories of the "rebels" in Pennsylvania; those individuals, in their fight against slavery and black social, legal and economic inequality, are pitted against the federal and local governments upholding the institution of slavery with the force of American law and the justice system.

With its deep roots simultaneously in abolition and pro-slavery and slaveholding, the Philadelphia region was divided over the issue of slavery from its earliest settlements. The divisions grew deeper and stronger as the Pennsylvania colony abolished slavery and the American nation was formed with slavery embedded in the Constitution and City served as the national Capitol. The City's industry, commerce and many of its wealthy families, by marriage and/or business connections, were rooted in the South's slave economy and the slave trade. At the same time, the abolition presence grew increasingly more visible as the City's free black community became the largest concentration in the North and established institutions that served as both as symbols of their freedom and independence, as well as vehicles for social action. Members of this community, along with many white abolitionists, like Lucretia and John Mott, created an effective Underground Railroad, and several of the City's anti-slavery organizations that were part of a network of alliances connected to John Brown.

By 1856 John Brown's presence loomed large in Philadelphia. At the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in June 1856, Robert Purvis, a wealthy black abolitionist, made a short extemporaneous speech full of fire, declaring himself a "Disunion Abolitionist" over the "crimes against Kansas" by pro-slavery forces. Fiery anti-slavery speeches could also be heard from the pulpits of sympathetic churches, where some fearful parishioners carried pistols to service as protection against possible attacks. Sometime during this period before the Harpers Ferry Raid, John Brown called on Philadelphia abolitionists, like artist David Bustill Bowser, wealthy caterer Thomas J. Dorsey and William Still, for advice and support in his war against slavery and for black equality.

With the Harpers Ferry Raid, deeper more widespread divisions occurred in Philadelphia, as abolitionists provided aid and support to John Brown's wife, Mary, and the City's black citizens draped their homes and businesses to honor "John Brown, the Martyr". On the day of the hanging, "Martyr Day", while two vigils were held to memorialize Brown,

the “good citizens” of Philadelphia began holding their own gatherings in support of the State of Virginia and the South. These divisions over John Brown were a harbinger of the coming Civil War and the way the region would be divided over it. For many abolitionists, including those who were heretofore non-violent, Brown laid a marker in the ground. Increasingly, they began to believe that the nation could only be purged of slavery by war.

Landmarks/Locations

- **Stop 17: Union League of Philadelphia**, 140 South Broad Street, Philadelphia
Founded in 1862 as a patriotic organization to support Lincoln and the Union cause, the Union League was made possible because of the deep anti-slavery belief of many of its early members. Among these men was James Miller McKim, who began lecturing for the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1836. Settling in Philadelphia around 1840, McKim was an ardent abolitionist, who worked actively in the Underground Railroad. In fact, he was on the receiving end of the crate containing Henry Box Brown, when it arrived at Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery headquarters, located at 107 North 5th Street. Although a Presbyterian minister by training, McKim frequently defended fugitive slaves brought before the Federal slave commissioner in Philadelphia. He and his wife, Sarah, attended the execution of John Brown and accompanied Brown's wife, Mary, in claiming his body, escorting it through Philadelphia to take it home to North Elba, New York. In 1863, McKim was a leader in the Union League's efforts in raising regiments of United States Colored Troops, trained at Camp William Penn just outside of Philadelphia.

- **Stop 18: National Hall**, 1222-24 Market Street, Philadelphia

Some structures from the pre-Civil War period in Philadelphia do not exist anymore. One of these is National Hall, which was located at 1222-24 Market Street. The building was converted in 1873 into the Olympia Theater and burned to the ground the following year. But, on Martyr Day, December 2, 1859, an integrated assembly of several hundred abolitionists, among them Lucretia Mott, Unitarian minister William Furness, and Robert Purvis, came together for a public prayer vigil for John Brown. Although the gathering was disrupted at times by pro-slavery sympathizers also in the audience, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* reported that “the meeting was a great success, making a new era in the progress of the cause.” However, this description did not ring entirely true to other facts. After Robert Purvis gave an impassioned speech in which he called John Brown “the Jesus of the 19th Century”, the police closed down the meeting.

The location at 12th and Market places this abolition gathering in the heart of the City's newer commercial and entertainment district.

- **Stop 19: Philadelphia-Wilmington-Baltimore (PWB) Train Station**, Broad and Washington, Philadelphia

In 1859 John Brown's body was brought north from Virginia on the PWB (Philadelphia-Wilmington-Baltimore) railroad, which was located at Broad and Prime, the pre-Civil

War name for Washington Avenue. Out of concern for a pro-Southern riot at the Station, Mayor Henry Wise and John Brown's widow, Mary, agreed to have this body secreted to another location and have an empty coffin greeted by the welcoming crowd in Philadelphia. The delegation meeting Mary Brown included Unitarian minister William Furness and members of Philadelphia's black community, who were "invisible" in many newspaper accounts of the time. Today, we do know that Philadelphian Amos Webber, whose story is recently told by historian Nick Salvatore in *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber*, was there and he described not only this event, but also the John Brown vigil at Shiloh Baptist Church in his Memory Books.

- **Stop 20: Walnut Street Wharf/Ferry**, foot of Walnut Street Bridge at Delaware Ave, Philadelphia

The Walnut Street Wharf was an active location providing an important outlet to goods, services and people to New Jersey and New York. It is the place from which Philadelphia's Underground Railroad helped unknown numbers of black freedom seekers, like Jane Johnson, flee to safety. It is fitting that the wharf, became the place where John Brown's body embarked from Philadelphia on to North Elba, New York. Today, the ferry still leaves at 5 p.m. ringing its bell, just as it did in John Brown's day. If you stop by, you will also see a historical marker for Jane Johnson, another dramatic abolition story that involved many of John Brown's Philadelphia supporters in 1855.

- **Stop 21: Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society Office**, 107 North Fifth Street

Starting in the 1830's anti-slavery organizations began to spring up across the North. In 1837 John and Lucretia Mott, along with others like James Miller McKim and wealthy black abolitionist Robert Purvis, established the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, to which they devoted major portions of their lives to for many years. These abolitionists engaged in what Daniel Webster contemptuously referred to as "*rub-a-dub agitation by hysterical women and illogical sentimentalists, fit only for little minds and fatuous disturbers*". What Daniels failed to understand is that these abolitionists were appealing to a power which rewrites constitutions to address injustice. John Brown further hardened their resolve. "...it is John Brown the moral hero; John Brown the noble confessor and martyr whom we honor, and whom we think it proper to honor in this day when men are carried away by the corrupt and pro-slavery clamor against him." – Lucretia Mott, Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society Meeting, 1860.

- **Stop 22: Pennsylvania Abolition Society**, Front Street below Chestnut Street

The first abolition society in the world, both old and new, did not take an activist stance for John Brown. It was not their way. A Quaker dominated organization, the Society tried to use the legal system to fight for black rights. However, it tended to focus on on-the-ground issues like education, employment, training, and very importantly the rescue of kidnapped blacks. Yet their "practical" agenda, attracted a diverse group of abolitionists, including many "radicals" supporting John Brown. In 1859, the

Pennsylvania Abolition Society was among a network of abolitionists, who employed various strategies and agendas to improve conditions for blacks.

Today, the Society is the only extant abolition society from the pre-Civil War period. It continues to work to improve conditions for blacks, addressing the legacy of slavery and racism in America.

Historic Churches

- **Stop 23: Mother Bethel**, 6th and Lombard, Philadelphia

The Harpers Ferry Raid created a dilemma for the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first African American denomination in the United States. Formed in 1816 with Richard Allen (Bethel's founder) as its first bishop, the denomination was born in protest against slavery and discrimination against blacks. The Philadelphia "mother" church found itself in a crisis. It was the largest black church in the City with seating for 2,500. Although sympathetic to John Brown, Mother Bethel rescinded its offer to host a vigil for Brown on Martyr Day on December 2, 1859 when rowdies threatened to burn down its own building worth \$60,000, and out of concern for reprisals against AME congregations in the South and other parts of the country. The AME church had more at risk than other local Philadelphia churches. By the early 1850's the church had spread throughout the Northeast, Midwest, Pacific coast, Canada, as well as into the slave states of Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, Louisiana, and South Carolina, where they were subject to reprisals by anti-Brown sympathizers. Instead, a vigil for Brown was hosted by Shiloh Baptist Church, where its pastor Jeremiah Asher criticized Mother Bethel's decision. What do you think?

- **Stop 24: First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia**, 10th and Locust, Philadelphia (original location)

By the 1850's the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia was known for its abolition leanings, particularly because of its fiery minister, Rev. William Furness. A leader in the City's abolition movement, Rev Furness' speeches were so impassioned that he and his congregation feared reprisals from southern sympathizers in the City. Several members of the church quietly armed themselves and watched over the pulpit on Sunday. A supporter of John Brown, who reached out to provide comfort and aid to Brown's wife, Furness was a prominent speaker at the Philadelphia "Martyr Day" (December 2, 1859) vigil at National Hall. Furness' zeal against the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law captured attention at one of President Buchanan's cabinet meetings, where consideration was given to indicting Furness for treason!

- **Stop 25: Shiloh Baptist**, 2040 Christian Street, Philadelphia (current location)

Like Richard Allen and Absalom Jones before him, the Rev. Jeremiah Asher was repulsed by the especially onerous symbol of white racism: the *negro* pew. Asher left the

white Baptist church in Hartford, Connecticut and helped organize black Baptist congregations first in Providence, Rhode Island and then in Philadelphia at Shiloh Baptist Church. Arriving in Philadelphia in 1849 and he began building the fledgling church and by 1859, the church boasted not only a solid core of members but also an extraordinary music program lead by Addison W. Lively and infused with the talents of classical singer Elizabeth Greenfield, the Black Swan. So on December 2, 1859 when the church hosted the vigil for John Brown, after Mother Bethel rescinded its offer to host out of fear of reprisals, the vigil program included not only Asher's impassioned words praising John Brown, but also the music of Shiloh's choir and the Black Swan. A largely black group, attendees paid tribute to John Brown and pledge continued support to his family. The following year, Shiloh held a tribute concert to John Brown, raising money for his family. In 1863, Jeremiah Asher went on to serve as chaplain for the USCT Sixth Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers trained at Camp William Penn, just outside of Philadelphia.

Shiloh Baptist today is in a Frank Furness historic church, which was formerly an Episcopal congregation. Frank Furness is the son the John Brown supporter, Unitarian minister William Furness.

Cemeteries

- **Stop 26: Eden Cemetery**, 1434 Springfield Road in Collingsdale, Pa
Opened in 1902, Eden is a historic black cemetery, just minutes from Philadelphia. The cemetery's memorial sections are named for Harriet Tubman, David Bustill Bowser and John Brown, representing the deep respect and esteem that black Philadelphia felt for these freedom fighters into the early 19th century.

Buried at Eden is Frances Harper Watkins, the black poet and writer. After the Harpers Ferry Raid, Frances Harper gave emotional support and comfort to Mary Brown during her husband's trial and execution. In a letter smuggled into John Brown's prison cell, Watkins wrote, "*In the name of the young girl sold from the warm clasp of a mother's arms to the clutches of a libertine or profligate,—in the name of the slave mother, her heart rocked to and fro by the agony of her mournful separations,—I thank you, that you have been brave enough to reach out your hands to the crushed and blighted of my race.*"

- **Stop 27: Laurel Hill Cemetery**, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA

Situated in one of the most romantic spots in Philadelphia overlooking Kelly Drive and the Schuylkill, Laurel Hill cemetery is the final resting place for a number of individuals connected to the John Brown story:

- **William Furness**, the passionate anti-slavery Unitarian minister, known for is many sermons against slavery and his support of Mary Brown. Furness met Mrs. Brown at the Board and Washington depot as she escorted her husband's body back to New York. Furness was one of the strong abolitionist voices at

the National Hall vigil at 12th and Market Streets on December 2, 1859, paying tribute to John Brown. Furness met Mrs. Brown at the Board and Washington train depot as she escorted her husband's body to North Elba, New York. His Unitarian Church at 10th and Locust was a target of pro-slavery demonstrators and oft times "ruffians", who hurled insults at his parishioners and more.

- **Hector Tyndale**, a Union League member after the Civil War, also reached out to help John Brown's wife, perhaps a gesture of chivalry. He attended the hanging and escorted Mrs. Brown back to Philadelphia. Tyndale, however, stated in the memoir and earlier that he had no knowledge of Brown, but was treated poorly and threatened because he reached out to help Brown's wife. (He was even shot at by an unseen assassin!)
- **Joseph G. Rosengarten**, a Northern eye-witness to the Harpers Ferry Raid, whose recorded memories provide descriptions of the political and social intrigue following the Raid: "*...a motley audience gathered together to hear the papers captured at John Brown's house ---the Kennedy Farm in Maryland Heights---read out with the Governor's running comments. The purpose of all this was plain enough. It was meant to serve as proof of knowledge and insight of the raid by prominent person and party leaders in the North. The most innocent notes and letters, commonplace newspaper paragraphs and printed cuttings, were distorted and twisted by the reading and by talking into clear instructions and positive plots.*"
- **Alexander Henry**, Mayor of Philadelphia at the time of the Harpers Ferry Raid. John Brown's body aroused a great deal of interest. In Philadelphia, a large crowd of people from both African-American abolitionist and proslavery communities turned out to meet the body upon its arrival in the city. The Mayor Henry, along with Mary Brown and her supporters, feared a riot might ensue, and decided to send an empty coffin to the local undertaker as a decoy so the container with Brown's body could make it to the Walnut Street wharf and continue its journey by boat to New York City.

- **Stop 28: Fair Hill Burial Ground**, 2900 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia

The Fair Hill Burial Ground was founded in 1703 on part of a grant of land of 16 acres given to the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) by George Fox, known as the founder of the religious group. Fox received the land from William Penn as a gift. The present burial ground was laid out in 1843 and enlarged in 1853, providing almost five acres of green space in an urban neighborhood along lower Germantown Avenue

Although most of the persons buried at Fair Hill are Quakers, many of them participated in the early abolitionist and women's rights movements. Some of the more famous

include Lucretia Mott, James Mott, Thomas and Mary Ann McClintock, Sarah Pugh, Ann Preston and Edward Parrish. Among those not Friends, include Robert Purvis and his family. Many of these individuals were John Brown supporters, particularly James and Lucretia Mott and Robert Purvis.

Fair Hill is on the National Register for Historic Places and is open for public visitation. It holds special events throughout the year.

Abolitionists

- **Stop 29: William Still**, 244 South 12th Street, Philadelphia

William Still is known as the principal field organizer and record-keeper of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, an arm of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. But, he was much more than that to John Brown, who saw in Still a potential supporter in his goal to bring the entire slavery institution to its knees.

John Brown was a man of many ideas and evolving plans. In 1858, after his success in eluding capture in Kansas, Brown expanded his idea for a “Subterranean Pass Way” (*an underground railroad*) that would run the length of the Appalachian chain to include a *militarized enclave* based in the mountains. This enclave would provide a haven for fugitives from all over the Deep South, as well as used to launch attacks against slaveholding. To gain support for this, he made visits to leading abolitionists in the East. Among them was William Still, as well as Frederick Douglas, whom Brown wanted to help with the recruitment of black volunteers and would serve as president of his provisional government. Still told Brown that his plan was not realistic, but remained sympathetic. William Still proved correct. Following the Harpers Ferry Raid, Still, at his post at the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery office, assisted Brown’s fleeing men, including Osborne Anderson, a Canadian free black, and put them on their way to Canada.

Mary Brown, John’s wife, is said to have stayed with the Still family at an earlier Still home that was on an ally-like street that no longer exists, Ronaldson’s Row (tucked between 9th and 10th just below South in the heart of the city’s black community). This location on South 12th Street, with a Pennsylvania historical marker, is a later Still family residence.

William Still conducted much of his Vigilance work out of the offices of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery office, located on North 5th Street.

- **Stop 30: Thomas Dorsey**, 1231 Locust Street, Philadelphia

The Philadelphia free black community had a number of families who were able to amass both wealth and influence that enabled them to support causes important to them. Among this small black elite was Thomas Dorsey, a man whose contemporaries considered “*the most prominent of Philadelphia’s high status caterers*”. Dorsey escaped

from slavery in Maryland and married a free woman from Pennsylvania, Louise Tobias. Dorsey was known and respected for his political awareness and his unyielding demand for respect. He pursued a number of businesses, including a boot and shoemaking business at 36 N. Sixth Street, before turning to catering. Few details survive of Thomas Dorsey's relationship with John Brown. It is only through his son, William H. Dorsey, an artist, whose records of Dorsey's American Negro Historical Society, provides brief fragments about this father's life. Within these records is a handwritten marginal note by William Dorsey that John Brown's wife, Mary, stayed with the Thomas Dorsey family as she awaited the fate of her husband.

Like others of their "station", the Dorseys lived in the heart of Philadelphia's pre-Civil War black community, even with their greater wealth and influence. Thomas Dorsey's life reflected the common pattern of leaders being born into slavery or having family members who were enslaved and also free persons. The legacy of slavery was personal and close. The fact that John Brown and his family had intimate ties with blacks, often living in black communities, created a bond that few other white abolitionists had.

Thomas Dorsey ran his catering business out of 1231 Locust Street.

- **Stop 31: Robert Purvis**, 1601 Mt. Vernon Street, Philadelphia

His obituary in the *New York Times* in 1898 called him the "*President of the Underground Railroad*". For a long period of time his house on Lombard Street was a well-known station, where his horses and carriages and he himself were ever at the service of freedom seekers. But Purvis was much more. The son of a wealthy white cotton merchant and a mulatto mother, Purvis took pride in his African ancestry and often spoke of the influence of his grandmother, a full blooded-African, in shaping his personal identity. With a complexion that often had him mistaken as a white person, Purvis chose to live his life as a black man in Philadelphia's black community and to causes fighting injustice. His mentor and idol was James Forten, the wealthy black sail maker; his wife Harriet Forten, James' daughter. Purvis used his own wealth for the causes he fought for and was among the more radical and uncompromising. In support of John Brown actions in Kansas in 1856, Purvis declared himself to be a "*Disunion Abolitionist*" and castigated the "*abject servility of the North*" in refusing to stand up to the slave-owning South. Known for his great rhetorical abilities, Purvis' passion was in full form on December 2, 1859 when he took the podium at the National Hall vigil for John Brown and called him "*the great apostle of liberty and the Jesus of the 19th Century...the cowards of Virginia have sowed the winds, to gather in the coming wrath of God, the whirlwind.*" Like many abolitionists, further radicalized by Harpers Ferry, Purvis came to believe that war was the only solution to removing slavery.

1601 Mt Vernon Street is Purvis' last home. A portrait of John Brown, which he acquired shortly after Harpers Ferry, hung in the dining room here.

- **Stop 32: David Bustill Bowser**, 841 N. 4th Street, Philadelphia (Third and Green)

John Brown developed many personal connections in Philadelphia, as he sought out support and counsel within the black community and among abolitionists. Among his contacts is David Bustill Bowser, a self-taught black artist, ardent black civil rights activist and a descendent of one of Philadelphia's early free black founding families. Bowser lived here at 841 N. 4th Street (Third and Green Streets). Bowser hosted Brown in his home sometime after the Kansas wars and before the Harpers Ferry Raid. The particulars of their relationship have not been found in archival records so far. However, we do know is that during this time John Brown began seeking support to wage a larger attack against slavery to create new free settlements for blacks in Canada. It is highly probably that he sought out Bowser, since his family had many deep connections in the national and international abolition communities, as well as an economic status that gave them some ability to support various causes. On December 2, 1859, Bowser attended the Shiloh Baptist vigil for John Brown. In 1860, Bowser created a memorial portrait of John Brown, which is likely the first such artwork produced in his memory by an African American. Today this portrait is held in the collections of the Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia.

- **Stop 33: Lucretia Mott**, 5th & Arch Streets, Philadelphia (Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society)

After the Harpers Ferry Raid, Robert Purvis called Lucretia Mott "*the most belligerent non-resistant he ever saw.*" Although small in stature, Mott was perhaps the most influential woman abolitionist of her time. She is also called America's first feminist and stood strong in her support of John Brown. *I accept the character he (Purvis) gives me; and I glory in it. I have no idea, because I am a non-resistant, of submitting tamely to injustice inflicted either on me or on the slave. I will oppose it with all the moral powers with which I am endowed. I am no advocate of passivity. Quakerism, as I understand it, does not mean quietism. The early Friends were agitators; disturbers of the peace; and were more obnoxious in their day to charges, which are now so freely made, than we are.*

Mott and her husband, John, hosted Mary Brown in their home, as Mary waited for her husband's fate to be decided. On December 2, 1859 Lucretia was among the 4,000 people at the National Hall vigil, which roused concern among the "good" citizens of Philadelphia, supporting the State of Virginia. It was understandable to them that Philadelphia blacks would show support for John Brown, but "*that placid and pleasant looking white women and white men should display any other emotion than loathing and terror at a conspiracy for butchery and devastation*" was beyond comprehension.

Here at 5th and Arch Streets stood the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, and interracial group founded by Lucretia Mott in 1833.

- **Stop 34: Lucretia Mott**, PA Rt 611 North of Cheltenham Avenue, Elkins Park
Lucretia Mott and her husband James moved from downtown Philadelphia to "Roadside" in 1857. It is at this home, where they provided support to John Brown's wife, Mary.

Four years after his hanging, the Motts and their home get connected to John Brown in another way. Following the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, which provided for the mustering of United States Colored Troops, Lucretia donates her property to be used as a training ground for the black troops. Thus Camp William Penn is created! Nearly 11,000 men were trained, including Shiloh's Rev. Jeremiah Asher, the chaplain of the 6th Regiment. The favorite marching song of the USCT was *John Brown's Body*.

(sing) *John Brown's body lies a-mold'ring in the grave. John Brown's body lies a-mold'ring in the grave. John Brown's body lies a-mold'ring in the grave. His soul goes marching on!*

Museum/Archives

Visit one of the Philadelphia's premier museum and special collection for further research, study or just contemplation.

- **Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia**, South 7th S Street, Philadelphia
- **Historical Society of Pennsylvania**, 1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia
- **Charles L. Blockson Collection**, Temple University Libraries, Sullivan Hall, 1330 W. Berks Street, Philadelphia
- **African American Museum of Philadelphia**, 701 Arch Street, Philadelphia
- **National Archives at Philadelphia**, entrance on Chestnut Street between 9th and 10th, Philadelphia
- **Library Company of Philadelphia**, 1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia
- **Friends Historical Library**, Swarthmore College, 500 College Avenue, Swarthmore, Pa.
- **Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art**, 128 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia
- **Rosenbach Museum and Library**, 2010 DeLancey Place, Philadelphia