

A STATION ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD,
THE M'CLINTOCK HOUSE, WATERLOO, NEW YORK

Thomas M'Clintock and Mary Ann M'Clintock and their two oldest daughters, Elizabeth M'Clintock and Mary Ann M'Clintock, were active Quaker abolitionists and supporters of the Underground Railroad during the time they lived in Waterloo, N.Y., from 1836-1856. They were also major organizers of the first woman's rights convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y., in 1848. As abolitionists, they signed antislavery petitions; served as officers in local, regional, and national antislavery societies; wrote letters to national antislavery newspapers; organized antislavery fairs; hosted major antislavery lecturers; and used their home as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

After the rescue of William "Jerry" Henry in Syracuse in October 1851, Rev. Jermain Loguen, AME Zion minister, long-time Syracuse resident, outspoken opponent of the Fugitive Slave Act, and a freedom seeker himself, fled to Canada to escape prosecution. On the way, he stayed with the M'Clintocks. A visitor that night, Thomas Mumford, former editor of the Seneca County Courier, and friend of the M'Clintock family later reported that Loguen "was a man of noble countenance and gigantic stature, well armed, and determined to die rather than be re-enslaved. He was apprehensive and wakeful, walking in his room during most of the night, and if his pursuers had come, the house of a man of peace would have been the scene of a deadly struggle."¹

Waterloo's first antislavery society was organized in December 1836, as soon as Thomas M'Clintock moved to Waterloo. Very quickly, however, the M'Clintocks connected local organizing with regional and national antislavery activity. Waterloo sent more antislavery petitions to Congress than all but one other township in upstate New York, and the M'Clintocks participated fully in this campaign. In March, 1838, Thomas M'Clintock and his son, Charles, supported a petition to remove the "foul blot" of slavery by the prohibition of "this inhuman traffic between the states." In 1839, for example, Waterloo sent twelve antislavery petitions, and the M'Clintocks generated two of them. Mary Ann M'Clintock and Elizabeth W. M'Clintock signed first. Farther down the list, daughters Mary Ann and Sarah M'Clintock signed, noting their ages (sixteen and fourteen). . . In the 1850 Federal census, the M'Clintock household included two African Americans, eight-year-old S. L. Freeman and seventeen-year-old Mary Jackson. Mary Jackson's father, Thomas Jackson was a delegate to the Convention of Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York in 1840.²

The following spring, Thomas M'Clintock and his brother-in-law, Richard P. Hunt, sent William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the antislavery newspaper, The Liberator, a practical gift, four yards of "super olive mixed" woolen cloth, made in the Waterloo Woolen Mills, "free from the taint of slavery." Garrison planned to wear his new "free suit" on his forthcoming trip to the World Anti-slavery Convention in London, and he praised M'Clintock lavishly: "You have a soul capable of embracing the largest idea of humanity. . . . I regard you as one of those whose countrymen are all the rational creatures of God, whether they are found on 'Greenland's icy mountains,' or on 'India's coral strand'--whether their complexion be white, red, or any other color--whether they are civilized or savage, christians or heathens, elevated in point of intelligence and power, or sunken in degradation and helplessness. When this spirit shall universally prevail among men, there will be no more wars, no more slavery, no more injustice. Then will be held the jubilee of the human race; and every thing that hath breath shall praise the name of the Lord."³

In the 1840s, the M'Clintocks threw themselves wholeheartedly into antislavery activities. In August 1842, Thomas M'Clintock accompanied noted Garrisonian abolitionist lecturers Abby Kelley and Frederick Douglass on a speaking tour across New York State.⁴ In the fall, at a meeting attended by Thomas, Mary Ann, and daughter Mary Ann M'Clintock, Western New York members of the American Anti-Slavery Society organized the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, and Thomas M'Clintock was elected to the Executive Committee. In November 1842, five Quaker women, including Mary Ann M'Clintock, organized an antislavery fair. The M'Clintocks organized antislavery fairs for many years. It was this group that helped to convince Frederick Douglass to move to Rochester in 1847 to publish the North Star.⁵

Work in upstate New York drew them into national antislavery activities. In May 1843, the M'Clintocks attended the anniversary meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York City. Thomas M'Clintock joined the Board of Managers of the American Anti-Slavery Society, a position he retained for five years; in 1848, he became a Vice-President.⁶ The M'Clintocks also offered their home as a regular stop for both black and white antislavery agents such as Abby Kelley, Frederick Douglass, C. C. Burleigh, William C. Nell, and William Lloyd Garrison.⁷

Abolitionist activities entailed an economic cost. Thomas M'Clintock's business suffered, and a one-time opponent noted that "he was really an object of dread to us," and that "an insulting effigy was once attached to his sign." When townspeople objected to M'Clintock's theological views, M'Clintock thanked them but noted "I was trained up to obey the monitions of the spirit, and be true to my best light. . . . I must speak the truth, and abide the consequences."⁸

In every way, the M'Clintock family organized their lives around ideals of equality. They worked not only to end slavery but to create a world where people would be respected no matter what their race, sex, or condition. Thomas M'Clintock advertised that all the goods he sold in his store were "free from the labor of slaves."⁹ One visitor remembered that "famous and friendless guests often sat together there, and colors and creeds were alike forgotten."¹⁰ In 1840, in an article in the National Anti-Slavery Standard, M'Clintock explained his own vision. "Religion," he argued, "has been emphatically embodied, not in speculative theories, but in practical righteousness, in active virtues, in reverence to God, in benevolence to man--the latter being the only sure test of the former." "Where much is given," he advised, "much is required. We are all stewards of the grace of God. We must use our talents for "the renovation of the world."¹¹

¹ [Thomas Mumford], "Thomas M'Clintock," The Christian Register March 25, 1876; Thomas J. Mumford and Samuel J. Barrows, The Life and letters of Thomas J. Mumford, with special memorial tributes (Boston: G E Ellis, 1879). Mumford was a Unitarian minister, and editor of the Christian Register, who eulogized Thomas M'Clintock. Mumford's acquaintance with the M'Clintock Family dates from the late 1840's when, as a young man, they influenced his conversion from a pro-slavery Episcopalian to an anti-slavery Unitarian and introduced him to Syracuse Unitarian minister and abolitionist Samuel J. May. Thanks to Christopher Densmore for locating this information.

²Petitions dated February 4,10, and 18, 1839, National Archives, HR25-H1.8; The Colored American, 12 September 1840.

³William Lloyd Garrison to Richard P. Hunt, May 1, 1840, Lewis Ruchames, ed. Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Vol. II: A House Dividing Against Itself (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971): 594-595; Garrison to Thomas M'Clintock, May 1, 1840, Neeley Collection, WRNHP.

⁴List of agents in the Liberator, June 3, 1842; Liberator, August 12, 1842.

⁵Hewitt, Nancy. Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 2000), 108; Liberator, February 3, 1843; Liberator, January 5, 1843; Seneca Observer, October 3, 1843.

⁶Dorothy Sterling, Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Antislavery (New York: (W.W. Norton, 1994), 169; report on the May meeting from the New York Express, reprinted in the Liberator, May 19, 1843; report from the National Anti-Slavery Standard, printed in the Liberator, May 26, 1843; Densmore and Wellman, "The M'Clintock Family," American National Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷ Thomas M'Clintock to Isaac Post, September 28, 1839, Post Family Papers, UR; M'Clintock to Garrison, October 1, 1847, Garrison Papers, BPL.

⁸[Thomas Mumford], "Thomas M'Clintock," The Christian Register March 25, 1876; Stebbins, Upward Steps of Seventy Years, 70-71; Seneca County Reveille, July 7, 1856.

⁹Seneca Observer, December 15, 1836, quoted in John E. Becker, A History of the Village of Waterloo, New York (Waterloo, New York: Waterloo Library and Historical Society, 1949), 135.

¹⁰[Thomas Mumford], "Thomas M'Clintock," The Christian Register, March 25, 1876.

¹¹Thomas M'Clintock "To the Association of Friends for advocating the cause of the slave, and improving the condition of the Free People of Color," Waterloo, May 9, 1840, reprinted in National Anti-Slavery Standard, July 16, 1840; M'Clintock to the Editors of the National A.S. Standard, Waterloo, July 23, 1840.

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