

William "Jerry" Henry's Escape

The great Daniel Webster came to Syracuse in May of 1851 and threatened enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law during the next anti-slavery convention in Syracuse. He had his chance five months later during an anti-slavery convention.

Around noon on October 1, federal marshals from Rochester, Auburn, Syracuse, and Canandaigua, accompanied by the local police, arrested William "Jerry" Henry. Jerry was working as a barrel maker, and was arrested at his Syracuse, NY workplace. He was originally told the charge was theft until after he was in manacles. On being informed that he was being arrested under the Fugitive Slave Law, he put up substantial resistance, but was subdued.

Word of the arrest quickly reached the Convention, then in session at a nearby church. There are reports that the wife of Commissioner Sabine, who would hear the case, had already leaked plans of the arrest.

"Fellow citizens! We are here in the most extraordinary circumstances," [ex-slave Samuel Ward](#), the man Frederick Douglas called "the ablest man the country has ever produced," told a gathering at an October 1, 1851 gathering in Clinton Square of Syracuse. "We are witnessing such a sight as, I pray, we may never look upon again. A man in chains, in Syracuse! ...

"We have arrested him, confined him and chained him on purpose to inflict upon him the curses of slavery. They say he is a slave. What a term to apply to an American! How does this sound beneath the pole of liberty and the flag of freedom?

Ward told the residents they were responsible, in part, for the existence of the Fugitive Slave Law because they elected the men who made it law. He asked the crowd: "Do you promise, so help you God, so to vote, as that your sanction never more shall be given to laws which empower persons to hunt, chain and cage men in our midst?"



By pre-arranged signal, church bells began ringing, and a crowd of Negroes and Whites gathered at Sabine's office, where Jerry had been taken for arraignment. An immediate effort to free the prisoner was unsuccessful, and though he escaped to the street in irons,

he was rapidly recaptured. The arraignment was put off until evening and relocated to a larger room. A large crowd gathered in the street, this time equipped for a more serious rescue attempt.

With a battering ram the door was broken in and despite pistol shots out the window by one of the deputy marshals, it became clear that the crowd was too large and determined to be resisted. The crowd broke into the jail and forced the marshals to free William "Jerry" Henry. One deputy marshal broke his arm jumping from a window to escape the crowd. The injured prisoner was hidden in the city for several days in the home of a local butcher known for his anti-abolitionist sentiments.

The Rev. (and later Bishop of the AMEZ church) [Jermain Wesley Loguen](#) and Sam May of Syracuse helped organize the escape of Jerry's escape who was taken in a wagon to the home of William Lyman Salmon in Oswego, from which he crossed Lake Ontario into Canada. Later Loguen was indicted and escaped to Canada until tensions in Syracuse eased. It is interesting to note that William Seward (former New York governor, later US Senator and of the Seward's folly fame) signed the bail bond for those indicted in the Rescuers of Jerry Henry (he was not present for the rescue).

reference: [Pettit](#); [Loguen](#); [Jerry rescue](#);

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