

Site of Morgan Freeman Barbership (after 1857) and of Hornbeck, Waire, and Swarts Barbershops later in the century.

Site of William Hosmer's *Northern Independent* newspaper (after 1856).

111-117 Genesee Street

Auburn, New York

Significance: One of most important Underground Railroad sites in Auburn; important African American business site from 1857 through early twentieth century; important reform/abolitionist newspaper published here



June 2005

Looking northeast

Beginning in 1856, the building that stood on the site of the current First Niagara Bank building was occupied by William Hosmer and the offices of the *Northern Independent*. Beginning in 1857, a succession of African American barbers had their shops in this building and its successor, a Richardsonian Romanesque structure. In 1857, following the movement of Auburn's business district west along Genesee Street, Morgan "Luke" Freeman moved his barbershop from the corner of Cumpston Lane and South Street to this site. Morgan Freeman died in 1863, and his obituary noted that he had kept an Underground Railroad station for 29 years. Probably this barbershop was a key anchor for that station.

Morgan Freeman suffered a stroke in 1859, and Burget Freeman took over his shop. It was here, in B. C. Freeman's "shaving saloon," that African American men in Auburn organized the Auburn Suffrage Club in October 1860. As reported by the local newspaper:

The colored people of Auburn held a meeting last evening to consider the propriety of forming a club to attend to the suffrage question at the polls. They desired to enjoy the

Sites Relating to the Underground Railroad, Abolitionism, African American Life

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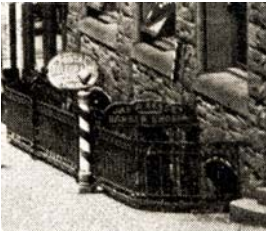
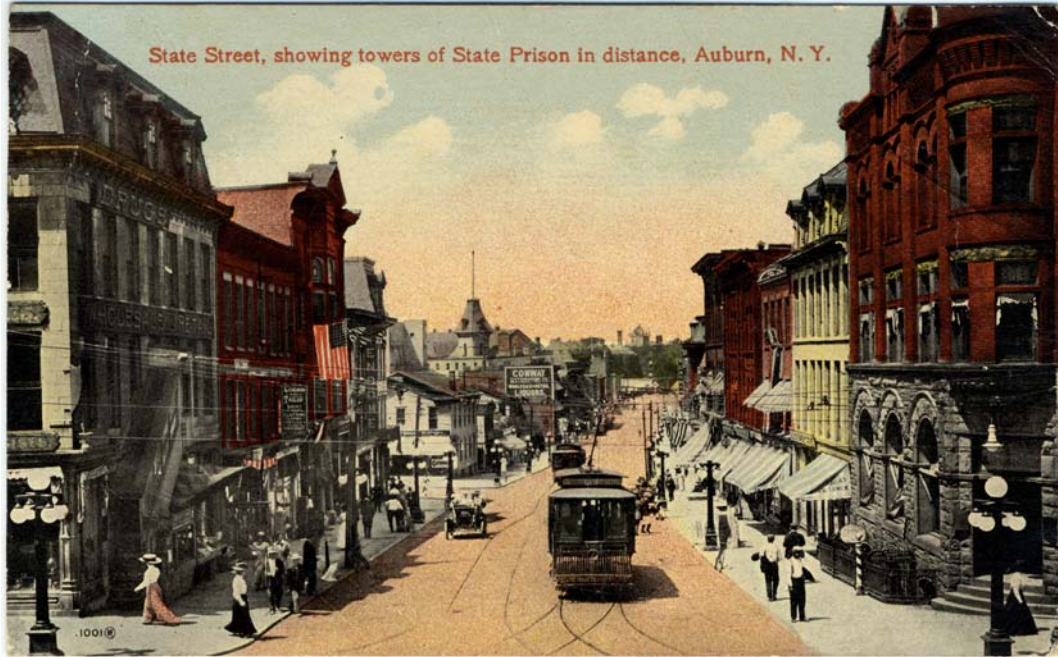
Coordinated by Historical New York Research Associates

2004-05

elective franchise; and they know that they are dependent on white men to give it to them—They will attend at the several polls in the city on election day, and distribute tickets “for the amendment of the constitutions.”¹ John Stuard (Stewart), Harriet Tubman’s brother, was elected treasurer of the new organization, and B.C. Freeman was secretary.

African American barbers continued to maintain their businesses at this site into the twentieth century, including John Hornbeck, John Waire, and George Swarts. For many years, Anthony Shimer, the jeweler with whom Harriet Tubman and her brother John Stewart were involved in a gold scheme in 1873, had his store in this building.

¹ The *Auburn Daily Advertiser* noted that the “old and popular barber of Auburn” suffered a severe attack of paralysis yesterday.” His “entire right side was rendered useless.” July 26, 1859. Unknown newspaper, October 30, 1860. Thanks to Anthony Gero for finding this.



State and Genesee Streets, Looking East
 Barber pole at corner of bank on SE corner.
 1890-1910

The building on the right replaced an earlier building on this site. Note the barber pole on State Street. Photo found by Bill Hecht.