

The 1851 Recapture and Trial of Harrison: a compilation of accounts between 1851 and 1944  
By Douglas H. Shepard, 2014

On 12 or 13 January 1851, a 19-year-old slave named Harrison (later called Harrison **Williams** and in at least one account called William **Harrison**) ran away from his owner Dr. N. D. **Parran (Parren, Parrin, Parron)** of Hardy County, Virginia. He eventually found refuge at the home of William **Storum**, an African American farmer in the Town of Busti, Chautauqua County, New York. On 30 September 1851, a group of slave-catchers from Virginia kidnapped Harrison and rushed him to Buffalo, where his case was tried in Federal Court the next day. By 2 October, he was on a train heading back to Virginia in the custody of a U. S. Marshal. On that day, the trial record reputedly appeared in the Buffalo *Commercial Advertiser*.

On October 2, 1851, the following appeared in the *New York Times*:

Latest Intelligence. By Telegraph to the *New York Times*. Fugitive Slave Case. Buffalo, Wednesday, Oct. 1. A Fugitive Slave, named Harrison, from Virginia, was arrested yesterday near Dunkirk, and brought to this city. He is now in jail, and will be examined before the Commissioner at 2 o'clock, P.M. Four others, against whom warrants had been issued, have escaped to Canada.

Id Dispatch. Buffalo, Oct. 1 – 7 ½ P.M. After a brief hearing in the case of Harrison, Commissioner **Smith** decided that the boy was a fugitive slave, and that he would make out an order for his return. He was then ironed and taken to jail.

The Court-house was crowded with excited citizens who made a show of resistance, but after some slight skirmishing within and without the Court-House, Harrison was safely lodged in jail. He is a mulatto, about 19 years of age. When about being removed from the Court-house he said, "I would rather die than return to slavery."

The Hon. Seth C. **Hawley** and H. S. **Love**, Esq., appeared for the fugitive, and James M. **Smith**, Esq. for the claimant.

The claimant of Harrison is Doctor **Parron**, of Hardy County, Virginia.

To prevent the escape or rescue of the prisoner, he was hand-cuffed and delivered in charge of a Buffalo constable named **Cambest**.

Another Dispatch. Buffalo, Wednesday, Oct. 1. Seth C. **Hawley** defended the prisoner; the principal objection that he raised, was that the affidavit on which the warrant was issued did not state that Harrison escaped from Virginia, or any other place, but simply that he escaped. This point was overruled.

Neither of the other four fugitives for whom warrants are issued have been arrested.

On October 3, 1851 the Buffalo NY *Daily Courier*, which described itself as a Democratic newspaper, printed the following editorial account of the capture, based upon a letter of September 30 from a Jamestown NY subscriber:

"Arrest of the Fugitive Slave at Jamestown.

"[We are indebted to an intelligent friend at Jamestown for the following particulars relative to the arrest of Harrison.—Ed. Courier.]

"Jamestown, N.Y., Sep.30, 1851.

“Ed. ‘Courier:’ —Deputy Marshal **Gates** of your city, assisted by officer **Best** and others, this morning arrested a Fugitive Slave in the town of Busti, five miles south of this village, the property of a Virginia planter whose name I have not been able to learn. The slave is a boy about eighteen years of age and has been living in Busti since last fall. The arrest was made without excitement in the neighborhood where he was taken, and although an attempt was made by an abolition lecturer in our streets, at the time of their passing through this place, to “raise a muss,” it was “no go.” Our citizens evince an unmistakeable [*sic*] determination to abide by the law, as was manifest by the shouts of laughter with which they received the harrangue [*sic*] of the excited individual who seemed so anxious to have our citizens show fight.

“The slave is to be taken before Commissioner **Smith** of your city for examination.

“Yours, &c.,

“A Subscriber”

Also on October 3, 1851, the following editorial appeared in the Jamestown *Journal*:

#### “Seizure of a Negro Boy – A Hard Case

“On Tuesday morning last our citizens were thrown into a state of considerable excitement by the passage through the village of three carriages containing a strong guard of armed men and an alleged fugitive from Slavery in the State of Virginia. The facts as we learned them were that the person in custody was a colored boy by the name of Harrison, about 17 years of age, who arrived in the adjoining town of Busti about seven or eight months since. For most if not all of this time he has been at work for Mr. Lewis **Clark** of that town, and proved an honest and industrious boy. Early on Tuesday morning, as he was engaged in milking, the party of men above named drove up, pounced upon him without process, bound him with chains, and drove off. The whole transaction was conducted with so much rapidity, that no opportunity was given for alarm, and the party proceeded without molestation. No halt was made here, but we learn that they proceeded to Dunkirk, and from thence by boat to Buffalo. Who the claimant or agent is, or by whose warrant the boy was seized, or before whom he is to be ‘examined,’ we have been unable to learn. Certain humane gentlemen followed the captors to see that if the boy should be remanded into slavery, it be done legally, and these are all the particulars of the affair that we possess. For an observance of legal forms, trust must be placed in the captors.

“Whether we look upon this seizure as a successful operation of the Fugitive Slave Act, or as an instance of the loyalty of the people in submitting to its execution, it is a hard case. To see a young boy isolated from kindred and without paternal home, endeavoring to earn his bread by honest industry, roughly seized without process by a party of armed men, manacled and smuggled away before a foreign tribunal, with no right to establish his freedom if he is free, nor offer any evidence in self-defence [*sic*], appears to our Republican senses as a sad falling off from the practice of human justice, and a perversion of the Common Law. The proceeding was doubtless conducted according to the provisions of the Act, and as ‘nominated in the bond,’ and all those who were its instruments, in the eyes of the law, ‘All, all honorable men;’ but, if there is one stain upon our national fame more foul than another, that Act is the one; and if there is a degradation lower than man in his frailty ordinarily sinks, the persons, the things, who for money voluntarily become agents in the seizure and enslavement of persons having every natural right to be Free, are the ones who find it. We are glad to state that none of our officers aided in the above seizure, and that one who was applied to, very promptly declined.

“We claim to be, and are, law-abiding citizens, and shall probably loyally observe all enactments that are by the constitutional authorities declared to be constitutional; but we reserve to ourselves the right to think and speak of them according to the dictates of our sympathies and our judgments. Thus we have done, and thus we shall always do.”

Also on October 3, 1851, the following account appeared in the *Buffalo Morning Express*, a newspaper which supported the anti-slavery Whig party and was condemnatory of the recently enacted Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, under which Harrison was tried.

“Illustration of the Fugitive Slave Law

“On Saturday evening last H. K. **Smith**, U.S. Commissioner, issued as we are informed five warrants for as many persons claimed to be fugitive slaves. One of the victims was arrested in the town of Busti, Chautauque county, and brought before the Commissioner at the Court House Wednesday at two o’clock. Mr. James M. **Smith** partner of the Hon. Solomon G. **Hayes**, appeared for the claimant, and Harlow S. **Love**, Benjamin F. **Green**, and Seth C. **Hawley** appeared as counsel for the party arrested.

“The first move by the counsel for the claimant was to call a witness on the part of the claimant, to prove the identity of the party arrested.

“The counsel for the defendant here asked the court to request the counsel for the claimant to state or elect whether he intended to proceed under the 10<sup>th</sup> section [of the Fugitive Slave Law], relying on a record from the Virginia court to establish the fact that the defendant was a slave and had escaped, or under the 6<sup>th</sup> section, where they must establish those points by oral proof. This course was necessary and proper to enable the court to decide whether the proof that should be offered was admissible and pertinent, inasmuch as the testimony which would be applicable and proper under one of the sections would be neither pertinent nor proper under the other.

“The Commissioner, very much to the surprise of legal men, refused to require the claimant to make such election and said he might go on and offer evidence under one or the other, or both — This rendered it very difficult to separate the testimony — the pertinent and legal, from that which was not.

“The counsel for the defendant said, that under the peculiar circumstances, he felt called upon to take some exceptions to the record under the 10<sup>th</sup> section, which it was presumed the claimant would offer in the course of the proceedings before it was offered in evidence, because if the record was insufficient and inadmissible, the testimony of identity of the defendant with the person described therein, would be irrelevant and inadmissible. Therefore, for the purpose of showing that this testimony of identity was not admissible, it was objected to the record.

“1<sup>st</sup>. That it did not show on its face nor allege that the court which made it was a Court of Record — the 10<sup>th</sup> section only authorizing a Court of Record or an officer of such court to make such a record, it being improper to assume without evidence that it was a record *of a Court of Record*.

“2d. It was required by law in this State, that the exemplification of a record, should set forth that it was a copy of a record, and *of the whole thereof*. This was necessary, because a part of a record would prove one state of facts, while the whole of it would prove another, and different state of facts — and without this precaution, a partial record, true as far as it went, might be reverted [?] to produce an effect opposite to the whole facts of a case.

“The Commissioner decided that the exemplification was in due form under the law of Congress, and the record sufficient.

“3d. That the Record if introduced did not show that the man described in it, owed service and labor to the claimant, nor that he had escaped from a State where he owed such service into another, and that without those points were established by the Record, it was a mere piece of waste paper without legal effect, and therefore all oral testimony of identity was irrelevant and inadmissible.

“The Commissioner reserved for the present his decision upon the point, whether the Record did establish those points, but said the witness might be sworn upon the question of identity and upon all the other points. The counsel for defendant claimed that the claimant should make out the fact that the man was a slave, and the fact that he escaped, by the Record wholly under the 10<sup>th</sup> Section, or by other proof without the Record under the 6<sup>th</sup> Section. Because it was not competent to aid the Record by oral proof if it was defective on those points — nor to aid the oral proof under the 6<sup>th</sup> Section by the Record where it was defective.

“The Commissioner ruled otherwise and drove the case along pell-mell, the two distinct processes being all mixed up together, so that a lawyer could not tell exactly what testimony was, and what was not pertinent, any more than the Commissioner could himself.

“The claimant then called George S. **Neff** as a witness, who said, I have lived in Hardy County, Virginia, all my life, some 38 years, am a farmer, know Dr. Nathaniel D. **Parren**, (the claimant) who lives in Hardy County on the South Fork, a stream that empties into the Potomac. He is my neighbor and a practicing physician. I know the boy Harrison (the defendant) and have known him since he was about two years old — some 17 years. He has always lived with the Doctor (the claimant) he got him by his wife. The Doctor has hired him out to work. I have hired him of the Doctor. I have known him to exercise acts of ownership on Harrison in his presence, without any denial by Harrison of his right as master.

“The questions which elicited this testimony were all objected to by the counsel for Harrison on the ground that the testimony was irrelevant. The rule being that facts proved to be pertinent should be of a character inconsistent with Harrison being a free man and all these facts are just as consistent with his being a free man as a slave. The objection was over ruled and the testimony admitted. The counsel for claimant then asked the witness if Harrison was the slave of the claimant!

“To this the counsel for Harrison objected because the question whether Harrison was a slave was a conclusion of law to be determined by the commissioner — and could not be sworn to by a witness for the best of reasons that he could not possibly know. That facts from which the officer could draw that conclusion were competent, but not the conclusion itself.

“The commissioner decided that it was competent to prove a conclusion of law by a witness, and overruled the objection. The question was put and answered in the affirmative, in the following language:

“Yes, he is the slave of Nathaniel D. **Perren**.

“About the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> of January last, I went to stay with a sick friend. My wife sent for me thinking my slave was preparing to run away; on my way home, I met Doctor **Parren**, who was in pursuit of his negro who had run away, as he said. I never saw Harrison there afterwards. The next time I saw him was when we arrested him in Chautauque county. This closed the examination of the witness by the commissioner. There was no cross examination. The claimant’s counsel said he had no more witnesses.

“The counsel for claimant then read the record in evidence, (the commissioner having decided as above set forth that it was competent,) in the words and figures following:

“*State of Virginia to wit:*

“Among the records and proceedings of the County Court of Hardy County, is the following:

“At a Court summoned and held for the County of Hardy, at the Court House thereof, on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of September 1851, pursuant to the provision of the act of the General Assembly of Virginia, passed the 21<sup>st</sup> day of March, 1851, to hear proofs of the escape of Harrison, a slave, the property of Doctor Nathaniel D. **Parren**, of said County, and that the said Harrison owed service and labor as a slave to him, the said **Parren**.

“Present,—Thomas **Massalon**, and Joel W. **Hallen**. Gentlemen Justices, the Court order is to be entered on record, that satisfactory proof on oath has been made before them; that said Harrison escaped *from his owner*, the said Nathaniel D. **Parren**, on the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> day of January last; and that he owed service and labor as a slave to the said owner; that said slave was about 19 years of age, mulatto color, with a scar on his left cheek, bushy head; his front teeth some distance from each other; about five feet six inches high; heavy set and having large feet. Ordered that the Court adjourn.

“{Signed by the Justices}

“I, James C. **Gamble**, Clerk of the County Court of said County of Hardy, in the State of Virginia, certify that the foregoing is a true transcript of the records of said Court. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand, and affixed the seal of the said Court, the 22d day of September [L.a] 1851, and of the seventy sixth year of the Commonwealth.

“James C. **Gambel**.

“I, John **Hopewell**, Presiding Magistrate of the County Court of Hardy County, in the State of Virginia, certify that James C. **Gambel**, who has given the above certificate, is the Clerk of the said Court, and this attestation is in due form.

“Given under my hand and seal, the 22d day of September, 1851

“John **Hopewell**. [L.a]

“The counsel for claimant rested his case upon the record and the testimony of the witness.

“In order that the reader may get a clear understanding of the points in this case, it is necessary to give the clause of the Constitution which the fugitive slave law is intended to carry out. It is the 3d division of the 2d section of article 4<sup>th</sup> and reads as follows:

“No person held to service or labor in one State *by the laws thereof*, escaping into another, shall in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor; but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.”

“The counsel for Harrison insisted that the claimant had failed to make out his case, and made the following points:—

“1<sup>st</sup>. To bring a man within the reach of the power of the Commissioner and show him liable to be returned to slavery, it must be proved that he is in the condition described by the above clause of the Constitution, that is to say, he must by the law of one State owe service or labor in that State to the claimant, and he must have escaped from that service *into another state* and consequently out of that one.

“2d. This provision of the Constitution and the law of Congress being in derogation of the common law and in restraint of human liberty which God has conferred alike upon all men,

white and black, both the Constitution and the law should be construed strictly in favor of human liberty, and no effect should be given to them beyond their letter [literal?] and obvious meaning. Proof should be legal, strict and clear, and where there must be presumptions they should always be on the side of liberty and humanity.

“3d. It is not shown that Harrison owed service or labor to the claimant in Virginia. The record being entirely defective in regard to the point of the escape, cannot be used as evidence to establish that point. As the party is bound to go upon the 10<sup>th</sup> section wholly, or upon the 6<sup>th</sup> section wholly. And as to the parole proof, it will be seen that the witness testified to no fact which was not just as consistent with his being a free man hired by the claimant, as with his being a slave owned by him.

“4<sup>th</sup>. It is not shown that he escaped *from* one State “into another.”

“Upon examining the record it will appear that it does not state that he escaped from any State into any other State, the language being ‘that the said Harrison escaped from his owner the said Nathaniel D. **Parren** on the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> of January last, and that he owed service,’ &c. So much for the record. Now as to the oral proof on this point. The witness said, that ‘he met Dr. **Parren** who said that he was in pursuit of his negro who had run away.’ This is the purport of his testimony as to the escape.

“Can any honest mind believe that either in the record or the oral proof, there is an allegation even that he escaped from Virginia into another State.

“No facts are shown anywhere to prove that he left home without leave. Unless it is claimed that the jist [*sic*] of the whole proceeding can be proved by hearsay, there is no proof. Even if it should be claimed that it is proved that he was once in a State of Slavery — there is no evidence to show that he was not sold by **Parren**, or sent North or manumitted. Indeed no single fact is proved to rebut the presumption which all men are entitled to, that they are free and act legally until the contrary is shown.

“5<sup>th</sup>. The proposition that Harrison by not resisting the assumption of authority over him by **Parren**, admits his ownership, is both unfounded and uncharitable. These acts of Dr. P. have occurred from the time the boy was 2 years until he was 19 years old. He is still a minor and no confessions of his, while under age, can bind him in a civil action. If he were a free boy and should make a contract of any description [*sic*], it would be null. A confession of indebtedness would be void — a confession in the very language of the Constitution that he owes service or labor to Dr. P., would be equally so.

“This is a brief statement of the position taken by the counsel for Harrison.

“The counsel for claimant replied and maintained that the record was good and sufficient — insisting that it was not necessary to show that he escaped from one State into another, but that it was enough that it appeared he had escaped from service and labor.

“We understood Mr. **Smith**, the counsel, to hold that this fugitive slave law, applied to a case of escape, where a slave leaves his master, though he does not escape into another State. We must believe that this strange position was taken by the counsel without reflection.

“The Commissioner differed with the counsel for claimant on this question, but held generally that the case was made out, and asked the counsel if he had the certificate made out — one was handed up and signed and delivered to the Marshall. An affidavit was of course made that a rescue was apprehended, which will throw the expense of this capture upon the Federal Treasury. By no means a small item. The boy Harrison, who is a good looking mulatto, was removed by the officers to the jail.



“So ends the second case of slave hunting in Buffalo, may we hope that it is the last of this kind of outrage? Or will the intemperate zeal of the Commissioner secure to him and to our city a monopoly of this very christian business?”

“It is proper to state that the eminent counsel of the men catchers have learned how to make the final certificate of the Commissioner, so that, however defective the proof may be at the hearing, enough shall be stated in the certificate to hold the victim against a *habeas corpus*. If they had understood that dodge in the case of the man Daniel, a few dashes of a sharp attorney’s pen would have rescued Daniel from the jurisdiction of Judge **Conklin**, prevented the issuing of a *habeas corpus* by the federal Judge, and restored him to bondage.”

The account above ends with a reference to a particularly sensitive issue of the time. In August 1851 a fugitive slave, Daniel **Davis**, had been taken into custody under brutal circumstances. He was brought before U. S. Commissioner H. K. **Smith**, the same official who was later to preside over Harrison’s case. Although **Davis** was sent to jail prior to being returned to slavery, he countersued the officer who had brutalized him. As part of those judicial proceedings, he was granted a writ of *habeas corpus*, let out of jail, and promptly left for Canada. The *Morning Express* writer was expressing his or her disgust with the whole notion of slavery and his or her glee that Daniel **Davis**, at least, had escaped injustice. However, the writer was also expressing sorrow that the *habeas corpus* maneuver would no longer work. Perhaps it was this editorializing, common at the time, which led the *Buffalo Courier* to publish the following account on October 4, adding commentary based upon its own political leanings:

“The Fugitive Case.

“We give below, as reported in the *Commercial Advertiser*, of Thursday, the testimony taken in the case of the fugitive slave Harrison. Its clearness and directness can leave no doubt but that the decision of Commissioner **Smith**, was perfectly correct, and that with such testimony before him, none other could have been made. No stronger evidence of this could be adduced, than the fact that the case has created no excitement whatever, here, and that with scarcely an acception [*sic*], so far as we have been able to learn, the course of the Commissioner meets with entire approval.

“The following are the testimony and the record:

“The examination was commenced by the introduction on the part of Dr. Nathaniel P. **Parron**, the claimant, of George S. **Neff**, who being duly sworn, testified as follows: I reside in Virginia, Hardy county. I have resided there 28 years and upwards. I am a farmer. I know Dr. N. P. **Parron**. He resides on the south fork of the Potomac River, in Hardy county, State of Virginia. He is a neighbor of mine —is a physician by profession. I know the mulatto boy *Harrison*—I have known him since he was two years of age. I have hired him to work for me—I hired him of Dr. **Parron**. I have known him to be living with the Doctor 16 or 17 years.

“Question by Counsel—“Is he a slave?”

“Objected to by Counsel for defendant, on the ground that it involves a question of conclusion of law, and is the very question which this Court must determine as matter of law, when it shall have heard the proofs and facts to be adduced in the case. Court overruled the objection, whereupon the witness answered— *Yes*. He is a slave, and owned by Dr. **Parron**. I have known the Doctor to hire him out.

“*Harrison* escaped in January last, about the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>. I have not seen him since until I saw him at Busti, in Chautauque county, N.Y. the place where he was arrested.

“Question by the Court- Have you known Dr. **Parron** to exercise acts of ownership and control over *Harrison*?

“Answer—I have.

“Question by Counsel for claimant—Have you any doubt but that this negro *Harrison* is the slave of Dr. **Parron**? Question was objected to by Counsel for the defendant. Objection overruled, and witness answered. ‘I have none. I have known Dr. **Parron** to claim *Harrison* as his slave in the presence of *Harrison*, and to control him as such without objection on the part of *Harrison*. The boy admitted to me that he was the slave of Dr. **Parron**.’

“The Counsel for claimant then offered in evidence under an objection of the Counsel for defendant, a record in the words and figures following, to wit:

“*State of Virginia lo cit.*

“At a court summoned and held for the county of Hardy, at the Court House thereof, on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of September 1851, pursuant to the provisions of the Act of the General Assembly of Virginia, passed the 31<sup>st</sup> day March, 1851, to hear proof of the escape of Harrison, a slave, the property of Dr. Nathaniel D. **Parron** of said county, and that said Harrison owes service and labor as a slave, to the said **Parron**:

“Present—Thomas **Martin** and J.W. **Hatton**, Gentlemen Justices.

“The Court ordered it to be entered of record that satisfactory proof hath been made before them that said Harrison escaped from his owner, the said Nathaniel D. **Parron**, on the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> day of January last, and that he owes service or labor as a slave to his said owner; that said slave was about 19 years of age, mulatto color, with a scar on his left cheek, curly head, his front teeth some distance from each other; about 5 feet 6 inches high, thick set and having large feet.

“Ordered that the Court be adjourned.

“Thomas **Martin**

“J. W. **Hatton**.

“I, James Carr **Gamble**, Clerk of the County Court of said County of Hardy, in the State of Va., do certify that the foregoing is a true transcript from the record of said Court.

“In testimony whereof I have hereto set my hand and affixed the seal of the said Court the 23<sup>rd</sup> [sic] day of September, 1851, and in the 76<sup>th</sup> year of the Commonwealth.

“James Carr **Gamble**.

“I, John **Hopewell**, presiding magistrate of the County Court of Hardy County, in the State of Virginia, certify that James C. **Gamble**, who has given the above certificate is the Clerk of the said Court and that his attestation is in due form.

“Given under my hand and seal the 22d day of September, 1851.

“Jno. **Hopewell**, Justice.

“To the introduction of this record, the Counsel for the fugitive objects on the ground—

“1<sup>st</sup>. That it did not appear to be issued from a Court of record.

“2d. That it was not in conformity with the requirement of the act of Congress, because it did not show from what place the fugitive escaped.

“Both objections were overruled by the Commissioner.

“The case was then summed up by Mr. **Hawley**. The Commissioner said that on this proof, there could be no doubt on the subject, and the fugitive was proved to be the slave of Dr. **Parron**, both by the record, and by the testimony of Mr. **Neff**, which alone was sufficient to warrant the return of the fugitive without resort to the record. He should therefore make the order



that *Harrison* be remanded to his master. An affidavit of the owner stating that resistance was expected was made.

“*Harrison* is a mulatto boy, nineteen years of age, and escaped last January. He was arrested in the town of Busti, Chautauque county. The Marshal started Thursday morning, on the western cars for Virginia, with him in custody.

“As the *Buffalo Express* has seen fit to give what it undoubtedly considers a Report of the case,— totally misrepresenting the facts, we think it proper that the public should know what the Counsel for the claimant, James M. **Smith**, *Esq.*, did assume, and insist upon, and which the Commissioner recognized as law.

“Mr. **Smith** said—

“1<sup>st</sup>. That if the Record showed that *Harrison* escaped from service and labor, which at the time of such escape he owed to the claimant as his slave, (and there was no pretence that it did not show this,) it sufficiently complied with the requirements of the 10<sup>th</sup> section, even if it did not show that he escaped from Virginia into this State.

“2d. That it did fully appear from the record that *Harrison* had escaped from Hardy county, Virginia, where at the time of his escape he owed service and labor to the claimant as his slave.

“3d. That independent of the record, the testimony of Mr. **Neff** proved that *Harrison* was the slave of the claimant and by him held to service and labor at Hardy county, Virginia, whence he escaped to this state, in which he was arrested.

“After reciting the above points, we think nothing more need be said.”

The following account allegedly appeared in the Warren PA *Mail* of 9 October 1851:

“The U. S. Constitution places mule and man in the same category.

“The community of Busti was thrown into a state of great excitement last Friday by the passage through the village [of Jamestown] of 3 carriages containing a guard of armed men and an alleged fugitive from slavery in the State of Virginia.

“The fugitive was a colored boy, 17, by the name of *Harrison*, who was working for Nevis **Clark** of Busti. The boy, according to Mr. **Clark**, was honest and industrious.

“Early Tuesday morning as the boy was engaged in milking, the party of men named above, drove up, pounced on him without due process, bound him in chains and drove off. This was done with great rapidity and no alarm.

“Once they had the negro boy in chains, they drove off for Dunkirk where they took the boat for Buffalo.

“Such is the working of the Fugitive Slave Law!”

The next printed mention of *Harrison*, described as “the only victim the slave power ever took from the County” was in the *Jamestown News* of 12 February 1864, as follows:

“Escape Of *Harrison*, The Kidnapped

“Most of our citizens will remember the kidnapping of a young mulatto named *Harrison Williams* or *Harrison* as he was more commonly called from the residence of Wm. H. **Storum**, in the neighboring town of Busti in the year 1851; and the attendant excitement throughout this County and Buffalo. He was arbitrarily returned to bondage and given up as one consigned to the tomb, by the many who pitied his sad fate and denounced his wrongs. They will be pleased to

again hear from the first and only victim the slave power ever took from this County. Harrison was seen and identified, a few weeks ago at the camp near Brandy Station, Va., by Ord. Sergt. J. W. **Broadhead** of the 7<sup>th</sup> Co. U. S. Sharpshooters, of Busti. From a letter to his sister, we learn the interesting particulars of Sergt. **Broadhead's** interview with him. He did not know him, and he took every precaution to draw from the fugitive, facts to confirm his suspicions, before telling who he was. Asked him if he was ever up North, and he said yes, when he was about sixteen years old, and then told whence he had lived and the names of neighbors so accurately that Sergt. B. could not doubt the identity. After he was given into his master's hands at Buffalo, he was taken to New Orleans and sold, and the succeeding summer was sold again into northern Georgia, where he remained until about a year ago, when he was taken into the rebel army as an officer's servant. He escaped into the Union lines last October, and hired out as a servant to one of our staff officers, and is at present with the army."

The next account was written by Palmer K. **Shankland** in the *Saturday Times* of Jamestown on 18 July 1891. It was based on his interviews with some of the older residents of Busti, who remembered the incident and provided many details, including names of participants in the seizure, attempts to thwart the slave-catchers, and the subsequent chase to Buffalo. The **Shankland** story reprinted as follows is itself from two later reprints. The items in brackets indicate differences between those two versions:

"Exciting Incident Forty Years Ago

"Capture of a Fugitive Slave in Busti – Chasing the Sheriff's Party to Buffalo

"It is forty years ago that a most exciting incident connected with the fugitive slave law [occurred in this county], and [which] aroused the people to a high state of excitement. Harrison **Williams** [was] a runaway slave, [who], with six other slaves had escaped from Virginia, and through the assistance of the "underground railway" made their way North and found refuge [and shelter] among the zealous [and earnest] members of the Abolition party who resided in the vicinity of Busti. **Williams** was about 20 years of age .... For four or five months he resided with a colored family by the name of **Storum** [on a farm] a short distance from Busti Corners, and during these days of fancied security he would often meet his refugee companions, [who were] quartered on vicinity farms, and give exhibitions of Old Virginia song and dance, [which highly interested and entertained those of the neighborhood who were permitted to be present.]

"One morning in the fall of the year 1851 three covered carriages were driven into [to] Busti, and proceeded direct to [the home of] Levi **Jones**. The occupants of the carriage[s] were Deputy Sheriff **Cotton** of Fredonia[?], R. D. **Warner**, a liveryman, [and] a man known as "Jockey" **Wood**, both [all] residing in Jamestown, [and who had been engaged to assist the deputy sheriff]. They were accompanied by [two or] three Virginians [on the trail of runaway slaves]. Levi **Jones** was an earnest Abolitionist, and [at the time] was sheltering one of the runaways, known as Sam **Smith**.

"As it happened, when the party arrived at **Jones'**, the colored boy, Sam **Smith**, had gone [away some little distance] to a neighboring farm. A hasty search [of **Jones'** premises was made by the party, and] failing to find any of the negroes they drove rapidly to **Storum's**. Harrison **Williams** was milking a cow in the barn when he was surprised by seeing his old master and the officers approach. No opportunity [was] permitted [for] him to escape by running, so quietly had the approach of his captors been made. He was seized and an attempt made to put handcuffs upon him, when Marinda **Storum**, a grown-up daughter of William [Henry] **Storum** made a

[fierce] attack upon the party in an [a fierce] attempt to rescue and give **Williams** a chance to get away. She fought with the fierceness of one struggling for life, and before she could be repelled her clothing was nearly [all] torn from her person. In the meantime Henry **Storum** and another colored man named Lewis **Clark** discovered the purpose of the capturing party. There was another runaway slave in the house at the time and they hastily assisted him to escape by a [the] rear door, and then rushed upstairs [in the house] to obtain a couple of guns. But the captors of **Williams** wasted no time in ceremony, and after Marinda **Storum** was overpowered, **Williams** was placed in one of the carriages and the whole party were out of reach before **Storum** and **Clark** were ready for action.

“The news of the [slave-holders’] raid spread [passed] from house to house with surprising rapidity, and in twenty minutes, every Abolitionist in Busti knew of the outrage [to their sentiment], and were aroused to the highest pitch of anger and resentment [excitement]. Excited men flew from house to house calling upon volunteers for a rescue, but before any organized effort for the recapture [of the colored boy] could be [made], Jabez **Broadhead**, then a muscular and intrepid young man came dashing down to the “Corners,” mounted upon a bay mare [a horse] and carrying a musket in his hands. He was joined by Norman **Backus**, a cooper by trade, who seized a meat axe as his only weapon of offense, and jumping into a [one-horse] buggy, the two [formed a cavalcade and] started in pursuit of the sheriff’s party, breathing vengeance and threatening to rescue the colored boy, [even if it was necessary to make it a bloody encounter]. Others made preparations to follow, and it is stated that the venerable Hiram **Knapp**, who is yet living, rushed over to his neighbor Z. K. **Fox**, and beseeched **Fox** to take his gun at once and join the pursuers. **Fox**, who was a moderate man, thought it would be consistent for **Knapp** to go himself, and said so. The latter replied that [he had not had his breakfast, and besides] he had no gun. **Fox** offered to loan him his musket, but the offer was not sufficiently tempting to be accepted, and the two neighbors failed to induce each other to shoulder arms and join in the chase.

“**Broadhead** and **Backus** reached Jamestown without getting in sight of the slave-holders’ party. The latter had driven through the village [without detection], and taken [taking] the road leading to Fredonia. There was a strong anti-slavery sentiment prevailing in Jamestown, and its intensity was aroused by the passage of the obnoxious fugitive slave law a short time previous. When **Broadhead** and **Backus** brought [the] news of the slave-holders’ raid, the leading Abolitionists of Jamestown were thrown into a ferment of excitement. Hasty consultations took place and plans were proposed to circumvent the purpose of the Southerners [in taking the helpless colored boy back into bondage]. Silas **Shearman** was then in the prime of [his] life, a man of undaunted courage and an acknowledged leader among the small band of Abolitionists of Western New York. He hastened to the office of Judge **Hazeltine**, in company with **Backus**, and made an application for a writ of habeas corpus, but, thinking [that] it might take up too much valuable time before he could get the writ, he decided to follow without. He went to Frank **Palmer**’s newspaper office, where the only telegraph operator in the village was located, and sent a message to George A. **French** of Dunkirk, who was a prominent and zealous Abolitionist. He then [went to a livery stable and] secured a span of good horses and started alone in pursuit. It was surmised that the Southerners would go through Fredonia on their way to Buffalo, and Mr. **Shearman**’s plan was to overtake them at the former place, secure a writ of habeas corpus from a Fredonia judge and effect the release of **Williams** before he could be carried out of the county. He knew that George A. **French** would arouse the friends of anti-slavery in the vicinity of Dunkirk [and] who would give him every possible assistance, [and

along the route the valiant members of the “underground railway” could be relied upon for any service to assist in the recapture of the colored boy]. At Stockton Mr. **Shearman** found that the slave-holders were about two hours ahead of him. [They had stopped at Stockton for breakfast.] His horses had commenced to show signs of fatigue, and Milton **Smith**, an Abolitionist, procured him another pair.

“Driving to Fredonia, [he] discovered that the Southerners had taken a road bearing to one side of the village and were making a straight line for Buffalo. Mr. **Shearman** concluded to drive [on] at once to Dunkirk, where he met George A. **French**. The latter sent a message to Abolitionist friends in Buffalo, warning them to be on the lookout, [and to take prompt measures for the rescue of the refugee]. Changing horses again, Mr. **Shearman** proceeded to Buffalo where he arrived a little after dark. He found that the Southerners had arrived [there] a short time previous and placed the negro boy in jail, [in the custody of the sheriff of Erie County]. The venerable Humphrey **Pratt** of Sugar Grove, who was also a [an ardent] member of the “underground railway” came to Jamestown in pursuit, as soon as he heard of the capture of **Williams**, and following [followed] on alone to Buffalo, where he joined Mr. **Shearman**.

“Under the provisions of the fugitive slave law it was necessary for the Southerners to take **Williams** before the [a] United States Commissioner and submit evidence that he was a runaway slave, and [also] show their legal rights to his custody. Henry K. **Smith** was the commissioner and when the case came up [for hearing before him] the following day the court room was crowded with interested spectators, a large portion of whom were ardent Abolitionists [who were] anxious to secure the release of **Williams** [if it were a possible thing]. Feeling ran so high that it looked at one time as if he would be taken from his captors by force. Benjamin F. **Green**, a prominent advocate, [who was] afterwards a judge of the Supreme Court in this judicial district, was retained to defeat the attempt to carry the negro boy back into Virginia. He made a masterly and eloquent plea, and asked for the release of the boy on the ground that there was no complete identification or evidence to show that he was a runaway slave. Commissioner **Smith** decided in favor of the masters [and gave **Williams** into their custody to be taken back South]. There were angry murmurings over the decision, and Mr. **Shearman**, who was a spectator to the proceedings, was aroused to such a pitch of indignation that he denounced Commissioner **Smith** when the latter approached him after the adjournment of [the] court. As there was no further possibility of effecting the release of **Williams**, Mr. **Shearman** and Mr. **Pratt** returned to their homes.

“Of course the capture of **Williams** caused consternation and fright among the remaining runaway slaves [who were] located between Jamestown and Sugar Grove. There were earnest and vigilant anti-slavery friends, like Dr. **Catlin** and Humphrey **Pratt** of Sugar Grove, John **Broadhead**, Thomas **Danforth**, Theron **Plumb**, and Levi **Jones** of Busti, Silas **Shearman** and numerous others of Jamestown, anxious to assist the refugees, but secrecy and courage were required to defeat the [advantages which an obnoxious] law [which] gave to slave-holders to take possession of their slaves wherever found. The six runaways who came North with **Williams** were brought to Jamestown the same night that he was captured, and concealed in the swamp where Marvin Park now is. They remained there two or three days, then went back to Busti, staying there only two nights, and then [they] were carried into Pennsylvania at night and concealed for two weeks, when they were quietly passed along the “underground railway” to Canada [where they were safe from molestation].

“A few months after the negroes had reached Canada, two of their number returned to Busti and expressed their intention of going to Virginia to try and effect the escape of their

wives. They enlisted the sympathy of Elder **Burrows** of Sugar Grove, [a strong Abolitionist,] who determined to go South with and aid them [in any possible manner] in their undertaking. They went to Virginia and the negroes were recaptured by their old masters and returned into slavery, while Elder **Burrows** had to exercise considerable caution and ingenuity in escaping from the angry slave-holders for the part he had taken.

“Twelve years after these [thrilling] events had taken place, James **Broadhead**, who is now a well known and prominent farmer [residing] in Busti, was soldier in the Union Army stationed at Culpepper, Va. One morning he had occasion to visit the regiment[al] quartermaster’s headquarters, and there saw a contraband negro who had a strangely familiar countenance. **Broadhead** was in company with Byron **Ellsworth** and after the two had departed from the quartermaster’s headquarters, **Broadhead** said to **Ellsworth** that he believed [that] the negro they saw was none other than Harrison **Williams**, the colored lad [who was] captured at **Storum’s** in Busti. **Ellsworth** laughed at the suggestion, and said that he looked no more like Harrison **Williams** than a thousand others they had seen in the army, but **Broadhead** was so [firmly] impressed with the resemblance that he determined to go back and ask the colored man. He did so and it turned out that his surmise[s] were correct. It was Harrison **Williams**, the runaway slave of twelve years before, captured at Busti. He was overjoyed at meeting **Broadhead**, whom he remembered well as a boy. **Williams** said that when he reached Virginia after his [re]capture he was severely whipped [for running away], and shortly after was sold and taken into Georgia. There he remained [a slave] until the war broke out when he escaped into the Union lines, and at that time was serving as [a] hostler and servant to an officer on the staff of General **Scofield**.

Also in 1891, shortly after the publication of **Shankland’s** account in the Warren PA *Ledger*, the following appeared.

“Old Time Reminiscence. A Sugar Grove Correspondent Corrects a Few Statements Regarding the Runaway Slave Captured in Chautauqua County. Mr. A. H. **McKelvey** has the Floor.

“Sugar Grove, Aug. 3 – On reading the account of the runaway slave in your columns I felt as if there should be some corrections made, and at the same time more light thrown on the history of this once exciting case. Although I was young at the time, I remember the kidnapping of Harrison very well. But what facts I write in this case I have received from conversing with those who are still living and were intimately connected with the construction and equipment of the underground railroad of forty years ago. The seven runaway slaves all bore fictitious names. We knew the boy who was kidnapped as William Henry **Harrison**, instead of Harrison **Williams**. The mother of Henry **Storum** was the woman who tried to help Harrison to make his escape, and Marinda, a sister of Henry’s, pushed the gun aside when Henry attempted to shoot and disable the horses of the kidnapping party.

“Loren **Blodgett**, another person who was an active Abolitionist, notified Humphrey **Pratt** at once, and they rode on horseback in hot pursuit to Jamestown, the latter riding Prince, a colt of the noted Falconer Durac. Prince received a permanent injury in this race, but lived to the great age of about 30 years. **Pratt**, instead of going to Buffalo as stated, took the Randolph road, to meet his son and Billy **McCoo**, another slave, whom he had sent there on business and thought perhaps they might meet and have trouble with the kidnapers, who it was thought by some would go via Salamanca. It was afterwards learned that they were making for Buffalo,

where the only U.S. marshal in this section was stationed. Billy **McCoo** was in Jamestown and saw Dr. **Perrin**, Harrison's master, riding with the kidnapping party, and hastened with the other slaves (who were then attending a circus) to the Marvin swamp, where they remained until after dark, and then made their way to friends in Sugar Grove.

"Lewis **Clark**, better known in the play Uncle Tom's Cabin as George **Harris**, was a noted abolition lecturer, a slave, and a brother-in-law of Henry **Storum**; he was censured unjustly at the time by pro-slavery men for cowardice in not helping to save Harrison, but as soon as he could get his arms in condition he mounted his horse and followed the slave-holders, and was sitting on his horse in Jamestown, exciting the people to action, when **Pratt** and **Blodgett** arrived in the city. The later Heamon **Wodard**, then a young boathand on Lake Erie, happened to be in Buffalo and helped to organize a mob to release Harrison, but the officers, knowing that they were protected by the fugitive slave law, were encouraged to help return Harrison with his Virginia Master. Two of the seven slaves had previously returned to Virginia against the wishes of their comrades to help their wives escape, and it was afterwards learned that they were captured and whipped until they confessed where Harrison and the others were located.

"The other four slaves were concealed on Lanning Hill, then owned by Seth **McDaniels**, for several days, and fed by their friends. Those who saw them said they were well fortified on the hay mow with clubs and stones and meant to fight to the finish.

"When they decided to make their way toward the north star, Mrs. **Pratt** cooked them a midnight meal, and sent them on their way rejoicing. They went to Beaver Dam, Pa., were secreted by a wealthy farmer William **Gray**, who delivered them on a boat at Erie, which landed them safely in Canada."

In 1902, C. R. **Lockwood** of Jamestown published a series of articles containing reminiscences of Jamestown's early days. Among them was a retelling of the Harrison **Williams** capture as it was later remembered.

"Lockwood No.18

"Tale of Slave Days

"Negro Fugitive Captured in Busti about 1851.

"Great Excitement Was Caused and People Threatened to Release the Captive by Force — A Slave's Gratitude — No.18 of C. R. **Lockwood's** Reminiscences.

"Of the important events of 1850, was the passage in the congress of the United States of the Fugitive Slave law, under the provisions of which fugitives from serfdom were subject to capture by their masters and taken back to slavery; and in this unholy work the officers of the several states and territories were required to assist whenever demanded. To contemplate the enforcement of this law was and is a monstrosity in legal procedure; but such were the times and such the imposition upon the people.

"This law generated the underground railroad of which we have heretofore spoken and under the operations of this law 'Old Jamestown' received quite an impulse from its workings, and so conspicuous was this in the history of the times we cannot pass it unnoticed and now for the episode.

"After the passage of this law and in the year 1851 or about then (which we are not certain) seven runaway slaves from the state of Virginia came north, finding their way into our adjoining town of Busti. One of these slaves was named Harrison **Williams**; he was a young man



of the age of about 17 years, and located himself in the family of William **Storum**, colored; and one other also made a stop in Busti with a man by the name of Levi **Jones**. Two others of these seven were married and left their wives in Virginia; hoping to obtain their wives they returned to Virginia, but were themselves captured and were induced by promises of favors to reveal the whereabouts of the two in Busti. What became of the remaining three is not known to us; nor does it now matter.

“Quite early one morning in September of this same year two covered carriages appeared at the **Storum** place and doubtless, seeing a colored man in the milkyard, they halted. In one of these carriages were a United States marshal and the claimed-to-be-owner of the slave; and in the other carriage were two deputy sheriffs of our county, but of whose names we are not certain. One of these officers was from the north part of the county and the other said to be from the village of Jamestown, but their precise designation is not now material.

“Whoever these officers were they doubtless felt it their duty, under the provisions of the United States law, to listen to the requirements of the marshal and this owner, and so joined in the capture of the slave. Had they not acted they would have subjected themselves to heavy punishment and, looking at it in this light, an impartial judgment should not seriously blame them, however much it was against the judgment and feelings of the people.

“Stopping the carriages near the milkyard the master got out and went up to this colored man, who was then milking a cow, and tapping him on the shoulder, the latter turned around and dumbfounded faced his old master; the recognition seemed mutual and the other persons being notified that he was the one, they got out and went to the colored man, took him at once and led him to the carriage, placed him therein and, securing him firmly, started off, the marshal taking special charge of him. The slave was not permitted to complete his work, bid anyone “goodbye” or other thing. Getting into their carriages, off they started for Jamestown with their treasure, said to be then worth about \$1,000.

“This occurrence was observed from outside, and at once it was proclaimed over Busti that a colored man had been captured and carried off, whereupon the people became greatly aroused and men, women and children were on the alert; they assembled in great numbers and one man, mounting his horse, hurried up on the run for Jamestown. Outspeeding the carriages, he reached Brooklyn square ahead of them, sounding the alarm: ‘A man kidnaped [*sic*] ! a man kidnaped!’ at which the people rallied and rushed forward in great numbers, evidencing such feeling as never before aroused the people of Jamestown. Men with coats off, boys led by the hand, mothers with babes in arms, parties of all classes and colors, the rich and poor, merchants and clerks, locking stores; bootblacks and bellboys, and everybody of the living order, all hustled, jammed, rolled and tumbled together to learn ‘What’s up and what’s the matter?’

“The contempt for the ‘man-grabbers’ was unlimited and ‘hurrah to retake the negro’ was proclaimed aloud; but the local officers quieted the disturbance and so far as possible dispersed the people, keeping the masses from pell-mell and onslaught, and the carriages with their bounden booty passed along over Brooklyn, up Main street and on their way.

“Among other things done, people mounted upon boxes, board piles or else where [*sic*], made speeches, among whom was Guinea **Carpenter**, our old stage driver and boat runner. Said he in substance, if not precise words:

“ ‘Fellow citizens! Think of this act of cruelty! This stealing of a poor colored man in the free north! This tyrant slave holder, aided by such unholy law and the United States authority, comes here and grabbing this poor young colored man from his milking stool, puts him in chains and claims to return him to slavery! Shall we suffer it? Answer, you freemen of the north! For

one, I say no! He is guilty of no crime and all he has done was to find his liberty! You and I have our liberty, then why not let him? They cry “law and order,” but what be they without liberty? Accursed institution, this slavery must down!”

“Yells of ‘Good, good, go ahead Guinea!’ came from the crowd; and others followed in speaking, but more moderate in temperament, advised caution and to await the action of the court. The police, too, were on the move and by a hard pull and a strong pull.

“Certain citizens were advising with the legal fraternity, among whom then were Hon. S. A. **Brown**, Madison **Burnell**, Abner **Hazeltine**, Orsell **Cook**, John F. **Smith** and others for going ahead; but Jamestown unfortunately, was so situated as to proper authority the people could not act at once and of necessity there would be great delay, and the conclusion was to suspend operation here; in the meantime the captors and captured went on to the north, taking the railroad and ‘hustling’ to Buffalo with their victim.

“Inconsiderate as crowds will be, there was great complaint and people and attorneys became more or less excited and fault finding, while southern friends rejoiced and ‘laughed in their sleeves’ at the apparent dilemma.

“Of course political friends and foes met on our streets and occasionally by word of mouth if not physical strength, grappled in with each other, calling more or less names; but one thing was quite perceptible and that was the countenance of the slavery hater was rather sour and cast down, while that of the southern sympathizer indicated cheerfulness and seemed to say, ‘I told you so.’ The occasion was seized upon as a kind of victory for ‘hard shell Democracy,’ which, it was reported at the time, held private meetings in certain offices and places for mutual congratulation, while gatherings of Abolitionists and their Whig sympathizers were draped in mourning; but though ‘chopfallen,’ all friends of freedom felt that the waves of relief were near at hand.

“And now, young man, what became of that other colored man, then located near **Storum’s**, and one of the seven? Listen!

“On learning of the situation of this other, our own anxiety became considerably solicitous and meeting Henry H. **Jones**, an old friend from Kiantone who stopped to congratulate us for our ‘reminiscences,’ he remarked that he was one of the underground railroad friends, and knew about the Busti matter. At this intimation, we ‘hitched on’ to find out all we could and so asked him to relate his knowledge, whereupon he cheerfully proceeded to say:

“ ‘I remember the capture in Busti; it was in 1852 or 1853, I think; I was living in Kiantone about five miles from **Storum’s**; my cousin, Levi **Jones** lived in Busti not far from **Storum’s**; he was in full connection with the underground railroad; he hired a colored man to work for him and during the time of this capture he was there; he was one that came with the seven spoken of; my cousin was milking in the yard with the colored man working for him. Early in the morning my cousin got wind of what was up and notified his colored man of it; and, taking his pocketbook with money in it out of his pocket, he handed it to the colored man, telling him to run to the woods. The slave took it and did run; these slave catchers were after him, too. Three years from the next winter, in January or February, one night about midnight, his door opened, (not keeping it locked), and someone came in and came up to [my] cousin’s bed and handed him a pocketbook, which proved to be the identical one given by my cousin, and says “Here is your pocketbook and more money in it than when you gave it to me.” My cousin then recognized the voice as coming from that same slave and getting up said to him: “Go to bed and stay over night!” He said “I dare not stay any time at all; since I was here I have got married and have a

good position,” and said “good night” and off he went. He said “In getting here I slept in barns and traveled nights and got here the best I could,” and then left.’

“In the pockets of how many, that pocketbook and money would have been lost! Here kindness, generosity and honesty, noble trinity, seemed to unite while the hearts of to [*sic*], white and black, met in unison for the accomplishment of worthy deeds.

“This negro was a mere chattel under the law, subject to sale on the auction block. Thanks be to Deity and good luck he secured his freedom.

“Jamestown, N.Y., May 17, 1902.

“C. R. Lockwood”

The next installment of the 1902 **Lockwood** series retold the 1864 encounter of Harrison **Williams** and J. W. **Broadhead**. **Lockwood**’s account unfortunately used stereotypical dialect that was common at the time but derogatory today. It is included here only for the sake of accuracy:

“Lockwood No.19

“James W. **Broadhead** Saw Harrison **Williams** in Virginia — Old Jamestown’s Part in Stirring Events — C. R. **Lockwood**’s No. 19.

“We left the slave Harrison **Williams** in the care of his master and United States marshal on their way to Buffalo, N.Y., and just what became of him, except that he was taken from Buffalo to Baltimore, has been a mystery with the people. Some have claimed that Harrison died with a fever on the way from Baltimore to Virginia, while others were differently informed, the general impression being that he never reached his old ‘slave pen,’ at which his friends were generally pleased, preferring even death to renewed bondage.

“On investigation we became convinced the truth as to this matter was not fully known, and commencing inquiry, we learned that James W. **Broadhead**, a resident of Busti, who was a soldier in the Civil War, might give some information and, writing him, he made personal appearance in our office and at our solicitation very gladly cleared up the difficulty. Mr. **Broadhead** is an old resident of Busti and knew this negro and remembered the capture and when in the service of his country met the same colored unfortunate, and stated as follows:

“ ‘I remember the captured slave from Mr. **Storum**’s in Busti; he was about 17 years old; he came from Virginia; with several others; seven came to **Storum**’s in February or March, 1851, I think; his name was Harrison **Williams**; he was a mere boy; two of the others were married and left their wives in Virginia and they went back to Virginia and told where **Williams** was; in this way the master found out. **Williams** was kidnaped [*sic*] in September 1851, I think. I next saw **Williams** on Christmas day, 1863, at Culpepper, Va.; I was out with Byron **Ellsworth** from near here, roving about; we had a pass and started to go to town and came to a sutler’s shop; we saw a negro standing by, near the door; we went in and soon returned and the negro yet stood there; my attention was attracted to him from some cause; we passed on by him. He was constantly on my mind and I suggested to **Ellsworth** to return, saying to him I thought that negro was the one kidnaped [*sic*] in Busti at **Storum**’s. He consented to go back and we did so. The negro was yet there. I asked him his name and he said: “Massa, my name is Harrison **Williams**.” I said, “Have you ever been up north?” He answered “Yes.” I asked him what part of the north and he answered “Yok [*sic*] state.” I then asked what part of the state and he answered, “Between Busti and Sugargrove.” I then asked him who he worked for and he said: “For a family by the name of **Storum**.” I then asked him if he remembered any of the neighbors near **Storum**’s and

he said: “Yes sa, a **Broadhead** family. Then said he: “Are you from da?” I answered I was and told him my name was James **Broadhead**. I then asked him where he had been and he said: “I was taken back by my old masta and sold to another masta in Georgia; and, when the wa broke out, my new masta went into the Confederate army as an officer and took me along as his waita.” Then he said in the fall of 1863 when the northern army drove the enemy near the Rappahannock station, he was taken with the baggage train and captured with his master; and, when I saw him, he was taking care of horses for the Union general and corps commander **Slocum**. I never saw him afterwards. He said to me: “I nebber spected to see anybody from way up da gin, nebber, nebber!” The poor fellow shook all over with gladness. He laughed with joy and then to at last find himself with the Union ranks, greatly elated him. I went with 112<sup>th</sup> regiment, and was mustered out at Arlington Heights, Va., in June, 1865. I was born February 15, 1839, in Busti.’

“So there can be no doubt as to what became of Harrison **Williams** after leaving Buffalo; his fortune was rather with and connected in certain memor- [*sic*] mixed but, at last, he reached the army of freedom and was among those who gloried in the triumph of liberty.”

There is, as follows, a brief retelling of the Harrison incident in the text of a talk or article by A. S. **Price** found in the collection of Underground Railroad documents compiled by Roy **Blodgett** in the 1940s and filed with the Warren Public Library. Because Phin **Miller** was a living source for this narrative, and because Phin **Miller** died in 1917, it may be assumed that this talk or article was presented prior to that date.

“In the dramatic capture and return of Harrison **Williams** there was enacted here a tragedy which must have stirred the whole County. I always wondered how the boy’s owner knew where to look for him in the North and how he traced the slave to Busti. Mr. **Lockwood** says that there were seven slaves in the party of which he was a member. Two of the party, growing confident over their own escape and hoping to obtain their wives, returned to Virginia; where they were recaptured and returned to slavery. Through promises of favors they were induced to reveal the hiding place of the others. On the other hand, the account written by Palmer **Shankland** in 1891, seems to place the return to Virginia of these two after the capture of **Williams**. Mr. **Shankland** says that they were accompanied on this venture by Elder **Burrows** of Sugar Grove an ardent abolitionist, who narrowly escaped the anger of the slave holders.

“In 1851, when **Williams** was captured, **Cotton** was a deputy sheriff of the County, and Charles **Kennedy** of Jamestown, was a deputy also. He was a harness maker. Mr. **Kennedy** says that a request was sent to him to go to Busti to assist in the capture of the negro. As no legal papers were tendered he refused to go; on the ground that if he went upon the errand, which was in every way repugnant to him, without the authority of legal papers, he would simply be going as the slave catcher’s ‘hired man.’ This was his statement in 1901. My grandfather, Wilson A. **Price**, told me, however, many years ago, that on the morning of the capture **Kennedy** stood at the bridge at Main Street and as the kidnappers came in sight dropped a pair of boots, a pre-established signal to them that no alarm had preceded [*sic*] them and that the way was clear for their passage through the village. This made **Kennedy** very unpopular here. **Cotton’s** part in the transaction later defeated him for sheriff.

“The news of the tragedy was brought to Jamestown (according to Mr. **Shankland**) by Jabez **Broadhead** and Norman **Backus**. Immediately there was great excitement; the church bells were rung, and a great crowd gathered in Brooklyn Square. The news spread through the

village very rapidly; and, apparently, everybody who heard it rushed to Main Street to learn the details and late developments. I here quote **Mr. Lockwood's** account:

“The contempt for the “man-grabbers” was unlimited, and “hurrah to retake the negro” was proclaimed aloud; but the local officers quieted the disturbance and so far as possible dispersed the people; keeping the masses from pell-mell onslaught. And the carriages with their bounden booty passed along over Brooklyn, up Main Street, and on their way. Among other things done, people mounted upon boxes, board piles, or elsewhere and made speeches. Among these was Guinea **Carpenter**, our old stage driver and boat runner. Said he in substance if not precise words: “Fellow citizens! Think of this act of cruelty! This stealing of a poor colored man in the free North! This tyrant slave holder, aided by such unholy law and the United States authority, comes here; and grabbing this poor young colored man from his milding [*sic*] stool, puts him in chains and claims to return him to slavery! Shall we suffer it? Answer, you freemen of the North! For one, I say no! He is guilty of no crime, and all he has done was to find his liberty! You and I have our liberty, and why not let him? They cry ‘Law and Order,’ but what be they without liberty? Accursed institution, this slavery must down!” Yells of “Good, good, go ahead Guinea” came from the crowd, and others followed in speaking; but the more moderate in temperament advised caution and waiting for the action of the court. The police, too, were on the move, and by a hard pull and a strong pull the people were held back. Certain citizens were advising with the legal fraternity; among whom were Hon. S. A. **Brown**, Madison **Burnell**, Abner **Hazeltine**, Orsell **Cook**, John F. **Smith** and others, some advising moderation and other for going ahead; but Jamestown, unfortunately, was so situated as to proper authority the people could not act at once and of necessity there would be great delay. The conclusion was to suspend operation here; and, in the meantime, the captors and captured went on to the “North”.’

“It can hardly be supposed that after the lapse of so long a time **Mr. Lockwood** could give an accurate synopsis of **Carpenter's** speech; but Guinea, doubtless, dealt in the sentiments and ideas here attributed to him, with much emotional appeal. Sure it is that the speech produced a great sensation. Mrs. Amy **Price** says that her husband, Wilson A. **Price**, was present and heard the appeal; and that it not only moved the crowd powerfully at the time, but was much talked of for a long time thereafter. Guinea was the hero of that day, and public opinion was overwhelmingly with him.

“Henry **Jones** of Kiantone, a cousin of Levi **Jones** of Busti, gave **Mr. Lockwood** an interesting story, and from **Mr. Lockwood's** account I paraphrase: ‘Levi **Jones** had in his employ at the time of **Williams' capture** one of the seven negroes who came in that party. Early in the morning Levi **Jones** got wind of what was up and notified his colored man of it. Taking his pocketbook with money in it from his pocket, he handed it to the colored man; telling him to run to the woods. The slave took it and ran, for the catchers were after him, too. Three years from the next winter, in January or February, one night about midnight, his door opened and someone came up to his bed and handed him a pocketbook. It proved to be the identical one given to the slave. The slave said “Here is your pocketbook and more money in it than when you gave it to me.” **Jones** recognized the voice and asked the slave to stay all night. But the slave did not dare to linger. He informed **Jones** that he was married; had a good position; and that in getting to Busti he had traveled nights; sleeping in barns and other obscure shelters.’

“In the Journal of December 20, 1897, I find an item announcing the death of Lewis **Clarke** at Lexington, Kentucky, December 16, 1897.”

There is another brief retelling of the Harrison incident by A. S. **Price** in **Downs' History of Chautauqua County and its People** Vol. I (1921). It adds a reference to a crowd in the Buffalo courtroom and describes its attempt to free Harrison. A list of sources at the end credits articles in the *Jamestown Evening Journal* of various dates from 21 July 1896 to 14 July 1910:

“Among runaway slaves was Harrison **Williams**, who escaped from Virginia, arriving foot-sore and exhausted at the farm of William **Storum**, a free colored man, in Busti, in February or March of 1851. **Storum** kept him several months, supplying his wants and helping him back to health. He was a mere boy of seventeen. Early one morning in September he was kidnapped by his former master, who had learned of his hiding place. This man and some others, dressed as women, drove to the farm, went around to the rear of the house where **Williams** was milking, seized and bound him, and put him in the bottom of their wagon. They drove rapidly north through Jamestown by way of Forest Avenue, Roosevelt Square and North Main Street to Fredonia, and thence to Buffalo. The alarm quickly spread, and a man on horseback, outspeeding the captors, arrived before them in Jamestown. A crowd quickly gathered in the Square, but there was no time to organize any effort, and the captors dashed through the crowd and up Main street without being stopped. “Guinea” **Carpenter** addressed the crowd, urging action, and a pursuing party was quickly made up. But valuable time had been lost, and the captors, with relays of fresh horses, got safely to Buffalo. Here the owner established a legal claim. In the crowded court room a lane was opened through the crowd, and an effort was made to induce **Williams** to make a dash for liberty. The crowd intended to close behind him until he should reach the carriage which was waiting at the door to take him to a place of safety. Either he failed to understand, or lacked the necessary courage, for he didn't make the effort, and was taken back to Virginia.

“James W. **Broadhead**, of Busti, whose farm was next to the **Storum** farm, and who knew all the circumstances of the capture, enlisted in the 112<sup>th</sup> N.Y. Regiment in the Civil War. On Christmas Day in 1863 at Culpeper, Virginia, Mr. **Broadhead** saw Harrison **Williams** in camp. After being taken back to Virginia he had been sold to Georgia, and went as servant to his new master in the Confederate army. With his master, he was captured by the Union army near the Rappahannock station in the fall of 1863, and became hostler for Gen. **Slocum**. Mr. **Broadhead** talked with him and verified his identity. This capture deeply stirred the county and is said to have stimulated the activities of the Under Ground Rail Road.”

Next, virtually the same account as that by **Shankland** was printed in the *Jamestown Morning Post* of 18 July 1923:

“The following story which was of deep interest to many people in this section of the county appeared in the ‘Saturday Times,’ then published in Jamestown, in the issue of July 18, 1891, written by its editor, Palmer K. **Shankland**, from facts gathered from many of the older residents of Busti.” [The **Shankland** story then followed, as reprinted earlier in this compilation. The *Morning Post* then added the following.]

“The Marinda **Storum** mentioned in the second paragraph of the old Busti story, history books prove, met John **Brown** at Syracuse in 1859 and he told her about his plans to attack Harper's Ferry. She was probably the only person, outside of **Brown's** immediate officers, who knew of his plans for action at Harper's Ferry.

“The Lewis **Clark** mentioned farther down in the story was the original negro about whom the character “George Harris” in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written.



“Commenting on the assistance given the Virginia slave owners by Deputy Sheriff **Cotton** who piloted the early party, Eleazer **Green** states that when, many years later, in 1873, **Cotton** was a candidate for the office of sheriff, he was overwhelmingly defeated by the persistence of the sentiment aroused against him because of his participation in the Harrison **Williams** kidnapping.”

On June 6, 1925, William S. **Bailey** gave a talk about the Underground Railroad to a group at the B. S. **Dean** farm in Busti. Included in the speech were references to the Harrison case. **Bailey**'s talk appeared in Roy **Blodgett**'s compilation of Underground Railroad documents, and is excerpted as follows:

“Of the number of slaves who came to or passed through Busti over the U.G.R.R. no data is available. My informant, James **Broadhead**, relates that negroes had come ‘one or two at time’ until the winter of 1850-51 when a group of seven came together to the **Storum** place. Of these one, Harrison **Williams**, remained with the **Storums**; one went to Levi **Jones**; one to Squire **Plumb**, while the others were hired by friendly neighbors. Apparently the protectors of the slaves did not at that time feat [*sic*] attempts of capture by the owners of the negroes under their protection. And now we come to the event that revealed Busti to be no longer a safe haven for runaway slaves; an event that stirred the entire region and gave it an object lesson of the horrors of slavery that must doubtless have led the abolitionists along this part of the U.G.R.R. to redouble efforts in passing the negroes on to freedom.

“On the morning of September 30, 1851, the colored lad, Harrison **Williams**, was kidnapped by a party of slave-owners.

“From Edward C. **Jones** of Evanston Ill., a son of Levi **Jones**, who was nearby at the time of the kidnapping, I secured the following account. Mr. **Jones** was seven years old at the time.

“A party of the runaway slaves, a few days before the kidnapping, had gone to Jamestown; attracted by the visit of Dan **Rice**'s circus. In the group was a slave named Sam **Smith** who was working for Levi **Jones**. These negroes did not return to Busti until after three days, when Sam **Smith** came to the **Jones** farm at night and said he had seen his master on the streets of Jamestown. Since that encounter the slaves had concealed themselves in a swamp. Levi **Jones** evidently kept a watch for the slave-owners; for when they came to his farm searching for Sam **Smith**, who was still hidden, he tried to beat them to the **Storum** farm, but his horse was not fast enough. On reaching the **Storum** farm the slave-hunters, in three carriages, went at once to the barnyard where they found Harrison **Williams** milking; threw him into their conveyance and quickly drove toward Jamestown. Levi **Jones** followed and in Jamestown tried to recruit enough men to effect a rescue, but he could not arouse sufficient interest. However, he and Silas **Shearman**, who joined him in Jamestown, followed the party toward Fredonia, but returned at night after an unsuccessful pursuit.

“Following the capture of **Williams** the other slaves were taken to Dunkirk by their friends and sent across the lake to Canada. The slave-hunters were said to have followed their human property as far as the boat but were not in sufficient force to take the slaves from their friends. Two weeks later the slave, Sam **Smith**, wrote of their safe arrival in Canada.

“Mr. **Jones** explained the capture as due to the previous return from Busti of two slaves who went back after their wives but were recaptured and beaten until one revealed the location of the others who had escaped.

“We can best gain a realization of the depths to which this man-hunt, following so closely upon the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law, stirred the outraged sentiment of the locality from an editorial that appeared in the Jamestown Journal three days later and which I have incorporated into this paper.” [Here followed the editorial of October 3, 1851. Then, on June 19, 1925, in reporting about Bailey’s talk, *The Nunda News* added the following.]

“The matter of placing a boulder on the farm in the town of Busti to mark the spot where Harrison **Williams**, an escaped slave boy from Virginia, was captured by his master away back in 1851, was considered by the University club at Jamestown at its annual outing at Long View, the summer home of B. S. **Dean** in Busti.”

In August 1934, William S. **Bailey** read a prepared paper on the Underground Railroad in Western New York to a meeting of the New York State Historical Association at Chautauqua Institute. The section of **Bailey**’s paper referring to the Harrison case, a slightly revised version of **Bailey**’s earlier speech, is as follows:

“Of the number of slaves who came or passed through Busti over the Underground Railroad no data are available. My informant, James **Broadhead**, related that Negroes had come ‘one or two at a time,’ until the winter of 1850-51, when a group of seven came together to the **Storum** place. Of these, Harrison **Williams** remained with the **Storums**, one went to Levi **Jones**, one to Squire **Plumb**, while others were hired by friendly neighbors. Apparently the protectors of the slaves did not at that time fear attempts of capture by the owners of the Negroes under their protection. And now we come to the event that revealed Busti to be no longer a safe haven for runaway slaves, an event that stirred the entire region and gave it an object lesson of the horrors of slavery that must doubtless have led the Abolitionists along this part of the Underground Railroad to redouble efforts in passing the Negroes on to freedom.

“On the morning of September 30, 1851, the colored lad Harrison **Williams** was kidnapped by a party of slave owners. From Edward O. **Jones**, of Evanston, Illinois, a son of Levi **Jones**, I secured the following account. Mr. **Jones** was seven years old at the time. A party of the runaway slaves had gone to Jamestown a few days before this kidnapping, attracted by the visit of Dan **Rice**’s circus. In the group was a slave named Sam **Smith** who was working for Levi **Jones**. These Negroes did not return to Busti till after three days when Sam **Smith** came to the **Jones** farm at night and said he had seen his master on the streets of Jamestown. Since that encounter the slaves had concealed themselves in a swamp. Levi **Jones** evidently kept a watch for the slave owners, for when they came to his farm searching for Sam **Smith**, who was still hidden, he tried to beat them to the **Storum** farm, but his horse was not fast enough. On reaching the **Storum** farm the slave hunters, in three carriages, went at once to the barnyard, where they found Harrison milking, threw him into their conveyance and quickly drove toward Jamestown. Levi **Jones** followed and in Jamestown tried to recruit enough men to effect a rescue, but he could not arouse sufficient interest. However, he and Silas **Shearman**, who joined him in Jamestown, followed the party toward Fredonia, but returned at night after an unsuccessful pursuit.

“Following the capture of **Williams** the other slaves were taken to Dunkirk by their friends and sent across the lake to Canada. The slave hunters were said to have followed their human property as far as the boat, but were not in sufficient force to take the slaves from their friends. Two weeks later the slave Sam **Smith** wrote of their safe arrival in Canada.

“Mr. **Jones** explained the capture as due to the previous return from Busti of two slaves who went back after their wives but were recaptured and beaten until one revealed the location of the others who had escaped. We can best gain a realization of the depths to which this man hunt, following so closely upon the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law, stirred the outraged sentiments of the locality from an editorial in the Jamestown ‘Journal’ three days later. [Here followed the editorial from the Jamestown *Journal* of October 3, 1851.]

“Notwithstanding the sentiment reflected by the ‘Journal’ editorial my informants Messrs. **Jones** and **Broadhead** agree that the Abolitionists were not popular in Busti. Mr. **Jones** told me they were looked upon as ‘bad’ men and that the only men in the village who voted the Abolitionist ticket in the early fifties were Squire **Plumb**, Levi **Jones**, and William **Storum**, though the majority of the people were in sympathy with the runaway slaves. Mr. **Broadhead** recalled that on the morning of the kidnapping much ridicule was hurled at the Abolitionists and that the feeling toward them in the village was very bitter.

“An interesting sequel to the **Williams** kidnapping is told by James **Broadhead**. On Christmas day, 1864 [*sic*], Mr. **Broadhead**, then in the Union army, was in camp near Culpepper, Virginia. Having secured passes to town, he and Byron **Aylesworth** [*sic*] encountered a Negro who impressed Mr. **Broadhead** as a man he had seen before. This Negro proved to be Harrison **Williams**. He told his former Busti friends that he had not been punished after his capture, but had soon been sold into Georgia. He had entered the war as body servant to his master, had been captured with him by the Northern troops after Gettysburg, and at this time was a hostler in the Union army.

“The Jamestown ‘Journal’ of September 14, 1855, copies from the Romney (Virginia) ‘Intelligencer’ an article to the effect that a Captain **Harnes**, of Hardy County, had been informed by a friend residing in Jamestown that his Negro man who, eight or nine years before, ‘had left his comfortable quarters with his master and taken up his abode in Jamestown,’ was at that time in jail in Buffalo for a misdemeanor. **Harnes** and three friends came to Buffalo to secure possession of the Negro, but did not succeed.”

In a letter to the Warren Public Library in 1944, Roy **Blodgett** spoke of the Harrison case as follows:

“I was born in Busti, New York, which is just over the Chautauqua County line, and later lived in Sugar Grove. In company with a cousin, who is 85 years old, I traveled over some of the roads mentioned between Sugar Grove and Busti and located the home of Lauren **Blodgett**, who was [a] statistician for the government in the early days and a brilliant man. I understand that his father’s home, part of which still stands, was a station of the ‘Underground Railroad’ on the ‘Wellman Road.’

“I visited the site of the **Storum** Farm where the Negro boy was captured. All that remains of this place is the foundation. My cousin remembers the **Storum** Farm well. About 1898 and later there were two families of **Storums** living in Warren. They were part Negro and were reputed to have some Indian blood. No doubt they were connected with the original **Storum** family, where the slave boy was captured.”

A number of questions are raised by the various accounts, and it’s not clear how the name William or **Williams** became associated with Harrison. Yet, in spite of the variations among the

Harrison stories over time, it is possible to ascertain from public records that many of the persons named in those accounts did actually exist.

For example, Dr. Nathaniel Dare **Parran** (born in 1812) married his wife Adeline L. about 1833, when Harrison would have been about 2 years old. In the 1840 census, **Parran** was listed as having five slaves, one of them a male under 10. The 1850 Census listed his children as Martha Louisiana, 16; Jonathan C., 13; and Western Virginia, 10; with no mention of slaves or servants.

**Parran's** near neighbor, George S. **Neff**, can be found in the 1840 Census in Hardy VA, with his wife, a one-year old son, and a male slave between 36 and 54 years of age. By the time of the 1850 Census, one year before the Harrison episode, the family included George S., 36; Mary, 32; Mortimer D., 11; Amzella, 8; Laura, 5; and Sarah Catherine, 2. The 1850 Slave Schedule noted that **Neff** had two mulatto slaves, an 18-year old male and an 11-year old female. In 1870, **Neff** and his family were still there farming.

One major difficulty in tracing Harrison **Williams** after he was recaptured is the issue of his name. There can be no doubt that he was first called "Harrison." That was the designation used at the hearing in Hardy County Court in 1851, as well as by his pursuer, George S. **Neff**, who claimed to have known him since he came to the **Parrans** when he was two years old.

In the Jamestown *Saturday Times* of 18 July 1891, **Shankland** referred to him as "Harrison **Williams**." However, the writer in the Warren PA *Ledger* in early August wrote that "we knew the boy who was kidnapped as William Henry **Harrison**, instead of Harrison **Williams**."

On the other hand, according to **Lockwood's** interview with James W. **Broadhead** in 1902, Harrison answered **Broadhead's** question in 1863 by saying "my name is Harrison **Williams**."

Harrison was said by **Broadhead** to have been working for the Union general and corps commander **Slocum**, who can only be General H. W. **Slocum**. It is possible that Harrison then enlisted in the Union army. The New Orleans newspaper *Black Republican* of 13 May 1865 carried an item headed: "Sick Colored Soldiers. List of Patients Remaining in Corps D'Afrique, U. S. General Hospital, April." The list included an entry for a "**Williams** Harrison ... Private" in Co. G of the 48<sup>th</sup> U. S. Colored Infantry. It is possible that a search of that Harrison **Williams's** service jacket and the pension lists would determine if he was the former refugee Harrison.

The Federal Census showed at least two entries for men named Harrison **Williams** who were born in Virginia about the same time as refugee Harrison. One possibility is in the Census for 1870, which recorded a Harrison **Williams**, 41, born in Virginia. In 1870 he was living in District 1, Tunica, Mississippi with his wife, Jane, 30; Betty, 9; and Thyme, 6. Another possibility is in the 1880 Census, which showed Harrison **Williams**, "Mulatto," 49, born in Virginia but living in Prides, Alabama with his wife, Ollie, 37, born in Alabama; son Lewis, 18; "servant" Amanda Peters, 19; and her daughter, Alice, 5.

Other records may one day verify the existence of other persons who took part in the Harrison story, and may even identify some of the others in his party of refugees.