



BREAKING THE CHAINS



# Ann Maria Jackson

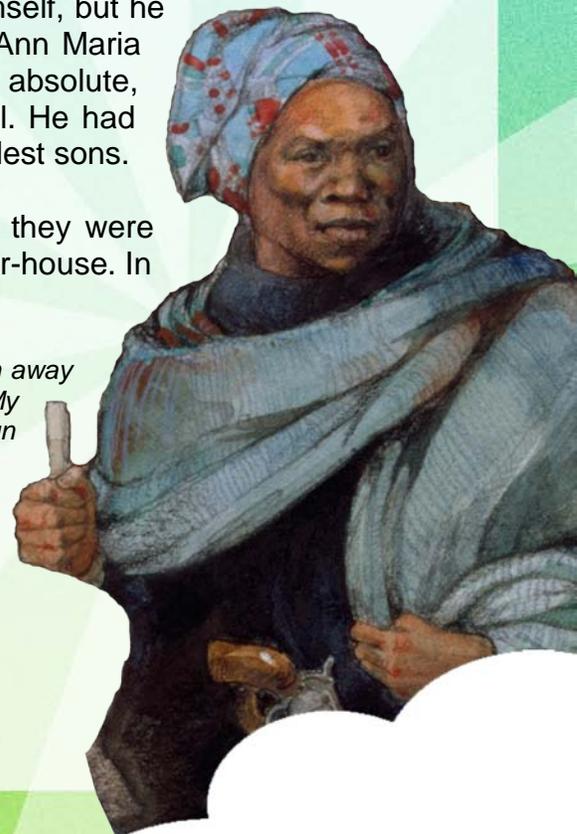
TORONTO

The year 1858 was a monumental one in the lives of Ann Maria Jackson and her family of nine children. In that year, Mrs. Jackson took destiny into her own hands and made a mad dash for freedom with seven of her children in tow. William Still, Philadelphia abolitionist and Underground Railroad stationmaster who interviewed the interesting party, and recorded their story for posterity. His book, *The Underground Railroad*, was published after the Civil War when it was safe to tell such tales. Still noted that this family's journey to freedom was utterly remarkable, given how difficult it was to escape and travel through slave territory for anyone, let alone women with young children.<sup>i</sup>

At the time of her escape, Ann Maria Jackson was living in a condition of quasi-freedom in Delaware. She was hired out by her owner, Joseph Brown, meaning that she worked for other employers and paid a portion of the wages to her owner and kept a portion for herself. Brown had also allowed her to live with her husband, a free Black man named John Jackson, a blacksmith, and their nine children, as opposed to living with her owner on his plantation. However, as Still pointed out, this "quasi-freedom" benefitted Brown in two ways. Not only would he take most of her wages for himself, but he would also bear no responsibility for financially supporting Ann Maria and her children. Moreover, his authority over the family was absolute, for the owner of a slave mother owned her children as well. He had proven that the previous fall when he had sold off her two eldest sons.

The situation had had tragic consequences, because after they were sold, Ann Maria's husband lost his sanity and died in the poor-house. In her own words, she stated:

*It almost broke my heart ... when he came and took my children away as soon as they were big enough to hand me a drink of water. My husband was always very kind to me, and I had often wanted him to run away with me and the children, but I could not get him in the notion; he did not feel that he could, and so he stayed, and died broken-hearted, crazy...*<sup>ii</sup>





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As Still observed, “[John Jackson] was a ‘free man’ in the eye of Delaware law, yet he was not allowed to exercise the least authority over his children.”<sup>iii</sup>

What prompted Ann Maria’s desperate flight was the same motivation that often led enslaved people to escape: she had learned at the last minute, despite her master’s attempt to keep her in the dark, that her next four oldest children would be sold away from her. Once on “the road,” alone and vulnerable, Ann Maria Jackson became terribly fearful that they had been betrayed. However, the network of Underground Railroad agents had been watching them carefully, and sent a carriage to pick the Jacksons up outside of Wilmington, Delaware. They were then transferred to a second carriage which transported them across the border into free territory in Chester County, Pennsylvania.

After meeting with William Still, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society, they were then sent on a northbound route to St. Catharines, Canada West, (now Ontario). Their arrival there was announced in a letter from noted UGRR activist Reverend Hiram Wilson.

Niagara City, Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>, 1858.

Dear Bro. Still: -- I am happy to inform you that Mrs. Jackson and her interesting family of seven children arrived safe and in good health and spirits at my house in St. Catharines, on Saturday evening last. With sincere pleasure I provided for them comfortable quarters till this morning, when they left for Toronto. I got them conveyed there at half fare, and gave them letters of introduction to Thomas Henning, Esq., and Mrs. Dr. Willis, trusting that they will be better cared for in Toronto than they could be at St. Catharines. We have so many coming to us that we think it best for some of them to pass on to other places. My wife gave them all a good supply of clothing before they left us. James Henry, an older son is, I think, not far from St. Catharines, but has not as yet reunited with the family.

Faithfully and truly yours,

Hiram Wilson.<sup>iv</sup>

In the letter, Wilson referred to James Henry Jackson, another son, who was already living not far from St. Catharines when the rest of the Jacksons arrived. William Still recorded this young man’s arrival in Philadelphia in September, 1858, saying his mother “Ann Jackson” was completely unaware of her son’s escape.<sup>v</sup> He too had made his way to Canada and was thus reunited with his joyful family.

Obviously, this Underground Railroad narrative was one of the great success stories, with Ann Maria and eight of her children



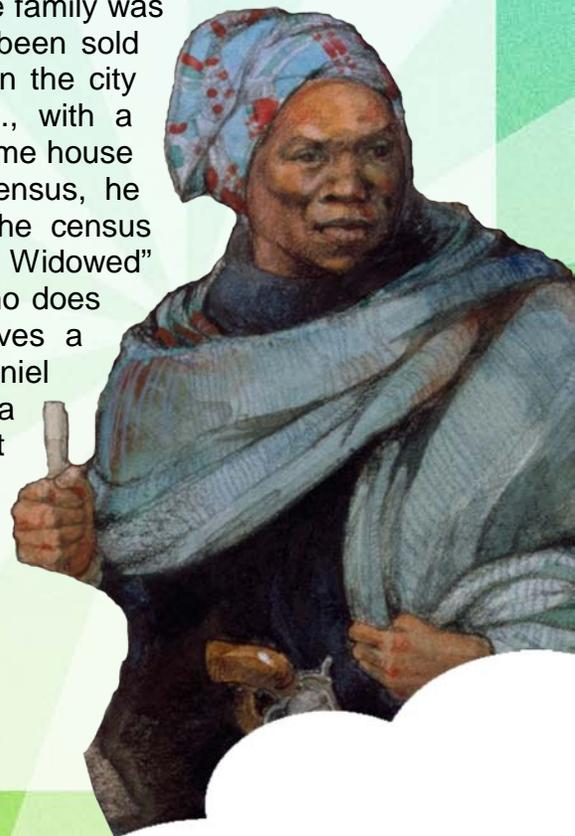


successfully achieving their goal of reaching Canada and the freedom that they had so valiantly sought. What became of Mrs. Jackson and her family and what of her ninth child, the other son that was sold away?

True to his word, Reverend Wilson sent them on to Toronto, where they settled and made a home for themselves. There they were befriended by Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, fugitive slaves from Kentucky who had arrived in 1834 and were now the owners of a prosperous taxi cab company.<sup>vi</sup> By 1861, the Jacksons were renting a one-storey frame house at 93 Edward Street in St. John's Ward. This was an area that received many new immigrants, particularly Black newcomers to the city, and was located north of Queen Street near Osgoode Hall. It had a vibrant community life, including several churches serving the African Canadian community. James Henry, aged 18 in the census, had already been reunited with his family, and the other children, Mary, aged 22; William, 15; Frances, 14, Wilhelmina, 11, John Edwin, 9, Ebenezer, 8, and Albert, 5, were all living in the household. Their mother's name was recorded simply as A.M. Jackson.<sup>vii</sup> Ann Maria supported her family by "washing," or taking in the washing of people who could afford to pay someone else to do it for them. There was an additional person who was not related to them living in the household named George Jones, a 20-year-old labourer, most likely a boarder.

Most of the family members remained together under the same roof over the next decade. By 1871, the census records show that the two eldest daughters, Mary and Frances, had moved out to start their own families. James Henry and William were barbers, John Edwin was a waiter, and Wilhelmina was a laundress like her mother. Ebenezer was not employed, and Albert was a twelve-year-old attending school.<sup>viii</sup>

Several years after the end of the American Civil War and the emancipation of the enslaved population, another wonderful event took place in the life of Ann Maria Jackson. The last piece of her family puzzle was found. The family was reunited with Richard M. Jackson, the final son who had been sold away in Delaware so many years ago. He first appeared in the city directory of 1870 working as a barber at 77 Yonge St., with a residence at 104 Edward St. in St. John's Ward, the very same house where his mother lived.<sup>ix</sup> One year later, in the 1871 census, he resided with Eliza Jackson, possibly his wife, although the census enumerator did not record an "M" under the "Married or Widowed" column. Also living in the household was Mary Williams, who does not seem to have been Richard's sister as there survives a marriage record for Mary Jackson, born in Delaware, to Daniel Carter in 1867.<sup>x</sup> Richard M. Jackson was 30 and working as a barber. Coincidentally, he was listed in the documentation just below the records for the family of Elizabeth Brooks and her daughter, Amelia, who had also been reunited after the Civil War with their mother, Deborah Brown. Deborah had escaped to Canada from Maryland in 1854.<sup>xi</sup>





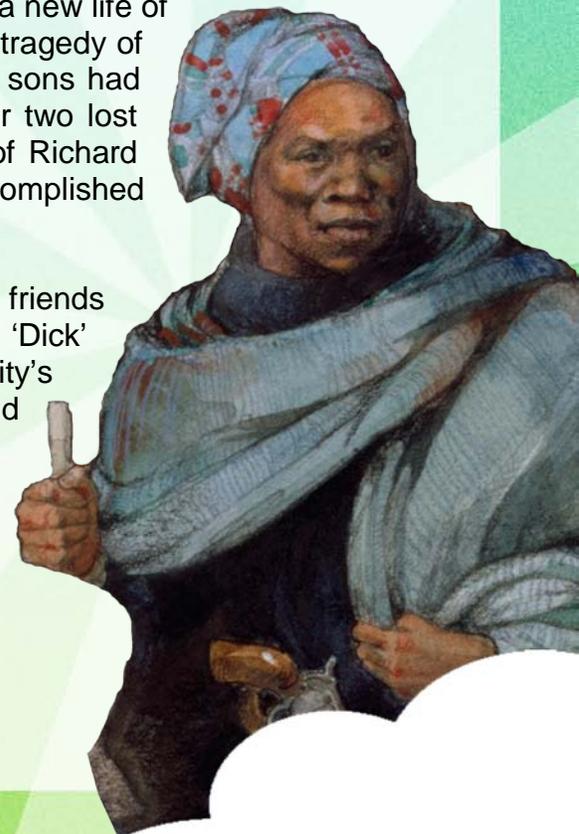
## BREAKING THE CHAINS

Richard, or 'Dick' Jackson as he was known, was a popular and well-liked barber catering to the well-heeled elite of Toronto society. In the 1870s, he operated a hairdressing establishment with Reuben Custaloe, the grandson of African Canadian community leader and noted Toronto builder, John M. Tinsley. The barber business was called "Dick and Rube's." Dick was known not only for his ability to cut and shave, but also for entertaining his clientele with the latest gossip, whether it was political, personal or social.<sup>xii</sup>

The baby of the family, Albert Jackson, had been an infant of two or three when his mother fled with him and his siblings to Canada. In May of 1882, he was appointed letter carrier by the federal government, but the difficulty he encountered on the job indicates that white Canadians were not prepared to accept Blacks in certain positions, particularly highly-valued government appointments. Every letter carrier refused to train him, and he was made an inside hall porter. However, the Black community vigorously objected to the situation, writing letters to the editors of the newspapers, and holding a mass meeting at the Wesleyan Methodist church on Richmond Street where they established a five-member committee to look into the matter. Fortunately, a federal election was underway at the time, and the Liberal candidate, J. D. Edgar, made a case of the issue to gain support from Black voters. T. C. Patterson, the Toronto postmaster who also happened to be a close political ally of conservative Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, decided to give in to the protests in order to help his friend the prime minister. When Macdonald came to Toronto he was greeted by a number of citizens who insisted that Jackson be put on the mail route. He replied that Albert Jackson would be delivering mail as soon as possible. On June 2, 1882, Albert Jackson was sent out without incident with one of the letter carriers to learn his new job. Thus began his career as a mailman, a career that lasted thirty-six years until his death in 1918.<sup>xiii</sup>

When Ann Maria Jackson passed away on January 28, 1880, she could look back on a life in which she had triumphed over slavery and had forged a new life of freedom in Toronto surrounded by her family.<sup>xiv</sup> Despite the tragedy of the death of her husband, and the fact that her two oldest sons had been sold away from her, she was able to reunite with her two lost children after settling in Canada. Based on the examples of Richard and Albert, the children demonstrated what could be accomplished given the opportunity. They flourished in their new home.

Ann Maria Jackson was buried in the family grave of her friends Thornton and Lucie Blackburn. Her son, Richard M. 'Dick' Jackson, died prematurely due to illness in 1886. The city's newspapers reported extensively on his funeral, and lamented the loss of Toronto's most popular barber.<sup>xv</sup>



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ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> William Still, *Underground Rail Road Records, with a Life of the Author, Narrating the Hardships, Hairbreadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in the Efforts for Freedom* (Philadelphia: William Still, 1883), 512-14.

<sup>ii</sup> Still, 513-14.

<sup>iii</sup> Still, 513.

<sup>iv</sup> Still, 514.

<sup>v</sup> Still, 475.

<sup>vi</sup> Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got A Home in Gloryland: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2007), 300-302.

<sup>vii</sup> Census of Canada, Canada West, City of Toronto, Ward of St. John, District 3 ½, 962; The names of the children recorded by Still in his book were: Mary Ann, William Henry, Frances Sabrina, Wilhelmina, John Edwin, Ebenezer Thomas, and William Albert.

<sup>viii</sup> 1871 Census, Canada West, Toronto West, St. John's Ward, Division 3, 49-50.

<sup>ix</sup> C. E. Anderson & Co's *Toronto City Directory, for the Year 1868*, Toronto: C. E. Anderson & Co., 1868, 256; *Robertson & Cook's Toronto City Directory for 1870* (Toronto: Daily Telegraph Printing House, 1870), 66. Ann Maria Jackson was not recorded in the 1870 directory, however she was living at 104 Edward St. in 1868.

<sup>x</sup> Mary Jackson, aged 22, born in Delaware to parents John Jackson and Maria Jackson, married Daniel Carter of Toronto on December 19, 1867. Daniel had been born in Virginia to parents Daniel and Isabella Carter, and was 27 years of age. Archives of Ontario; Series: Ontario, Canada. *County Marriage Registers, 1858-June 1869*. MS248; Reel: 15 & 16.

<sup>xi</sup> 1871 Census, Canada West, City of Toronto, St. John's Ward, Subdivision 1, 131; Smardz Frost, 334-5; Adrienne Shadd, Afua Cooper and Karolyn Smardz Frost, *The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto!* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2002), 9; "Information Wanted," *Christian Recorder*, June 12, 1869.

<sup>xii</sup> Smardz Frost, 334-5.

<sup>xiii</sup> Colin McFarquhar, "Blacks in 1880s Toronto: The Search for Equality," *Ontario History* 99:1 (Spring 2007), 66-72; Ontario Canada Deaths, 1869-1938, Schedule D, County of York, Division of Toronto, #1257.

<sup>xiv</sup> Smardz Frost, 334. See also "Ontario Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947," index, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/JFJX-G43>: accessed April 24, 2012), Annie Maria Jackson (1880).

<sup>xv</sup> "Death of 'Dick' Jackson, *Toronto World*, June 3, 1885; "City News Jottings," *Toronto Evening Telegram*, June 5, 1885. See also "Ontario Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947," index, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/JNLQ-SPV> : accessed April 24, 2012), Richard Jackson (1885).

