2020

Abolitionist Aunty: Jane Chester

Digital Harrisburg

Follow this and additional works at: https://mosaic.messiah.edu/women

Part of the African American Studies Commons, United States History Commons, and the Women's History Commons

Permanent URL: https://mosaic.messiah.edu/women/7

Sharpening Intellect | Deepening Christian Faith | Inspiring Action

Messiah College is a Christian college of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.
Jane Morris Chester was born enslaved in Baltimore, Maryland on July 5, 1801. Around 1828, she escaped enslavement and made a treacherous journey north to Harrisburg, where she married George Chester. Below, an obituary tells the story of her journey north to escape slavery and find George.

**EARLY LIFE & ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY**

**THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD**

After marriage, Jane and George owned a successful Harrisburg restaurant where abolitionists often gathered to talk about their work. Fueled by her own past, Jane and her husband provided aid to fugitives escaping enslavement.

One of Jane’s twelve children, Thomas Morris Chester, continued his parents’ work with an active role during the Civil War. T. Morris Chester recruited African Americans to serve the Union forces during the war, and was the only black journalist during the initial years of the war. Sadly, Thomas passed away shortly before Jane died, leaving her heartbroken.

**THE OLD EIGHTH**

Jane Morris Chester was born enslaved in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 5, 1801. Around 1828, she escaped enslavement and made a treacherous journey north to Harrisburg, where she married George Chester. After George's death in 1859, Jane, fondly called “Aunty” by Harrisburg citizens, continued to operate the restaurant and opened a premier catering business for Harrisburg elites, including events for two Pennsylvania governors. Using funds from her business, Jane purchased a home in the Old Eighth Ward at 305 Chester Street, where she hosted meetings and dinners with many important people from across the nation. Jane was also renowned by locals for her homemade taffy. An excerpt from another obituary, talking about her reputation in the city, is featured on the right.