

FREDERICK DOUGLASS WALKING TOUR

The New-York Historical Society presents,
Hidden Sites of Slavery and Freedom: a walking talking tour of New York City

Site 1
Frederick Douglass Landing
West end of Chambers Street



Pretending to be a free sailor, the young Frederick Douglass stepped off a Hudson River ferry at the Chambers Street Dock in 1838. Traveling by train, steamship and ferry, he completed his long journey from enslavement in Maryland to freedom in the North.

Frederick Douglass stayed only two weeks in New York before continuing further north to New Bedford, a whaling port in Massachusetts. There, Douglass avoided the dangers posed by slave catchers and the Fugitive Slave Laws. He found work as a ship's caulker.

Douglass described his first days of freedom in New York.



“... after an anxious and most perilous but safe journey, I found myself in the big city of New York, a free man.... No man now had a right to call me his slave or assert his mastery over me... I lived more in one day than in a year of my slave life. It was a time of joyous excitement.”

Despite his joy, New York remained a dangerous place for runaway slaves, since slave catchers watched the wharves. Warned of these dangers, Douglass was soon sheltered by David Ruggles, an ardent enemy of slavery who helped freedom seekers on the “Underground Railroad.”

"..seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness ... I saw in every white man an enemy and in almost every colored man cause for distrust." ...

When Douglass arrived, Manhattan was a much smaller island. Landfill claimed parts of the river shore; Hudson waters then covered the very spot where you now stand. This area has been renamed Frederick Douglass Landing to recall the enslaved fleeing the South on the Underground Railroad.

Here are the directions from Frederick Douglass Landing to Theodore Wright's lodgings, the next site on this tour:

- On Chambers Street, walk four (4) blocks east to West Broadway
- Turn left onto West Broadway, and walk seven (7) blocks north, uptown, to White Street.

This edition of the New York Historical Society's *Hidden Sites of Slavery and Freedom Tour* explores the life of Frederick Douglass and the Underground Railroad in New York. It has been generously supported by the Verizon Foundation and the United States Department of Education. Other *Walking, Talking Tours* can also be found at www.nyhistory.org.