
STORY CARD: John Levy, Abolitionist

John Levy (Levi) (1797-1871) was an important abolitionist¹ who lived in Lowell and worked to end slavery by raising money, giving speeches, helping freedom seekers, and aiding other efforts to end slavery in the United States. He worked as a reporter for William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*.

Levy was born on the Island of Nevis, West Indies. His father Daniel and his mother Nancy were both free black people. The Levys were slaveholding plantation owners, and their ancestors were part of the African Jewish community on the island of Nevis.

Initially, John Levy apprenticed as a sailor and worked on ships throughout the Caribbean. Then he sailed across the Atlantic to the Isle of Man, Liverpool, London, and Greece.

When he was 23, Levy arrived in Boston. He worked at Harvard College as a waiter. He married Sophia Lewis (1794-1852) in 1822.

In 1826, Levy and his family moved to Lowell and Levy opened a hairdressing salon on East Merrimack Street. He wanted to serve the female textile workers who worked in the factories in the new town of Lowell. An 1826 advertisement in the *Merrimack Journal* said, "John Levi has for sale a large assortment of FASHIONABLE CURLS, at his shop near Kimball's Hotel, Belvidere."

John Levy said that he "began to discuss the question of abolition with his customers, in his shop...He said, "I had read much and reflected deeply..." Talking to people and reading about the horrors of slavery made him realize that slavery was wrong. He joined the New England Anti-Slavery Society, founded by William Lloyd Garrison.

In 1834, John Levy became an agent and reporter for Garrison's abolitionist newspaper "The Liberator."

¹ The abolitionists were people who wanted to abolish slavery. Abolitionist societies raised money, hired speakers to give talks about the evils of slavery, and even had their own newspapers. They helped freedom seekers who managed to escape to the North.

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John Levy helped Freedom Seekers throughout his life. In 1841 the Amistad Africans visited Lowell. The newspapers reported that John Levy helped them and gave them money for their defense. He also gave money to people who were trying to help their families purchase their freedom.

In March 1843, John Levy worked with Maria Chapman of Boston, and Sarah Clay of Lowell to reestablish the Lowell Woman's Anti-Slavery Society and organize anti-slavery fairs held in City Hall, Merrimack Street.

In the 1840s, along with William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass, John Levy and others organized a series of one hundred anti-slavery conventions throughout Massachusetts. In 1843 and 1844, they arranged for Frederick Douglas to speak at the Lowell Anti-Slavery Convention.

John Levy, his second wife Henrietta Williams, and their six children moved to Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1846. Over the next 25 years, Levy worked for the civil rights of black citizens. John Levy wrote an autobiography about his work as an abolitionist. He wrote, "*I thank God I lived to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment² in the City of Boston.*"

John Levy lived to see the end of slavery. He died on March 25, 1879, in North Andover, Massachusetts.

Related Resources:

[Life and Adventures of John Levy](#), 1871 edited by Rachel Levy [his daughter]
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² The Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution guaranteed the right to vote to all US citizens, regardless of race. It guaranteed the right to vote to all African Americans.