

The Imprisonment of Rev. Samuel Green

As the clergy of the Philadelphia Conference prepared for the trial of John D. Long at their 1858 session, yet another unspoken shame lurked in their collective conscience. A year before, a black local preacher who lived near Cambridge, Maryland named Samuel Green had been sent to prison for possessing a copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.



Born in 1802, Green purchased his freedom in 1832, then worked as a farmer, and preached throughout Dorchester County. Respected by blacks and whites alike, Green purchased the freedom of his wife Catherine, but not that of his children Samuel, Jr. and Susan. In 1854, the younger Samuel escaped to Canada with the help of Harriet Tubman, and from afar aided others in his old neighborhood to do the same. Samuel, Sr. came under suspicion for helping runaways, and in April 1857, a search of his home turned up a copy of Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel of slave life. Green was arrested under a Maryland law that prohibited blacks from owning materials of an "inflammatory character," and in May he was sentenced to ten years in the state penitentiary. Despite Green's status as a licensed preacher with the ME Church, and his long history of service alongside its preachers, the Philadelphia Conference made no public statements of protest. John D. Long wrote,

Dorchester County is almost exclusively a Methodist County. If the members of the ME Church of Dorchester had been liberty-loving, slavery-hating Methodists, no judge or jury would have dared to consign their brother in Christ to ten years' incarceration... Maryland denies the humanity of one hundred thousand slaves, and oppresses seventy-five thousand free negroes. May the Omnipotent speed the hour when American slavery shall be blasted by the thunders of His power, amidst the shoutings and hallelujahs of a redeemed race!*

In 1862, Green was pardoned by Maryland Governor Augustus Bradford, on condition he leave the state. He and Catherine moved to Canada to join their son. It is unknown what fate befell their daughter Susan, who had been sold off to the deep South years before.

*Long, *Pictures of Slavery*, 398; see also Richard A. Bondo, *Samuel Green: A Black Life in Antebellum Maryland* (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Maryland, 1988).