

A Letter of Frederick Douglass

On the facing page is the transcript of a previously unpublished letter of Frederick Douglass (1818-1893), prominent African-American abolitionist, author and civil rights leader of the nineteenth century. It was discovered amid a sheaf of letters written to Rev. John Dixon Long that are part of the collection at Old St. George's United Methodist Church, Philadelphia, and has been transcribed by the editor.

Rev. Long's indictment and trial, as outlined in the previous article, was widely publicized in both church and secular papers, and he received a number of letters of support, among them this note from Frederick Douglass. Douglass was raised in slavery within the bounds of the Philadelphia Conference, on the eastern shore of Maryland, and his owner's family were Methodists. Douglass escaped from slavery in 1838.

The letter is noteworthy for its reference to Amanda Auld Sears, whom Douglass knew as a child in Maryland as the daughter of his owner Thomas Auld, and is striking in revealing his good will toward that family, even before slavery had ended. In his *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, published in 1893, he relates an incident in Philadelphia in 1858, after giving a lecture at National Hall. Informed about Amanda's residence in the city, Douglass went there to inquire about his relatives. "I had been out of slavery twenty years, and no word had come to me from my sisters, or my brother Perry, or my grandmother." After an emotional reunion with Amanda, he wrote, "All thought of slavery, color, or what might seem to belong to the dignity of her position vanished, and the meeting was as the meeting of friends long separated, yet still present in each other's memory and affection." Douglass notes that among the persons invited to the Sears home for this meeting were Rev. John D. Long and his wife.¹

¹Henry Louis, Gates, Jr., ed. *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: The Library of America, 1994), 829-832.



Rochester, August 28, 1858

Rev. J. D. Long.

My dear Sir,

Thank you for your kind note informing me of your removal to Auburn. It will give me great pleasure to call upon you when I shall again visit that place. I was very happy to learn from you that Mr. and Mrs. Sears were well when you left West Philadelphia. I feel an interest in the family of my old master, which I cannot explain and to see them prosperous and happy is my sincerest desire.

I am, Mr. Long, Yours Truly,

Fred^k Douglass.