

BRIDGEWATER, 1841
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TORY HOUSE

Stop on the Underground Railroad

Sheltered Famous Slaves William and Ellen Crafts

Sitting on the north side of the Bridgewater Town Common, is a historical two storied wooden building known as the Tory House. Built in 1698 by Jacob Leonard, the house got its name after it ended up in the possession of Tory sympathizer Colonel Josiah Edson, head of the local militia. In 1774, Josiah's great loyalty to the Crown and King George angered his fellow townsmen. Edson was forced to leave town, the house was confiscated by the Continental Congress and taken over by the Town of Bridgewater in 1776.

After the property was sold by the Town of Bridgewater, it was used as a inn. In the early 1800's, the Tory House served as a public house and then as a dental office. In the mid-1800's, the Tory House was established by local residents as a stop on the Underground Railroad assisting runaway slaves.

The famous slaves, William and Ellen Crafts were sheltered here in 1848 on their way north to Boston. The Crafts were heralded for the brazen method of their escape. During their trip, William's role was that of a slave and the fair skinned Ellen disguised herself as an invalid white man since a white woman would not be traveling alone with a male slave. With the assistance of abolitionists, the Crafts remained in Boston for two years. Sought by bounty hunters after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, they quickly sailed to England, a safer haven.

The Tory House later became a rooming house for out-of-town pupils going to the nearby Bridgewater Academy. It is now a private home and not open to the public. There is a historical marker on the side of the building describing its past.

Compliments of Register of Deeds John R. Buckley, Jr.
and Lorna Green-Baker

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