

The Amazing Story of Solomon Moseby

Fugitive slave who reaches freedom in Canada in 1837 is ordered back to United States, but escapes with help from hundreds of supporters.

1837

Moseby Time Line

May: Solomon Moseby steals his owner's horse and escapes bondage in Kentucky. He makes it to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario and becomes a free man.

Early July: David Castleman, Moseby's former owner, writes his friend, Peter B. Porter, a respected leader in Niagara Falls. (See the article about Porter below.) Castleman wants to trick Moseby to come back to the U.S. and have him arrested. Porter tells Castleman he can use his home in Niagara Falls as a base, and to bring criminal indictments and an extradition request from the Governor of Kentucky.

August 13: Castleman responds and writes Porter to expect his arrival with all the paperwork in hand.

Late August: Castleman arrives and goes to Canada and presents the arrest warrants to the local authorities. Moseby is immediately arrested in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The black community springs into action and surrounds the jail and court house with hundreds of Moseby supporters.

September 6: Canada orders Moseby sent back the United States.



This is a rare photograph of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Court House (no longer standing) where Solomon Moseby was held captive, awaiting his forced return to the U.S. With the help of hundreds of supporters who surrounded the Court House, he escaped.

September 12: The Niagara-on-the-Lake Sheriff prepares to take Moseby to the Niagara River ferry to transport him back the U.S. The Sheriff tells Castleman to wait at the Lewiston dock to pick Moseby up. Knowing that trouble is brewing, the Sheriff also calls on the military troops at Fort George for backup to help escort Moseby to the waiting boat. However, the crowd of 400 Moseby supporters charges the troops and Moseby escapes his captors. Two citizens are killed and 40 were arrested in Canada's first race riot.

Years Later: Solomon Moseby somehow made it to England where he became legally freed. Years later, he returned to the Canada and settled in the Niagara area.



Peter B. Porter

Did he help the slave catchers?

Peter B. Porter (1773-1844) was one of the early fathers of Niagara County and a colorful and highly influential character. He held many political posts, including Secretary of War under President John Quincy Adams.

He said he was opposed to slavery, but also said if the enslaved were freed in the South, it "would be impossible to sustain a moral and wholesome government." He was known to have helped bounty hunters who were looking for fugitive slaves in the area. During the War of 1812, he criticized fellow Gen. Alexander

Smyth's ineptitude for the failed invasion of Canada from Lewiston. The argument resulted in a duel. Historian John R. Elting summarized the outcome of the duel by stating, "Unfortunately, both missed."

Porter was a partner with Benjamin Barton of Lewiston in the company that owned the rights to transport goods around the Falls on the portage. Barton built the Frontier House in 1824. The Town of Porter was named after Augustus, Peter's older brother.



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Inventing Niagara

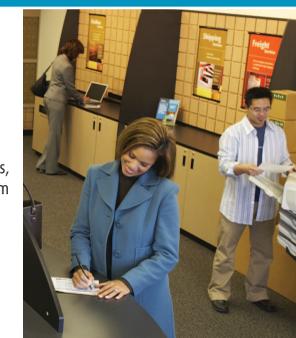
Much of the information for this placemat came from the book, *Inventing Niagara*, by author Ginger Strand. The book provides a number of fascinating glimpses into the history of the Niagara area.

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