

One way to glimpse 1850s Iowa is to invoke the power of place. Two houses that represent militant abolitionists are the Todd House in Tabor and the Hitchcock House in Lewis. Both are on the National Register of Historic Places and open to the public.

John Todd

IOWA ABOLITIONIST John Todd had a career as an activist that spanned nearly 60 years. Raised in Pennsylvania, Todd graduated from the most progressive institution in America at that time, Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio. At Oberlin, black men, black women, white men, and white women all attended the same classes. "Of all the thousands of Oberlin students," Todd once said, "I never knew one who studied there long, who did

not go out from there a thorough abolitionist." Todd became known as a dynamic Congregationalist preacher.

Once while traveling on a steamboat down the Ohio River, on his way to Iowa, Todd noticed that another passenger was reading the widely circulated proslavery argument by South Carolina clergyman Richard Fuller. Todd asked if he might read it next. The passenger was a proslavery man and questioned him about his beliefs.

Todd answered in no uncertain terms that he was for the abolition of slavery. Other proslavery passengers crowded around him in a most threatening manner and began shouting: "Shoot him. Kill him." Another yelled, "The damned Abolitionist!" I wish I had him! I would swap him off for a dog and then I would shoot the dog!" Todd stood his ground.

In 1850, Todd and his wife, Martha, and their children joined George and Maria Gaston and others who shared their beliefs southwestern Iowa. In 1854, the Todds helped establish the town of Tabor.

In Tabor, abolition was not abstract talk about an Alabama cotton plantation. Slavery was a reality, and fewer than 35 miles away from the Missouri border. Some Missouri slaveholders became so alarmed at the number of slaves escaping into Iowa that they doubled the reward for their capture to \$200 (a minimum yearly wage at that time was \$300.) The Todds played critical roles in helping free-soil immigrants reach Kansas Territory, and in assisting fugitives from slavery.

George Hitchcock

THE SON OF A SHOEMAKER who "was an ardent advocate of learning and religion," George B. Hitchcock was raised and educated in Massachusetts and Illinois. In 1835 he married Caroline Grossman, and in 1841 they moved to eastern Iowa. For a time he labored as a farmer in Scott County, but he soon entered his true calling, the ministry.

His "fields of labor" in Iowa included Oskaloosa, Eddyville, and Lewis. While there are no references to Hitchcock participating in the underground railroad while in Eddyville and Oskaloosa, both locations were situated along known routes. It would be stretching mere coincidence to believe that Hitchcock's and the American Home Missionary Society's presence in these communities were entirely without abolitionist motives and actions.

In Eddyville, Hitchcock founded a Congregational church with its own meeting house, the construction of which, achieved largely by means of his own labor, cost him the loss of an eye. In a few years he decided to "settle in Indiantown in Cass County. This will be a place of considerable importance. . . . All the roads running west take the same route to Kaneshville [Council Bluffs]. There is a good opportunity for a settlement, good land, good water power and good rock quarries. There are about 25 families in the settlement." He added, "There is no preaching in any of the



The Hitchcock House sits on a hill overlooking Lewis and the East Nishnabotna River valley. A National Historic Landmark, the house is open for tours May through September.

settlements, I shall supply them to the extent of my ability."

We need some five or six ministers in Western Iowa and Nebraska," he wrote the American Home Missionary Society in 1855. "This field is becoming more and more important, and will soon need a large reinforcement of ministers to supply the thronging multitude who are pushing forward to these wide-