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## Jackson, John Andrew

(c. 1825–c.1900), slave narrative author, freedom seeker, abolitionist, and agitator for justice,  
Susanna Ashton

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was born in Lynchburg, South Carolina, the son of an enslaved man with healing skills known as “Dr. Clavern” and his wife, Betty. Jackson and his family were enslaved by the English family in what was then a part of Sumter County. According to his narrative, Jackson married a woman named Louisa and they had a child named “Jinny” or “Jenny.” When, in 1847, Louisa was sent away, the heartbroken Jackson conceived of an escape plan. He fled on a pony during the Christmas holiday of 1847 and made his way to Charleston, South Carolina. There he managed to hide between cotton bales aboard a Boston-bound vessel.

With the assistance of several black sailors, Jackson survived and found refuge in a sailor’s boarding house in Boston. Despite bounty hunter inquiries about him, Jackson remained in Massachusetts for the next three years, working for a time in Salem and trying to raise money to purchase the freedom of his family. During this time he traveled and met Henry Highland Garnet and other activists, who helped advocate for his cause by opening negotiations with the enslavers who kept his family in bondage. Before anything could be resolved, however, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and Jackson, like many other people of color both enslaved and free, fled the United States. This time he did so with the assistance of conductors along the Underground Railroad. He first made his way north from Massachusetts to Maine. In Maine he arrived at the town of Brunswick and was directed to take shelter with the Stowe family. Harriet Beecher Stowe was at that time a little-known author with several young children at home; nonetheless, she allowed Jackson to hide for a night at her house and later wrote her sister Catherine Beecher about the incident in a letter of December 1851, identifying Jackson as “a genuine article” of South Carolina and describing him as a charismatic singer and storyteller (Ashton, 2013). Jackson evidently spent time in Portland, Maine, probably given shelter, in part, by Samuel Fessenden, a leading white anti-slavery figure who later provided endorsements for Jackson and who doubtless also protected him with the assistance of black residents of Portland. By spring 1851 Jackson had made it across the border to Canada, and he is listed in the 1851 census of New Brunswick as a resident of Saint John County.

Jackson remarried. He wed Julia Watson, a fugitive from North Carolina in Saint John, New Brunswick, and he worked as a whitewasher there to support himself. He says little in his memoir about his time in Saint John and few records exist from that period of his life. However, he did register to vote in 1852, according to the *Registry of Voters for the City of Saint John*, and he may have learned to read and write during these years. By late 1856, he and his wife had arrived in the United Kingdom, where he commenced a decade of lecturing against slavery.

Based in London and listed in the 1861 British census as living there with his wife, he traveled around the country, spending considerable amounts of time particularly in Scotland delivering talks regularly advertised in the newspapers between 1856 and 1865. Prominent Baptist minister Charles Haddon

Sturgeon became a patron of Jackson early on and allowed him to speak in his Metropolitan Tabernacle, and he evidently assisted Jackson in publishing his 1862 memoir, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*. Later, the relationship soured and they broke ties.

After the Civil War ended, Jackson and his wife returned to the United States. For the next 40 years, Jackson moved between New England and South Carolina, raising money for the freed people from charitable donations solicited through his talks. He lived in New Haven and Hartford, Connecticut, and in Springfield, Massachusetts, but also spent long stretches of time in South Carolina, where he reunited with his surviving family. He tried to raise money to purchase the English family property and settle black families on it as well as to fund an orphanage, a church, and possibly a home for the aged; however, most of these schemes never came to fruition. He did, however, manage to purchase land in Lynchburg, and one of his last known acts was to sign over for one dollar a small tract of land to a Massachusetts law firm that had presumably donated or somehow assisted him in its purchases at some point for charitable purposes. Jackson likely died in 1900 or soon thereafter. It is not known if he died in New England or in South Carolina, but he was not forgotten. In 1937, a man named Jake McLeod was interviewed for the New Deal's Works Progress Administration about his experiences of slavery in Lynchburg, South Carolina. As transcribed by the interviewer, he recollected: "I hear tell bout one man runnin away from Black Creek en gwine to Free State. Catch ride wid people dat used to travel to Charleston haulin cotton en things. He come back bout 15 years after de war and lived in dat place join to me.... Talk good deal bout how he associated wid de whites. Don' know how-come he run away, but dey didn' catch up wid him till it was too late."

## Further Reading

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### See also

Garnet, Henry Highland <<https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-16808>>