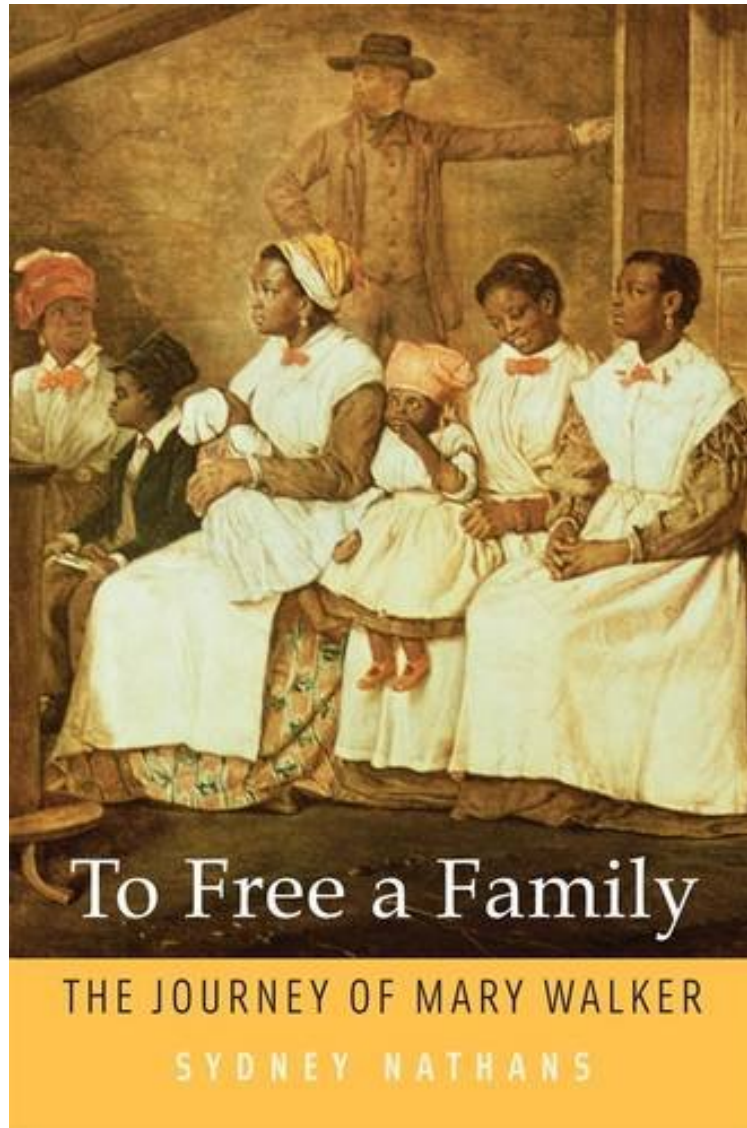


(Library ebook) To Free a Family: The Journey of Mary Walker

To Free a Family: The Journey of Mary Walker

Sydney Nathans

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review helpful. Lovely book with great human interestBy PennyBeautifully told, deeply researched, and good for either a historian or just an interested reader. I've given some as gifts. Nathans is a master story teller.8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. To Free a Family: The Journey of Mary WalkerBy Louise C. MaynorTo Free a Family is one of the most compelling stories I have read. Strong research! Reads like a detective story. Syd Nathans is to be congratulated for the strength of his writing.

To Free a Family tells the remarkable story of Mary Walker, who in August 1848 fled her owner for refuge in the North and spent the next seventeen years trying to recover her son and daughter. Her freedom, like that of thousands who escaped from bondage, came at a great price-remorse at parting without a word, fear for her family's fate.

Prior to the Civil War, thousands of African Americans escaped from slavery, but because few recorded their experiences little is known about their efforts to forge new lives in freedom. Mary Walker, the focus of this study, was a light-skinned fugitive who escaped from a North Carolina planter couple when she accompanied them to Philadelphia in 1848. Her history, though unique in many ways, is illustrative of the hardships and challenges such migrants faced and the support they sometimes received from abolitionist networks. Her efforts to preserve her freedom, gain economic independence, and locate and purchase the freedom of her children still held as slaves is pieced together here by Nathans from the papers of Northern abolitionists and Southern slaveholders. The result is an engrossing and readable study, thoroughly researched and well documented, that fills a significant gap in the history of the period. It is recommended for all readers seriously interested in the experience of fugitive slaves in Antebellum America.--Theresa McDevitt"Library Journal (starred review)" (01/15/2012)A page-turning history.--Pam Kelley"Charlotte Observer" (02/11/2012)[A] penetrating narrative...[A] captivating book.--Charles Shea LeMone"Roanoke Times" (02/14/2012)With few exceptions, we know little about the day-to-day lives of female runaways, their families and their relationships with Northern whites. Sydney Nathans's To Free a Family is a minor masterpiece that goes a long way toward filling this gap. [It is] deeply researched and elegantly written...Nathans is brilliant at reconstructing Mary Walker's life and her relationship with Peter and Susan Lesley...Nathans creates a vibrant and subtle portrait of the Lesleys, enabling readers to decide for themselves how trusting Mary Walker's relationship with them became. The result is a remarkable story of an extended biracial family that embarked on a 15-year effort to reunite Walker with her surviving children.--John Stauffer"Wall Street Journal" (02/24/2012)In piecing together Walker's story, historian Sydney Nathans has accomplished a remarkable feat. With a penetrating eye, he researched letters, diaries, public records and more to uncover the wrenching details of Walker's efforts to reunite her family. Where sources did not reveal the entire story, Nathans is careful to explore multiple possibilities and weigh them. The historian's craft is readily apparent throughout each chapter. To Free a Family will enthrall the casual reader as well as the scholar. Detailed maps and historic photographs immerse the reader in Walker's world. The tumultuous events of the Civil War era do not just serve as a contextual backdrop; one can see direct effects on ordinary people. Almost two decades after escaping, Walker brought her family back together. Her compelling journey reinforces that slavery, in all its brutality, did not destroy the African-American family.--Nathan P. Johnson"Post and Courier" (03/04/2012)Like so many other slave stories, Walker's is mostly shrouded in mystery, but Sydney Nathans has found enough reliable documentation to render it plausible and pertinent...Nathans is a careful researcher and lucid writer.--Jonathan Yardley"Washington Post" (03/09/2012)Nathans provides a compelling account of one mixed-race slave woman and her quest for freedom, as well as her long struggle to reunite her family in the North...Nathan's effort to reconstruct long-overlooked historical events through the close readings of correspondence and public records is commendable and comprises an educational, informative contribution to the U.S. narrative.--C. Warren"Choice" (08/01/2012)About the AuthorSydney Nathans is Professor Emeritus of History, Duke University.