

John Miles Stocking

1811 -1873

"Blessed are the pure in heart."

Epitaph on John Miles Stocking's gravestone in Riverside Cemetery.

John Miles Stocking was born in Goshen, Connecticut on March 15, 1811 and moved to Waterbury with his family during his childhood. He worked as a burnisher for the button industry, earning high wages. During the 1850s, Stocking went into business with Merrit Nichols in the Hopeville section of town, operating an iron foundry business. He later started a business manufacturing matches in Wolcott, but when this was not profitable, he returned to burnishing. He also invested in real estate during the 1840s and '50s, buying and selling property near the center of town along South Main Street and East Main Street.

Stocking joined the First Congregational Church in 1831, becoming a deacon in 1859. He was one of a minority of members of the church who supported the abolition of slavery. Other members were so strongly opposed to abolition that they drove out the church's minister in 1843 because he was an abolitionist. During the 1840s and '50s, Waterbury was a conservative town with relatively few abolitionists and many more supporters of Southern slavery. Public support of the abolition of slavery could lead to harassment and a loss of business, but this did not deter Stocking.

Originally a member of the Whig Party, Stocking joined the Free Soil Party, which was formed in Buffalo, New York in 1848. The Free Soil Party campaigned against the expansion of slavery into new territories and new states. The party dissolved in 1854, after which many of its members joined the newly formed Republican Party. One of Stocking's sons, William Gilbert Stocking, flew the Free Soil flag in front of their home during the presidential campaign of 1852, when he was only twelve years old.

Stocking raised his family on anti-slavery literature. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was read aloud to the children every week while it was published as a serial in *The National Era* in 1851 and 1852. The family attended anti-slavery sermons preached by traveling lecturers and at churches in other towns. Stocking's son William later wrote that abolitionists such as John M. Stocking "considered the whole slavery system an iniquity and the fugitive slave law especially as wrong in principle and harsh and cruel in its execution. If a man knew of a fugitive concealed or running away he did not consider it his duty to inform the United States marshal of that fact, but would rather aid the runaway."

The Stocking family took pride in knowing that every male of military age, including Stocking's nephews,



served in the Union army during the Civil War. One of Stocking's sons, Gilbert Miles Stocking, died from disease during his service.

John M. Stocking assisted several fugitive slaves on their way to freedom in Canada, using his barn as a station on the Underground Railroad. The location of the barn is uncertain. Until 1853, Stocking lived on South Main Street, approximately where I-84 crosses it today. This is the most likely location of the barn.

Stocking built a new home for himself and his wife on State Street in 1853. He died on February 22, 1873.