



The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers

Jean Fagan Yellin, Joseph M Thomas, Kate Culkin, Scott Korb

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Although millions of African American women were held in bondage over the 250 years that slavery was legal in the United States, Harriet Jacobs (1813-97) is the only one known to have left papers testifying to her life. Her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, holds a central place in the canon of American literature as the most important slave narrative by an African American woman.

Born in Edenton, North Carolina, Jacobs escaped from her owner in her mid-twenties and hid in the cramped attic crawlspace of her grandmother's house for seven years before making her way north as a fugitive slave. In Rochester, New York, she became an active abolitionist, working with all of the major abolitionists, feminists, and literary figures of her day, including Frederick Douglass, Lydia Maria Child, Amy Post, William Lloyd Garrison, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Fanny Fern, William C. Nell, Charlotte Forten Grimke, and Nathan Parker Willis.

Jean Fagan Yellin has devoted much of her professional life to illuminating the remarkable life of Harriet Jacobs. Over three decades of painstaking research, Yellin has discovered more than 900 primary source documents, approximately 300 of which are now collected in two volumes. These letters and papers written by, for, and about Jacobs and her activist brother and daughter provide for the thousands of readers of *Incidents*--from scholars to schoolchildren--access to the rich historical context of Jacobs's struggles against slavery, racism, and sexism beyond what she reveals in her pseudonymous narrative. Accompanied by a CD containing a searchable PDF file of the entire contents, this collection is a crucial launching point for future scholarship on Jacobs's life and times.

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