

*The Ballad of Passmore Williamson* by John Haigis  
(Written on the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his Imprisonment)

List while I tell you about Passmore Williamson, a Quaker not physically strong  
a white abolitionist locked up in a prison although he had done nothing wrong  
Jailed for contempt by the forces of slavery for helping Jane Johnson go free  
From August to November in Moyamensing by Federal Judge John Kane's decree

The year 1855 a man named John Wheeler on his way to ambassador's post  
With his slave girl named Jane and her two sons were traveling cross the sea to Nicaragua's coast  
But because of the law that was in Pennsylvania by State Law Jane Johnson was free  
By the terms of the Personal Liberty Law, Jane Johnson could gain liberty

A note had been brought to the office of William Still with news of the fugitives' plight  
That someone in bondage now wanted their liberty William Still knew what was right  
He and Friend Passmore then went to the ferry wharf on the bottom of old Walnut Street  
They told Jane that because of the laws of the Commonwealth Jane and her sons now were free

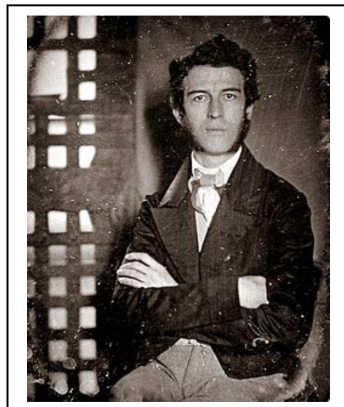
They all left the boat, Jane and Still traveled one way and Passmore went off in the other  
Deliberately not knowing where Jane now was going, believing that that would give cover  
But the judge had a fit, served him with a writ, an action of habeas corpus  
To produce the said Jane, so she could be reclaimed by her owner whose clout was enormous

Passmore would not lie; he was that kind of guy since he always had lived as a Quaker  
And he just did not know where Jane chose to go; it was not in his duty to take her  
But the judge didn't buy it and told Passmore "Don't try it. I can hold you in jail for contempt"  
"As the only white man, it was clearly your plan. From the law none of us is exempt"

So in old Moyamensing Passmore sat in his cell, a martyr for 100 days  
Unbending, unyielding, in the eye of the storm, a resolve to do right in his gaze  
A prisoner of conscience in cell 71 away from this family and wife  
Suffering from the damp and the rheumatism that would plague him the rest of his life.

His daughter was born as he languished in prison, his mind and his conscience quite clear  
To give of himself and to answer a higher call in the service of all he held dear  
The national press had a field day because of it, both supportive and negative views  
State rights and federal law, freedom and slavery, the people now pondered the news

So what can we learn from the story of Passmore who suffered in the cause of the right  
A nation in conflict, the issue of slavery, emerging from dark into light  
To do the right thing and so accept the consequence is a rare and a beautiful thing  
A martyr for freedom and a part of the panoply, of resolve and of courage now sing



John Haigis, 8/27/15