

Holy Grail of abolitionist-era Baptist documents found

A volunteer found the documents in Massachusetts

By MICHAEL CASEY
The Associated Press

GROTON, Mass. — Jennifer Cromack was combing through the American Baptist archive when she uncovered a slim box among some 18th and 19th century journals. Opening it, she found a scroll in pristine condition.

A closer look revealed the 5-foot-long (1.5-meter-long) document was a handwritten declaration titled “A Resolution and Protest Against Slavery,” signed by 116 New England ministers in Boston and adopted March 2, 1847. Until its discovery in May at the archives in Groton, Massachusetts, American Baptist officials worried the anti-slavery document had been lost forever after fruitless searches at Harvard and Brown universities and other locations. A copy was last seen in a 1902 history book.

“I was just amazed and excited,” Cromack, a retired teacher who volunteers at the archive, said. “We made a find that really says something to the people of the state and the people in the country. ... It speaks of their commitment to keeping people safe and out of situations that they should not be in.”

The document offers a glimpse into an emerging debate over slavery in the 18th century in the Northeast. The document was signed 14 years before the start of the Civil War as a growing number of religious leaders were starting to speak out against slavery.

Split over slavery

The document also shines a spotlight on a critical moment in the history of the

Baptist church.

It was signed two years after the issue of slavery prompted southern Baptists to split from northern Baptists and form the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest Protestant denomination. The split in 1845 followed a ruling by the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society prohibiting slave owners from becoming missionaries. The northern Baptists eventually became American Baptist Churches USA.

“It comes from such a critical era in American history, you know, right prior to the Civil War,” said the Rev. Mary Day Hamel, the executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts.

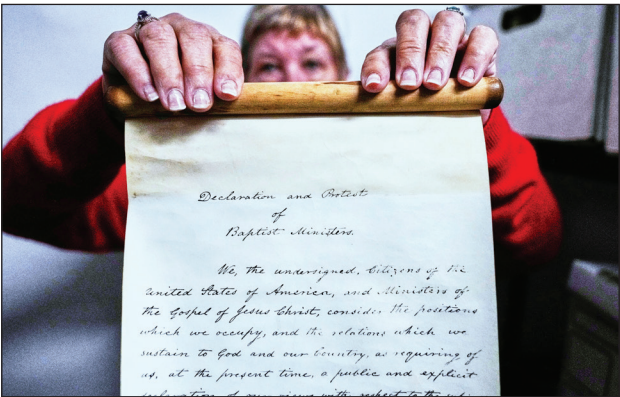
“It was a unique moment in history when Baptists in Massachusetts stepped up and took a strong position and stood for justice in the shaping of this country,” she said. “That’s become part of our heritage to this day, to be people who stand for justice, for American Baptists to embrace diversity.”

A RISKY DECLARATION

Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, the executive director emerita of the American Baptist Historical Society, said many Americans at the time, especially in the North, were “undecided” about slavery and weren’t sure how to respond or were worried about speaking out.

“They thought it was a southern problem, and they had no business getting involved in what they saw as the state’s rights,” Van Broekhoven said. “Most Baptists, prior to this, would have refrained from this kind of protest. This is a very good example of them going out on a limb and trying to be diplomatic.”

The document shows ministers had hoped “some reformatory movement” led



by those involved in slavery would make their action “unnecessary,” but that they felt compelled to act after they “witnessed with painful surprise, a growing disposition to justify, extend and perpetuate their iniquitous system.”

“Under these circumstances we can no longer be silent,” the document states. “We owe something to the oppressed as well as to the oppressor, and justice demands the fulfillment of that obligation. Truth and Humanity and Public Virtue, have claims upon us which we cannot dishonor.”

The document explains why the ministers “disapprove and abhor the system of American slavery.”

“With such a system we can have no sympathy,” the document states. “After a careful observation of its character and effects and making every deduction with the largest charity can require, we are constrained to regard it as an outrage upon the rights and happiness of our fellow men, for which there is no valid justification or apology.”

WHO SIGNED THE DOCUMENT?

The Rev. Diane Badger, the administrator of the American Baptist Church of Massachusetts who oversees the archive, teamed up with the Rev. John Odams of the First Baptist Church in Boston to identify what she called the “Holy Grail”

Historian Jennifer Cromack holds a recently found, 178-year-old anti-slavery scroll at Grotonwood, the home mission of The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts, on June 26, in Groton, Mass.

CHARLES KRUPA / AP

country, now known as Tremont Temple Baptist Church. Another was Baron Stow, who belonged to the state’s anti-slavery society.

Badger also is working to estimate the value of the document, which is intact with no stains or damage, and is making plans to ensure it is protected. A digital copy could eventually be shared with some of Massachusetts’ 230 American Baptist churches.

“It’s been kind of an interesting journey and it’s one that’s still unfolding,” Badger said. “The ques-

tions that always come to me, OK, I know who signed it but who didn’t? I can go through my list, through my database and find who was working where on that and why didn’t they sign that. So it’s been very interesting to do the research.”

The Rev. Kenneth Young — whose predominantly Black Calvary Baptist Church in Haverhill, Massachusetts, was created by freed Blacks in 1871 — called the discovery inspiring.

“I thought it was awesome that we had over hundred signers to this, that they would project that freedom for our people is just,” Young said. “It follows through on the line of the abolitionist movement and fighting for those who may not have had the strength to fight for themselves against a system of racism.”

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Lynette Yates, Warren County Clerk, pursuant to KRS 424.130 and 424.145, announces that the 2023 Delinquent Oil Bills and the 2024 Delinquent Real Property Tax Bills (Certificates of Delinquency) will be published after close of business July 11, 2025 on the Warren County Clerk’s Website. The web address to view the records is <https://warrencountyclerk.ky.gov> or the Software Management, LLC website at <https://kydtax.smlc.us>. The list of Certificates of Delinquency is also available for public inspection during the hours of 8:00-4:30 CST at the County Clerk’s office located at 429 E 10th Ave, Suite 100, Bowling Green KY 42101. The tax sale will be held on August 13, 2025 beginning at 9:00 a.m. CST. All interested participants must register with the County Clerk’s office by the close of business on August 4, 2025. Please contact the County Clerk’s office if you need additional information about the tax sale registration process, the required registration fee or the deposit amounts that will be needed. Taxpayers can continue to pay their delinquent tax bills to the County Clerk’s office any time prior to the tax sale. **Please note: All payments must be received in the County Clerk’s office prior to the tax sale date listed in this advertisement. Payments received after the tax sale has been conducted will be returned without exception.** Some delinquencies - although they have been advertised - will be excluded from the tax sale in accordance with the provisions of KRS 134.504(10)(b). If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the County Clerk’s office at 270-842-9416.

****Payment must be made by cash, certified funds, or debit/credit card (additional fees apply). The Delinquent Tax website will be updated a minimum of weekly to remove all paid Certificates of Delinquency****