

Richard Lord Selden

A Moral Decision To Disobey The Law

by Lynne Belluscio

In 1962, Janet Bryant was writing articles for the *LeRoy Gazette News*. In January she wrote about a lecture that was given by Marion Russell on the Underground Railroad. Apparently, Richard Selden had told Marion the following story.

Sometime between 1855 and 1857, my grandfather, Richard Lord Selden was working around his garden on the Selden homestead on Selden Road. He was approached by a badly disheveled and forlorn fugitive who asked the usual question: "Which way north?" My grandfather pointed toward the swamp area over near the Griswold Road, whereupon the stranger went on his way and grandfather went back to work.

In a short time two men drove up in a rig and introduced themselves as U.S. Marshals in search of a runaway! "Had he seen the man?" "Yes", said my grandfather "and he was traveling north." The two men forced grandfather to join them and drove down the back lane as far as they could. They saw the run-away across the field and all three went in pursuit. My grandfather easily outdistanced the Marshals and caught up with the fugitive just over the hogback there. Hurriedly he directed the slave to follow the brook until he came to a big pool and wait there until he returned after dark.

My grandfather went back to the marshals with the story that he couldn't find the runaway because he had gone into a rather impenetrable swamp, and there was little hope of finding him. He sent the marshals off on a fool's errand in another direction, assuring them that if he should emerge from the swamp they would be in the right place to intercept him.

That was the last he saw of the marshals. After dark, laden with food, shoes and clothing, he went in search of the man and took him to a station in Elba from which he escaped to Canada. Sometime in the 1870s or 1880s, my grandfather was on a business trip to Baltimore where he put up

at a good hotel. Upon entering the dining room he was cared for by a well-groomed personable waiter who quickly became most attentive to his every need. This went on for three meals, when the chap asked if my grandfather didn't recognize him. Upon being informed that he knew nothing of the man speaking, the waiter identified himself as the slave who had been assisted by my grandfather some twenty years earlier. He revealed that he had escaped to Canada and had later returned to the United States to enlist in a colored regiment and that he was one of only fourteen survivors of the horrible massacre at the hands of the Confederate soldiers.

So it was with story in mind that I discovered on e-bay, a photograph of Richard Lord Selden and his family taken on September 24, 1901. I really wanted to have this photo for our collection so with great trepidation, I placed a bid and was glad to learn that I had been the winning bidder. I know nothing of how the photograph came to be posted on e-bay and although I asked the seller about the source of the picture, I didn't learn anything about it. However, I have discovered that "Tracie" who is mentioned on the caption is Stewart Selden's granddaughter. Stewart Selden was the son of Claudius, and Tracie's father is Stewart Selden Jr.

Richard Lord Selden was described as a most remarkable man. He was a "natural student" and although he received his education in the "common schools" he was one of the best mathematicians in the county. He taught for 37 years and was an



Picture taken September 24, 1901

- Richard Lord Selden 1827-1913 "Tracie's great, great grandfather"
- Eunice Wilcox Selden 1825-1906 "Tracie's great, great grandmother"
- Claudius Huebert Selden (third from left standing) 1859-1935 "Tracie's great grandfather"
- Mary Electra Selden 1867-1945 (Claudius Huebert's brother)
- Clara Virginia Selden 1855-1905 (Claudius Huebert's sister)

instructor at the LeRoy Academic Institute.

From 1853 to 1856 he served as school superintendent, and was a most efficient civil engineer. For nine years he was Town Supervisor and for one year was the justice of the peace. From 1869 to 1874 he was the Genesee

County School Commissioner. He was remarkable indeed. Faced with disobeying the law by helping an escaped slave, he chose a moral path to help a slave find freedom. Richard Lord Selden died in October 1913 and was buried in the cemetery at Fort Hill.

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