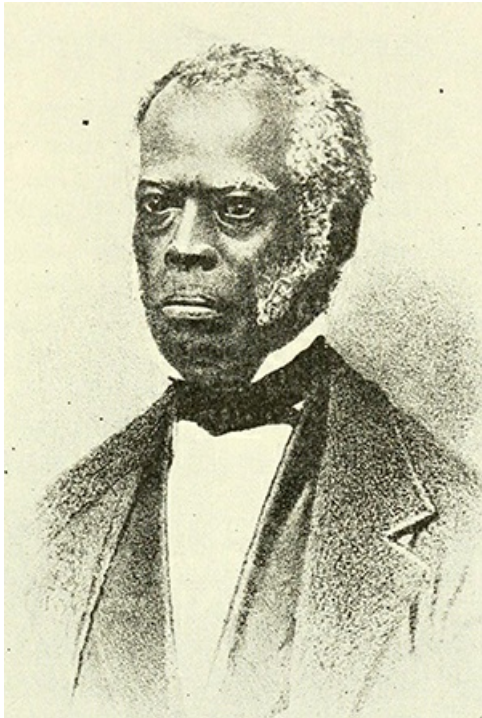


## **Lane, Lunsford** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Lane, Lunsford**

by Alice R. Cotten, 1991; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, December 2022

**30 May 1803–ca. 1863**



Lewis Publishing Co. 1919.

<sup>[2]</sup>Lunsford Lane was an enslaved then free black businessman, and lecturer. He was the only child of Edward and Clarissa Lane, who were enslaved people who were from Raleigh. His parents had assumed the surname of Lane from the white family that had originally owned them. At the time Lane was born, the family was owned by Sherwood Haywood <sup>[3]</sup>.

Lane was an enslaved person who worked in the home of his enslaver. As was the case with many enslaved people, he was troubled by the fact that he was enslaved and he yearned to be free. His sale of a basket of peaches given him by his father was the beginning of Lane's business ventures. Trying to accumulate enough money to buy his freedom, he saved what he earned—mostly tips from guests of the Haywood family. Lane cut wood at night and during his spare time. With the help of his father, he made and sold pipes and special smoking tobacco <sup>[4]</sup>, often to members of the state legislature <sup>[5]</sup>. Lane bought supplies for the Haywood household and he learned to buy in quantity when prices were low in order to save money. He began to buy goods for himself when he could buy at a bargain, store these items, and sell when prices rose. Lane was always careful not to appear prosperous and successful, as his possessions and stored wealth could have been seized by his enslaver at any time.

In May 1828, Lane married Martha Curtis, who belonged to the Boylan family. She was soon bought and enslaved by Benjamin B. Smith, a Raleigh merchant. When Sherwood Haywood died in 1829, his wife, Eleanor (Hawkins) Haywood, hired out the people she enslaved in order to pay debts. This was fortunate for Lane, as he bought his own time from her. He expanded his tobacco business under the name "Edward and Lunsford Lane" and had agents in Fayetteville, Salisbury, and Chapel Hill.

Lane's savings reached a thousand dollars, the price that Eleanor Haywood charged for his freedom. At the time, however, the North Carolina legislature would authorize manumission <sup>[6]</sup> only for "meritorious service," which Lane could not prove. In 1835, he arranged for his wife's enslaver, Benjamin B. Smith, to "buy" him and take him to New York, where Lane received his manumission papers. Now a free man, he returned to his businesses in Raleigh in order to buy his wife and children, then valued at \$2,500 by their owner. Lane arranged to buy them in installments. Smith allowed them to live with Lane in a house that he bought in Raleigh. In addition to his tobacco and firewood businesses, Lane also worked as a messenger and handyman in the office of Governor Edward B. Dudley <sup>[7]</sup>.

But Lane's troubles were not over. In September 1840 he received notice that because he had been emancipated in New York, he was in violation of a state law prohibiting free black people from other states from entering North Carolina. Lane had twenty days to leave. Although he received support from influential white people in his bid to stay in North Carolina,

by May 1841 Lane was forced to go. Taking one of his children with him, he went to New York and Boston, where he raised money to buy other members of his family by lecturing at churches and abolitionist meetings.

In April 1842 Lane returned to Raleigh to purchase the rest of his family. Though he had received assurances of his safety from the governor's office and from Benjamin B. Smith, Lane was arrested, charged with delivering abolitionist lectures, and tried at a "call court." There was no proof of the charge against him, so Lane was released, only to be abducted by a mob, dragged towards the gallows, and finally tarred and feathered. His white friends sheltered him overnight and smuggled him, his wife and children, and his mother (a farewell "gift" from Eleanor Haywood) to a train bound for Philadelphia. About two years later they were joined by Lane's father, who was also freed by the Haywood family. The Lanes lived in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Worcester, and Oberlin, Ohio. Lane continued to lecture. As late as 1863, the Worcester city directory listed him as steward at Wellington's Hospital. In 1865 he was no longer listed, though Lunsford Lane, Jr., was.

Lunsford and Martha Lane had seven children: Edward, William, Lunsford, Jr., Maria, Ellick, Lucy, and Laura. A lithograph of Lane is reproduced in the biography by the Reverend William G. Hawkins.

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## Additional Resources:

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## Subjects:

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## Origin - location:

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