

# THE TRUTH OF CAMPAU AVE



## JOSEPH CAMPAU

- DETROIT'S WEALTHIEST MERCHANTS AND LANDLORDS
- "SLUMLORD"

AMONG THE "LEADING HOLDERS OF HUMAN PROPERTY, EVIDENCING AN EXTRAVAGANT TASTE FOR SLAVEOWNERSHIP"

- TIYA MILES, DAWN OF DETROIT



## ELIZABETH DENNISON FORTH

- ESCAPED SLAVERY
- SELF-MADE REAL ESTATE BUSINESS
- FIRST BLACK FEMALE LANDOWNER IN MICHIGAN

**WHO SHOULD TRULY BE MEMORIALIZED IN  
THE STREETS OF DETROIT?**

## Joseph Compau Brief Overview

The Compau line holds a prominent presence in the life and history of the city of Detroit. Originally from Montreal, the family's roots in Detroit spread wide and deep following the arrival of Joseph Compau's grandfather Jacques in the city in the early 18th century. Over the course of the 18th and into the 19th century, the family grew to significant wealth and prominence in the "new settlement" of Detroit. At the time of his death in 1863, Joseph Compau was one the largest landowner in Detroit in the 19th century, holding nearly the equivalent of ten million dollars worth of property. His fortune and thus prominence as one Detroit's wealthiest citizens is the fruit of his role as both an extremely successful merchant and land speculator. Compau made a large part of his wealth through the fur trade, but in addition to his eye for quality pelts, Compau had an interest in another form of capital - he was one of the leading slave owners in Detroit. In Tiya Miles' *Dawn of Detroit*, she describes Compau as one of the "leading holders of human property, evidencing an extravagant taste for slaveownership". This description is paralleled in other contemporary literature that references Compau as a "slumlord". Compau perhaps can be considered the embodiment of the irony of Detroit - a place of promise and opportunity for the American Dream, at the expense of the freedom of human lives.

Sources:

<https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/campau-joseph>

Tiya Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*