

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

A Timeline of American Slavery

- 1775 Benjamin Franklin is elected president of the first abolitionist society established by Anthony Benezet of Philadelphia
- 1793 The U.S. Congress passes the Fugitive Slave Act, outlawing any efforts to aid runaway slaves or to hinder those in pursuit of them
- 1808 The U.S. Congress ends the importation of slaves to the United States though smugglers continue to do so
- 1822 Denmark Vesey, a former slave, leads a slave revolt in Charleston, South Carolina (35 participants are hanged)
- 1831 Nat Turner raises the most significant slave rebellion in American history, leading to the deaths of 60 whites and Turner's eventual capture and hanging
- 1835 Slave states outlaw abolitionists and their publications
- 1847 Frederick Douglass, a former slave, publishes *The North Star*
- 1849 Harriet Tubman, following her own escape, returns to the South at 15 to 20 times on missions to lead others to freedom
- 1850 The Compromise of 1850 admits California as a free state but makes the Fugitive Slave Law even more draconian
- 1857 The Dred Scott decision by the Supreme Court declares that African Americans are not citizens of the United States and asserts that the government has no authority to outlaw slavery

A General History

The Underground Railroad was not an monolithic institution but an amorphous network of escape routes maintained and facilitated by many whites but many more African Americans who led an estimated 100,000 slaves to freedom in Canada or Mexico (two countries that had abolished slavery before the US did so) between 1810 and 1850.

Though Quakers were helping slaves to escape even in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the term is first used in 1831, inspired by the rise of America's rail transportation system. The analogy to the railroads extended to calling resting points "stations" run by "stationmasters" who received "conductors" who lead escapees along the way. Even those who aided the cause with food and money were called "stockholders."

The Procedure

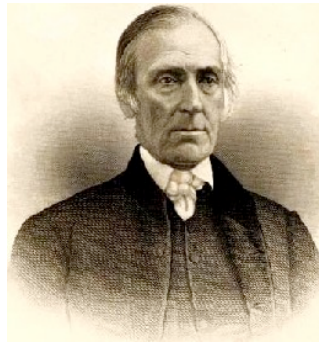
- ✓ Escape the master.
- ✓ Move almost exclusively at night.
- ✓ Pause for rest and food at "stations" where "stationmasters" sent word ahead to the next "station."

- ✓ “Stockholders” contributed funds to pay for clothing and actual travel by boat or train
Vigilance committees might also help a runaway find a new life in a community along the way
- ✓ Reach Canada or Mexico where the Fugitive Slave Law could not empower bounty hunters pursuing runaway slaves.



Map of Some Underground Railroad Routes. Wikipedia. 18 July 2008.
<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Undergroundrailroadsmall2.jpg>>

[Indiana Workers on the Underground Railroad](#)



Levi Coffin. Wikipedia. 18 July 2008. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Levi_coffin.JPG>.

- **Levi Coffin**, a Quaker, in Fountain City
 - Sometimes called the “President of the Underground Railroad”
 - Helped more than 2,000 slaves escape to safety over a 20 year period
 - Received runaway slaves routed through Jeffersonville, IN; Madison, IN; and Cincinnati, OH
 - No slave that passed through the Coffin station was recaptured
 - One of the runaways inspired the character of Eliza in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

For more information on Levi Coffin: <http://www.waynet.org/levicoffin/default.htm>

- **Samuel and Sarah Tibbets**, Lancaster (Eleutherian College)
 - Used their home as a station on the Underground Railroad
 - John served as a conductor to the next northern stop
 - Members of the Neil’s Creek Anti-Slavery Society

- **Lyman Hoyt**, Lancaster (Eleutherian College)
- Founded the abolitionist Liberty Party
- Condemned the Fugitive Slave Law
- Member of the Neil's Creek Anti-slavery Society
- Stockholder on the Underground Railroad

For information about the Underground Railroad in Indiana: <http://www.eleutherian.us/>

- **William Paul Quinn** and **Augustus Turner**, in Indianapolis (Bethel AME Church)
 - Founded the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1836
 - The church was known as "Indianapolis Station" on the Underground Railroad
 - The congregation sheltered runaway slaves bound for Canada
 - Church destroyed by fire in 1862 – probably by pro-slavery advocates

For information about the Bethel AME Church, click on

<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/Underground/in1.htm>

To do deeper research on the Underground Railroad in Indiana, click on

<http://www.in.gov/history/2474.htm>

For more information consult the National Geographic website on the Underground Railroad

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/>

To learn about the lives of runaway slaves who reached Canada, read

I Came a Stranger: The Underground Railroad by Bryan Prince (Grades 7-12)

I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad by Karolyn Smardz Frost (high school/adult)

To learn about Sojourner Truth, read *Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth* by Anne Rockwell (Ages 9-12)

To learn about Harriet Tubman, read *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (high school/adult)