Ohio's Underground Railroad Freedom Stations
Traveling the State's Underground Railroad
Welcome to Ohio’s Freedom Stations. No matter where you are in Ohio, no matter which direction you head, you will be near one of the liberty lines that crisscrossed the state. The Underground Railroad was neither a railroad nor did it run underground, but transportation from one safe haven to another was the business of this secret system that developed to help fugitive slaves escape to freedom.

For slaves traveling along the Underground Railroad, Ohio was the gateway from slavery to freedom. They found help from black and white religious leaders, businessmen, politicians, women and field hands. Slaves were hidden in mansions, shacks, churches, barns, caves and thickets. This anti-slavery network sometimes united Blacks, Whites and Native Americans in the cause of freedom.

A number of communities throughout Ohio ran active hubs along the Underground Railroad. In fact, an incident in southern Ohio is believed to have given the network its name. In 1831, Tice Davids dove into the Ohio River in a desperate attempt to flee his life of bondage. He emerged on the free soil of Ripley, Ohio, just ahead of his pursuing master, and then, remarkably, he disappeared.

When the slave owner asked the townspeople of Ripley to help find his missing property, no one admitted to having seen a dripping wet fugitive slave. The frustrated master left empty-handed, but carried an outlandish story back with him about his slave disappearing along some “underground road.” When locomotives emerged as an efficient transportation mode, “underground road” became “underground railroad.”

From Ripley, Marietta and several other towns along the northern edge of the Ohio River, tracks were quickly laid to dozens of other communities throughout the state as part of this loose network of anti-slavery activism. Although it had nothing to do with trains, the Underground Railroad shared the language of the locomotives. Sites where fugitives were given shelter and food were known as “stations,” and those who ran these sites were “station masters.” The courageous individuals who took runaways from one station to another were “conductors.”

Of the 100,000 slaves estimated to have escaped along the Underground Railroad, researchers believe about 40,000 came through Ohio.
Ohio, which was bordered by slavery to the south and the free shores of Canada to the north, likely had more Underground Railroad stations and trails than any other state. Hundreds still stand, although most are privately owned. Ohio also had more anti-slavery societies than any other state.

Ohio played a central role in the struggle to rid the nation of slavery. The state’s importance in understanding this great moment in history continues. From south to north, east to west, Ohio allows visitors rich opportunities to explore the many facets of the Underground Railroad: danger, hope, sadness, tragedy, sacrifice, courage and unity. We invite you to explore this inspiring moment in history.

“We knew not what night or what hour of the night we would be roused from slumber by a gentle rap at the door. That was the signal announcing the arrival of a train of the Underground Railroad, for the locomotive did not whistle, nor make any unnecessary noise. I have often been awakened by this signal, and sprang out of bed in the dark and opened the door. Outside in the cold or rain, there would be a two-horse wagon loaded with fugitives, perhaps the greater part of them women and children.”

– Levi Coffin, known as the Underground Railroad “president”
From "The Mysteries of Ohio’s Underground Railroads"
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Consider beginning your exploration of Ohio’s freedom network in Cincinnati. Cincinnati was once the home to anti-slavery activists both famous and lesser-known – from Levi Coffin, who is credited with helping some 3,000 slaves escape to freedom, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” forced the nation to face the horrors of slavery, to the Rev. Wallace Shelton and Peter H. Clark, black abolitionists who championed education as the key to overthrowing slavery and inequality.

Cincinnati is now revisiting and reviving the work of the Underground Railroad. The $110 million National Underground Railroad Freedom Center aims to show the continued relevance and modern message of the anti-slavery movement, which helped dismantle a powerful economic force based on oppression and deprivation. In fact, Spencer Crew, the center’s CEO and president, touts the Underground Railroad as the nation’s first interracial human rights movement.

The 158,000-square-foot complex, which sits on the bank of the Ohio River, mirrors the river’s undulating curves. The center’s three buildings each showcase a trait shared by Underground Railroad participants: courage, creativity and perseverance.

Those are traits common to freedom movements everywhere. The centerpiece of the facility is a slave pen, one of hundreds used to house 1 million slaves being sold south. But the center celebrates all struggles for freedom – from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s to the liberation of Nazi concentration camps, from Ryan White’s struggle for AIDS awareness to Afghani girls’ efforts to be educated. Most importantly, the center urges visitors to take action.

Freedom Center
Photo by Farshid Assassi / Assassi Productions
Exhibits include:

- “Suite for Freedom” – an opening film experience to introduce visitors to the center’s themes.

- The Slave Pen – a moving testimony to the confinement, degradation and misery of slavery.

- “Brothers of the Borderland” – a story theater highlighting the lives of Ripley Underground Railroad agents John Parker, a former slave, and the Rev. John Rankin, a Presbyterian minister.

- ESCAPE! Freedom Seekers and the Underground Railroad – provides families and students with a concise, age-appropriate summary of the history of the Underground Railroad concentrating on the period 1830 to 1865.

- Everyday Freedom Heroes – uses interactive multi-media kiosks to tell powerful stories of ordinary people making extraordinary choices. It celebrates heroes of the past and modern day.

- From Slavery to Freedom – an examination of the language of freedom, from the American Revolution to the Civil War.

- The Struggle Continues – an exploration of how the language and spirit of the Underground Railroad can be seen in freedom movements throughout the world and how individual acts of courage and creativity can spark reform.

- The Concluding Experience – an invitation for visitors to reflect, respond and resolve by taking steps to face issues that divide us and work toward solutions.

Planning a visit: The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, located at 50 East Freedom Way in Cincinnati, is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays. Tickets are $12 for adults, $10 for seniors and students, and $8 for children 6 to 12. For more information, call (877) 648-4838 or visit www.freedomcenter.org.

“We want to carry these stories from the past to the present. Freedom is still an issue across the nation and world.”

– Spencer Crew, Freedom Center, CEO and president
The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center’s commanding presence on the Cincinnati waterfront serves as a reminder that the northern border of the Ohio River marked the frontlines in the battle for the nation’s soul. The river was the demarcation line between slavery and freedom. From the river’s northern edge, multiple trails of the Underground Railroad fanned out across the state.

Although much of the work of the Underground Railroad occurred in the dark of night, the Rev. John Rankin in Ripley lit a torch for freedom. The light at his hilltop home served as a beacon as sure as the North Star. If escaping slaves could make it across the river and up the steep 100 steps, they would find shelter and assistance from the large Rankin family. Rankin, aided by his wife and 13 children, is credited with helping some 2,000 slaves to freedom.

On Front Street in Ripley, which edged the river, John Parker, a former slave turned entrepreneur turned rescuer, often didn’t wait for escaping slaves to come to him. Under cover of darkness, he would fearlessly cross the river and carry slaves off to freedom.

The homes of these extraordinary men, two of the hundreds of anti-slavery activists in Brown County, are both National Historic Landmarks and are open to the public. The Rankin House has been showcasing Ripley’s role as an Underground Railroad hub for more than 50 years. The museum features period furnishings and Rankin possessions, including a family Bible and collections of his writings. The grounds of the small Rankin home treat visitors to a peaceful, panoramic view of the Ohio River Valley and a rebuilt stairway encourages guests to experience the climb up Liberty Hill for themselves. The Parker House stood empty for many years before community activists managed to purchase and restore the riverfront home. The building opened as a museum in 2003.

Between Ripley and Cincinnati along the Ohio River Scenic Byway lies New Richmond, a waterfront town with more Underground Railroad stories to tell. A marker at a riverfront park, unveiled in 2003, highlights the small town’s history of standing against oppression. Leroy Lee had been an escaped slave who was captured by bounty hunters near Cincinnati. When his captors paraded him through the streets of New Richmond on his trudge back to slavery, an angry mob barred the way and demanded his release.

Across the street from the park is the now empty site where James G. Birney, a former Kentucky slave owner turned anti-slavery publisher, launched The Philanthropist in 1836. New Richmond abolitionists provided not only financial support for the newspaper, but offered physical protection, as well. A vigilante group patrolled the streets of the town at night to prevent Kentucky slave owners from making good on threats to destroy the newspaper presses. Twenty years later, New Richmond became home to an early black civil rights organization, a group that preceded the formation of the NAACP by half a century.

“The fugitives in most instances had to take care of themselves south of the line, but once across the Ohio River they were in the hands of their friends.”

– John Parker, Underground Railroad conductor
The waterfront and newspaper sites are among 33 stations with abolitionist or Underground Railroad ties that make up the “Clermont County Freedom Trail.” The self-guided driving tour of the county boasts 19 sites that are designated part of the National Park Service’s Network to Freedom. However, most of the sites on the Clermont County trail are privately owned and offer only a view from the street.

Ohio State University Professor Wilbur Siebert, an early Underground Railroad historian who interviewed conductors and escaped slaves in the late 1890s, considered the area north of Cincinnati to be among the secret operation’s most active lines. Four main routes of the Underground Railroad were believed to spread northward from Cincinnati and merge in the small community of Springboro.

More than 25 Underground Railroad sites have been documented in the Clearcreek Township area of Warren County – including 14 that are featured in “A Self-Guided Walk Into History.” The brochure, which is available from local merchants and at the Springboro Area Historical Society Museum, encourages easy exploration of the charming six-block area of town that is included on the National Register of Historic Places. The community also celebrates its Underground Railroad history with an annual Freedom Festival each summer the weekend nearest the Fourth of July.

Springboro’s attraction was part location and part conviction. Sitting some 38 miles northeast of the Cincinnati riverfront, nestled between the Great and Little Miami rivers, the community of Quakers acted on their beliefs that all people had the right to freedom by opening their homes and befriending the oppressed.

A few miles farther north, fugitives were drawn to education and opportunity. In 1853, the Methodist Episcopal Church of Cincinnati purchased land outside of Xenia to create Wilberforce University, an institution taking its name from British abolitionist William Wilberforce and having as its mission educating black students. Ten years later, the school became the first black-owned and -operated private university when the African Methodist Episcopal Church, led by Bishop Daniel A. Payne, bought it for $10,000. The school helped chip away at slavery, a system that survived on ignorance. But a number of residents in the surrounding area worked toward freedom, as well. The Underground Railroad did a brisk business through Greene County.
Planning a Visit

**Brown County**
- The Rankin House, 6152 Rankin Hill Road in Ripley, is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 12 to 5 p.m. Sundays May 1 through the second weekend in December. Cost is $3 adults and $1 children. Tours during the off-season may be made by appointment. Call (937) 392-1627 or (800) 752-2705 for more information or visit www.ohiohistory.org/places/rankin/.

- The John P. Parker House, 300 Front Street in Ripley, is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays May through the second weekend in December. Tours during the off-season may be made by appointment. Call (937) 392-4188 for more information or visit www.johnparkerhouse.org.

**Clermont County**
- Contact the Clermont County Convention & Visitors Bureau for more information about the self-guided “Freedom Trail” or to arrange a private tour. Visit www.visitclermontohio.com or call (800) 796-4282.

**Greene County**
- The National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, 1350 Brush Row Road in Wilberforce, was chartered by Congress and opened in 1988. Housed on the campus of Wilberforce University but operated as part of the Ohio Historical Society, the museum features two permanent exhibits, “Music as Metaphor,” which traces the roots of African-American music, and “From Victory to Freedom: Afro-American Life in the Fifties.” It also presents a number of changing exhibits and special events and has information on Underground Railroad sites throughout the area. The museum is located about 20 minutes southeast of Dayton. It is open Tuesdays through Saturdays throughout the year. Cost is $4 for adults. For more information about the area’s anti-slavery history or to arrange step-on tour guide service, call (800) 752-2603 or visit www.ohiohistory.org/places/afroam/.

**Hamilton County**
- In Cincinnati, the Harriet Beecher Stowe House, at 2950 Gilbert Avenue, was once home to the author of the monumental “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays. For more information call (513) 632-5100 or visit www.ohiohistory.org/places/stowe.

- For more information on the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, visit www.freedomcenter.org or call (877) 648-4838. For Cincinnati information, call the Greater Cincinnati Convention and Visitors Bureau at (800) CINCY-USA or visit www.cincyusa.com.

**Warren County**
- The Springboro Area Historical Society Museum offers materials for a self-guided tour of the more than 25 Underground Railroad sites throughout the community. Admission is free. Guided group tours are also available by prior arrangement; cost is $5 per person. Call the museum at (937) 748-0916 or visit the Springboro Web site for information on accommodations and amenities at www.springboroohio.org.

- The Jonathan Wright House, built in 1815 by Springboro’s founder, is now a bed and breakfast. The home was once an active stop on the Underground Railroad. During recent renovation, the owners replaced a second-floor wall with plexiglass to allow visitors easy view of one of the home’s secret hiding spaces. Tours of the home and lunches are available with prior arrangement. Contact the Jonathan Wright House, 80 W. State St. in Springboro, at (866) 748-0801 or visit www.bbonline.com/oh/wrighthouse.

- Built around 1831, the Harveysburg Black School, on North Street in Harveysburg, was the first free black school in Ohio. Admission is free. Open by appointment only. Call (513) 897-6195 to reserve a tour.
Ephraim Cutler of the Marietta area stood his ground against slavery in Ohio. In 1802, as Ohio grappled with issues of statehood, the question of slavery was a divisive one. Following the American Revolution, many of the soldiers who had been paid for their service with land had come from slaveholding Virginia and had brought their beliefs about human bondage with them. But Cutler, who was a delegate to the state’s constitutional convention, drew a line in free soil. He rose from what was thought to have been his deathbed to vote against an amendment that would have made Ohio a slave state. His proposal prohibiting involuntary servitude passed by just one vote and made the new state of Ohio free soil.

The small community of Veto in Washington County honors Cutler’s stand against slavery. In 2003, the state honored him with a Bicentennial marker.

Although Cutler, a judge and early benefactor of Ohio University, helped write the laws of the fledgling state, he frequently broke the laws of the nation. Cutler was considered an active leader in the area’s Underground Railroad. His home, across the Ohio River from what is now Parkersburg, West Virginia, was known as the Constitution Station.

Washington County recalls the courageous stands of Cutler and other anti-slavery activists as part of an Underground Railroad tour. The area’s history includes many compelling stories. “Rockingham” John Curtis ran away from a plantation with his two younger brothers in 1846. The three brothers swam the Ohio River and spent the winter in a cave, where one froze to death. “Rockingham” John Curtis became an Underground Railroad conductor, helping others to free themselves.

Another of the many courageous abolitionists in the area was David Putnam Jr. In 1847, Putnam was sued for more than $15,000 by a Virginia plantation owner over the loss of nine slaves. In all, thousands of slaves are believed to have escaped through the southeastern region of Ohio.

**Planning a Visit**

- **Belmont County**
  - The one-room Underground Railroad Museum, 121 High Street in Flushing, grew out of amateur historian John Mattox’s dream of sharing his own fascination with the Underground Railroad with others. In addition to his collection of publications, artifacts and memorabilia, Mattox offers group tours of Underground Railroad sites in eastern Ohio and a Traveling Trunk program for school and community organizations. Call (740) 968-2080 or visit www.ugrrf.org for more information.

- **Gallia County**
  - The community of Gallipolis has been celebrating the Emancipation Proclamation every year since 1863. The three-day Emancipation Festival, which is held on the third full weekend of September, revisits the Civil War era in food, costume and craft. Also open by appointment is the John Gee Black Historical Center, housed in a former African Methodist Episcopal church and dedicated to telling the history of African-Americans in the area. Contact the Gallia County Convention and Visitors Bureau at (740) 446-6882 for more information.

- **Lawrence County**
  - The Lawrence County Museum has developed a self-guided tour, “Tracks to Freedom,” highlighting the active Underground Railroad history of this southernmost tip of Ohio. The museum also features artifacts from the Rev. John Rankin, who lived in the area in his latter years. Call (740) 377-4550 for more information.

- **Muskingum County**
  - Tours are available detailing the Underground Railroad ties of Prospect Place, the former home of abolitionist George Willison Adams. The 27-room mansion near Dresden is in the process of being restored as a bed and breakfast by a descendant of the original owner. Cost for tours is $8. Call (740) 754-1054 or visit www.prospectplace-dresden.com for more information.

- In Zanesville, the Stone Academy was the site of two Ohio Abolition Society meetings and is now operated as a museum. Hours are Tuesdays through Fridays 12 to 4 p.m. For more information or to make reservations, call (740) 454-9500. Or call the Zanesville-Muskingum County Visitor’s Bureau at (800) 743-2303 to schedule a group tour.
• The Putnam Underground Railroad Education (PURE) Center, 522 Woodlawn Avenue in Zanesville, opened in 2004, featuring historical artifacts, period furnishings and a research library. Hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. For more information or to schedule a tour, call (740) 450-3100. Cost is $2 for adults and $1 for seniors and children.

Washington County
• To learn more about the self-guided driving tour of seven sites, contact the Marietta Washington County Convention & Visitors Bureau at (800) 288-2577 or visit www.mariettaohio.org. To arrange a guided tour of Underground Railroad sites in the area or to arrange an Underground Railroad tour on the Valley Gem sternwheeler, call Harley Noland at the Levee House Café.

• The Levee House Café, 127 Ohio Street in Marietta, displays historical photos related to the area’s Underground Railroad line. For more information, call (740) 374-2233.

• The Belpre Historical Society Farmer’s Castle Museum & Education Center, 509 Ridge Street in Belpre, has a fine collection of Underground Railroad artifacts and information. The museum is open 1 to 4 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays April through September and other times by appointment. Cost is $4 adults and $1 students. For more information, call (740) 423-7588.

East Central
COLUMBIANA • JEFFERSON • STARK

The counties in the eastern midsection of Ohio highlight the power of free speech and a free press in bringing about social change. The area boasted three important anti-slavery newspapers. And, often backing words with deeds, the region also ran active lines along the Underground Railroad.

In the Jefferson County community of Mount Pleasant, Quaker Charles Osborn issued the first edition of The Philanthropist in August 1817. Osborn’s short-lived publication is considered the first anti-slavery newspaper in the United States and the first to call for “immediate, unconditional emancipation.” In 1821, Benjamin Lundy, another Quaker who had contributed to Osborn’s Philanthropist, launched the Genius of Universal Emancipation in Mount Pleasant, devoting the newspaper exclusively to the abolition of slavery. Lundy was said to have walked through 19 states lecturing on abolition and is credited with helping to found 130 anti-slavery societies.

In the Columbiana County community of Salem, abolitionist and suffragist Abby Kelly Foster helped establish the Anti-Slavery Bugle in 1845 to spread news of the freedom movement to Ohio and points farther west. Abby Kelly Foster, who had graduated from Oberlin College, had already shocked the sensibilities of the nation by lecturing on the issue of
abortion to audiences of women and men. Salem became the western headquarters of the American Anti-Slavery Society and highlighted the close link between the anti-slavery and women’s rights movements before the Civil War. In 1851, the Bugle printed the first of only two accounts of former slave Sojourner Truth’s legendary “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech.

Planning a Visit

Columbiana County
• The Salem Historical Society Museum offers a self-guided tour of Underground Railroad sites in the community and interpretive displays of the town’s important anti-slavery contributions in its Freedom Hall. Homes featured on the tour, “The Underground Railroad – Escape to Freedom,” are not open to the public. The brochure is free, but admission to the museum is $4. Visit www.salemohio.com/historicalsociety or www.salemohio.com/tourism for more information or call (330) 337-8514.

Jefferson County
• The Mount Pleasant Historical Society Museum features information on and artifacts from Benjamin Lundy and other area abolitionists, as well as a self-guided walking tour of several private homes that were Underground Railroad stops. The charming village, founded in 1803, has been designated a National Historic Landmark for its largely intact 19th-century homes and buildings. The community boasts six museums, including the Quaker Yearly Meeting House State Memorial, a general store and a tin shop. All are open by appointment only. For more information or to schedule a guided group tour, call (800) 752-2631. Or visit http://users.1st.net/gudzent/.

Stark County
• Volunteers have been working since 2001 to restore the Haines House in Alliance. The home was a documented stop on the Underground Railroad and is being preserved as a multicultural museum. The home is open the first full weekend of each month: Saturdays 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Sundays 1 to 3 p.m. or by appointment. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call (330) 821-6020 or (330) 829-4668. A donation of $2 per person is encouraged. Visit www.haineshouse.org or call (330) 829-4668 for more information.

• Fugitives once stayed on the upper floor of the Spring Hill Historic Home, 1401 Springhill Lane NE, in Massillon. The 1820s home, which was built by well-documented abolitionists Thomas and Charity Rotch, is open 1 to 4 p.m. Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays June through August and 1 to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays in September and October. Groups of 10 or more may visit by reservation April through October. Cost is $5 for adults and $3 for students. For information about special events and tours, call (330) 833-6749 or visit www.massillonproud.com/springhill/.
In Franklin County, runaway slaves were aided by an active community of free and self-liberated black residents. From newspapers to poetry, the pulpit to the wagon, black leaders in Columbus worked to end slavery. The Rev. James P. Poindexter, minister of the Second Baptist Church and the offshoot Anti-Slavery Baptist Church, described his community’s work on behalf of the enslaved: “Ever since I have been here I must say that Columbus has always given its sympathies and protection to the colored men who were worthy of it – even better than Boston, I believe.”

Once a hub on the Underground Railroad, Columbus is now a hub for preserving the history of Ohio’s secret network. In 1996, a group of grass-roots activists – schoolteachers, history buffs and re-enactors – formed the Friends of Freedom Society to preserve homes that were once stops along the Underground Railroad. So far, the group and its research offshoot, the Ohio Underground Railroad Association, have managed to document more than 700 sites in the state.

The Friends of Freedom Society was also instrumental in creating the experiential Underground Railroad Learning Station at the Kelton House Museum & Garden in Columbus. Fernando and Sophia Kelton were abolitionists who took in an ill runaway slave girl whom they found hiding with her sister in the bushes outside their home. The sister went on to Canada, but 10-year-old Martha Hartway stayed with the Keltons. Students at area high schools now perform the play “Martha’s Journey” as part of the museum’s learning experience.

“Truly the Quaker Friend is a noble specimen of humanity; equally true it is, thank God, as impartial history avoucheth, that the Negro, after two hundred fifty years of the cruelest bondage, stood well in comparison with the best type of his white brethren.”

– Rev. James P. Poindexter
Defending the oppressed cost white attorney Rush R. Sloane more than $4,000 in fines. Helping fugitives to freedom cost free black Elijah Anderson his life.

Although a blacksmith by trade, Anderson was dubbed the “general superintendent” of the Underground Railroad in northwestern Ohio, where such communities as Sandusky, Toledo, Maumee, Sylvania and Napoleon ran active lines. Sloane, a Sandusky attorney, abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor, claimed that Anderson had led more than 1,000 fugitives to freedom.

In 1856, Anderson was captured in Kentucky and charged with “enticing slaves.” He was sentenced to eight years in the Kentucky penitentiary. Anderson died in prison on March 4, 1861.

A few years earlier, Sloane, too, had been charged with breaking laws that protected slavery. In Sloane’s case, it was the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which compelled citizens to assist slave catchers, not the slaves, and increased the penalty for assisting runaways.

In 1852, Sloane intervened on behalf of seven runaways who were nabbed by Kentucky slave catchers claiming to be their owners. Sloane managed to have the slaves released, saying their captors lacked the legal evidence to detain them. One of the slave owners, angered at losing his “property,” sued Sloane, who was ordered to pay some $4,300 in fines, court costs and legal fees. Sloane’s home is now among 11 Ohio sites the National Park Service lists as its “Aboard the Underground Railroad: A National Register of Historic Places Travel Itinerary.”

Planning a Visit
Erie County
• The “Underground Railroad in Erie County, Ohio,” is a self-guided driving tour of the anti-slavery communities of Sandusky, Huron, Milan, Venice and Vermilion. Sandusky features 13 sites related to the Underground Railroad, but only one, the Follett House Museum, is open to the public. The Inland Seas Maritime Museum also presents Underground Railroad programs. For more information about the tour, contact the Sandusky/Erie County Visitors & Convention Bureau at (800) 255-ERIE or visit www.sanduskyohiocedarpoint.com/underground.

• The Follett House Museum, 404 Wayne St., is part of the Sandusky Library system and features Underground Railroad artifacts, as well as items from the Confederate officers’ prison on Johnson’s Island. Admission is free. Call (419) 627-9608 for more information.
Communities in Northeast Ohio chipped away at slavery with secret deeds: Towns throughout the area ran active lines on the Underground Railroad. In the oblique language of the secret transportation network, Cleveland was known by the code name “Hope.” Many fugitives found unknown opportunities in this area far from the corrupting influences of slavery or found help in crossing Lake Erie to get beyond slavery’s grasp.

Many of those same communities attacked slavery with fierce words: “The voice of our people is, ‘Constitution or no constitution, law or no law, no fugitive slave can be taken from the soil of Ashtabula County back to slavery.’ If any one doubts that this is the real sentiment, they can easily test it.” The Ashtabula Sentinel took a menacing tone after the federal Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 compelled residents to compromise their own beliefs and morals to return human beings to bondage.

And when quiet attacks and tough talk weren’t enough, they resorted to physical defiance. In the early 1840s, a mob of Lake and Ashtabula county residents stood down slave catchers who had nabbed fugitive Milton Clarke outside the Old Tavern in Unionville. Clarke and his brother Lewis, whose life story helped shape one of the characters in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” had become well-known anti-slavery speakers. The mob barred the slave hunters’ way, employed legal maneuverings and technicalities to whisk Milton from his captors, and then used a bit of subterfuge to get the former slave away safely.

In 1858, 21 Lorain County men went to jail so that John Price might go free. The Oberlin-Wellington Rescue captured the nation’s attention as scores of area residents, both black and white, chased down the slave hunters who had nabbed the teenage runaway. Nearly 40 of the anti-slavery activists who helped forcibly remove Price to freedom were arrested; 21 spent months in jail. Among the “jail birds” were a judge, a professor, a minister, a printer, students and several black abolitionists in the Oberlin community, including carpenter and cabinetmaker Wilson Bruce Evans and his brother, Henry. Wilson Bruce Evans’ home in Oberlin is now a National Historic Landmark.

The jail birds did not waste their time while incarcerated. The men launched a newspaper from behind bars, which they used to make their case to the public.

Charles Langston was one of only two men actually convicted in the John Price case. Langston and his brother, John Mercer Langston, who was Ohio’s first black lawyer and the nation’s first black elected official, were active in organizing anti-slavery societies. At his sentencing Charles Langston delivered a powerful repudiation of America’s justice system. His eloquence earned him a reduced sentence under the Fugitive Slave Act.

Only months after the rescuers were released from jail, John Brown, the anti-slavery crusader who had lived much of his life in Summit County, led a group of 20 followers in an attack on the Harpers Ferry arsenal in what is now West Virginia. Brown and his band of insurgents, most of whom were from Northeast Ohio, had given up hope that slavery could be ended through peaceful resistance. Brown’s plan, which was to arm slaves for guerrilla warfare, failed. An unrepentant Brown was executed for treason on December 2, 1859.
Planning a Visit

Ashtabula County

• The William Hubbard House Underground Railroad Museum, corner of Lake Road and Walnut Boulevard in Ashtabula, was restored largely through the efforts of a descendant of the anti-slavery activists who originally owned the home and the many volunteers who carried on his work. Admission is $5 adults, $4 seniors and $3 children. For more information, visit www.hubbardhouseugrrmuseum.org. or call (440) 964-8168.

• The Joshua R. Giddings Law Office museum, 108 N. Chestnut St. in Jefferson, is open by appointment March through October. As a member of the U.S. Congress, Giddings was forced to resign after he was censured for speaking on behalf of slaves who mutinied while being transported on the Creole. Northern Ohio voters quickly returned him to office. Admission to the law office is free, but donations are encouraged. For more information, call (440) 466-7337 or visit the Ashtabula County Historical Society’s Web site at www.ashtcohs.com.

Lake County

• The Old Tavern in Unionville has begun sharing its history as a stop on the Underground Railroad with visitors. With nearly 200 years of operation as a tavern or inn, the building has plenty of history to tell. For more information, call (800) 7-TAVERN or visit www.yeoldtavern.com.

Lorain County

• The Oberlin Heritage Center/Oberlin Historical and Improvement Organization offers tours of three historic buildings, including the home of abolitionist, professor and Congressman James Monroe. Monroe traveled to Virginia to retrieve the body of John Copeland, a black Oberlin resident who was hanged for his role in the raid on Harpers Ferry. Copeland, Shields Green and Lewis S. Leary were among five black men who took part in the insurrection. The town of Oberlin erected a monument to these fallen heroes in 1860. The Oberlin Heritage Center is part of the National Park Service’s Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program. Cost to tour all three buildings is $4. The one-hour tours are at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Call (440) 774-1700 or visit www.oberlinheritage.org.

• The Lorain County Visitors Bureau offers “On the Trail to Freedom,” a self-guided driving tour of Oberlin featuring 15 sites with ties to the Underground Railroad. Included are the Westwood Cemetery on Morgan Street, also part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program, and Martin Luther King Jr. Park, where monuments stand to the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue and the Oberlin residents who participated in John Brown’s raid. For more information or to arrange group tours, call (800) 334-1673 or visit www.lcvb.org.

“Moreover, it was a hazardous business to those more immediately engaged in it, inasmuch as the laws of the national government made it a criminal offense, punishable by fine and imprisonment, to give a panting fugitive a piece of bread or point him to the free soil of Canada.”

– Horace Ford, Cleveland conductor
Information in this brochure is subject to change. While every attempt was made to ensure accuracy, information may have changed following publication. The Division of Travel and Tourism does not guarantee the accuracy of the details. It is advisable to contact the properties prior to travel to gain the most updated information.

For information about Ohio lodging, dining, shopping, and more, visit [www.DiscoverOhio.com/blkhist](http://www.DiscoverOhio.com/blkhist). Ohio’s comprehensive travel-planning Web site provides the tools and information for making a visit to the Buckeye State a memorable one. Or call (800) BUCKEYE.

The Ohio Historical Society has put together a Web site to provide Underground Railroad information for tour operators and their groups. For more information, visit [www.ohiohistory.org/places/groups/freedom.html](http://www.ohiohistory.org/places/groups/freedom.html) or call the Ohio Historical Society Packaged Travel Office at (800) 647-2498.