



**KIDS
DISCOVER**

Underground Railroad



**NO TRAINS
NO TRACKS
NO TICKETS**

**NETWORKING
TO FREEDOM**
SECRET SIGNS
HIDDEN ROOMS
CODE NAMES
FALSE BOTTOMS



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What Was the UNDERGROUND Railroad?

There were no trains to ride on the Underground Railroad. There were no tickets. It wasn't a railroad or under the ground. The Underground Railroad was a secret network that helped runaway enslaved people from the South escape to freedom. A network is a group of connected people. It included people of both European and African descent (that means they or their relatives came from Europe or Africa). Nobody knows exactly how many people "rode" the Underground Railroad or how many helped them. We do know that they all showed courage and took risks. Step aboard to hear stories of bravery, danger, and the determination to fight for freedom.

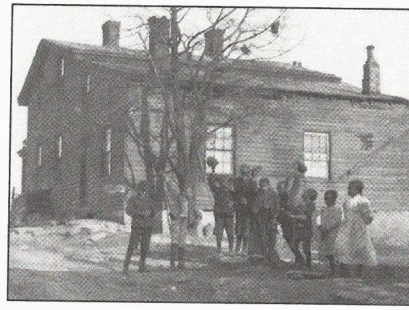
► **THE TERM** *Underground Railroad* wasn't used until the 1840s. But helping enslaved people escape dates back at least to the mid-1600s in the United States. Networks to freedom probably began in the 1780s. That's when the idea of emancipation (freedom from slavery) started taking hold in the North. The Underground Railroad existed



between 1830 and 1865. During that time, slavery was legal all through the South. Millions of enslaved people were forced to work on plantations there. The Underground

Railroad workers led fugitives (runaways) to northern states, where slavery was against the law. From there, many went to Canada. But most fugitives escaped without

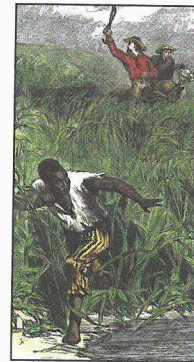
any outside help. The Underground Railroad operated mostly in the North but also in the slave states that lay on the border between North and South.



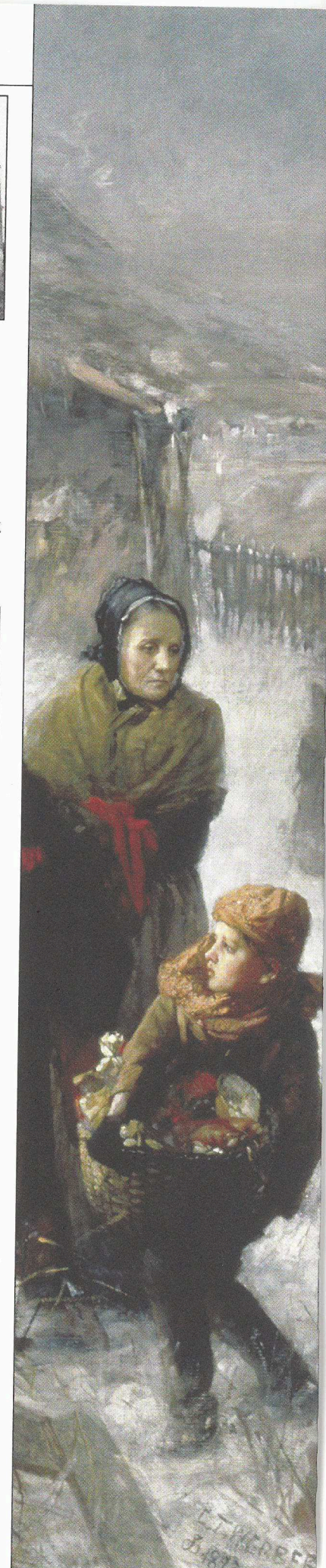
► **A FAMOUS STATION** was Levi Coffin's house in Newport, Indiana. Scholars think the railroad got its name from slave hunters searching for 17 freedom seekers who had safely

moved on from Coffin's house. "They declared that there must be an Underground Railroad, of which I was president," Coffin remembered. The network had its name.

► **THESE MEN (TOP)** are slave hunters. Even though slavery had ended in the North, people who had escaped weren't safe there. The United States had laws that said runaways had to be returned to their owners. Slaveholders offered rewards, so slave hunters made money tracking down



escaped people and returning them to the South.



UNDERGROUND RAIL-road members used secret names and code words to keep others from learning about their work. They were called "conductors" or "railroad workers." Most of them

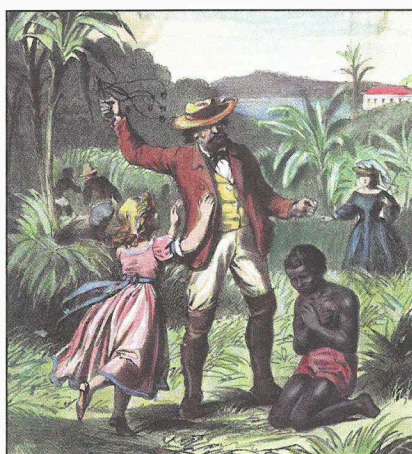
of African descent. They guided "passengers" to "stations" or "safe houses," which were hiding places in houses, churches, or schools. "Stationmasters" were the people who owned the safe houses.





◀ **MOST ENSLAVED** people worked 14-hour days. From sunup to sundown, field workers planted, tended, and picked cotton. They had to pick a certain amount every day. The overseer – a boss – watched them work. He whipped anyone he thought was not working hard enough.

▶ **PEOPLE CAUGHT** trying to escape from slavery were whipped and sometimes sold to slave traders. Enslaved people were denied basic rights. They were not allowed to become American citizens or to vote. They were not entitled to fair treatment under the law. Many southern states passed tough laws to control



enslaved people. In many states, they weren't even

allowed to learn to read or write.

▼ **In 1793,** Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin. This machine made it possible to remove the seeds from cotton hundreds of times

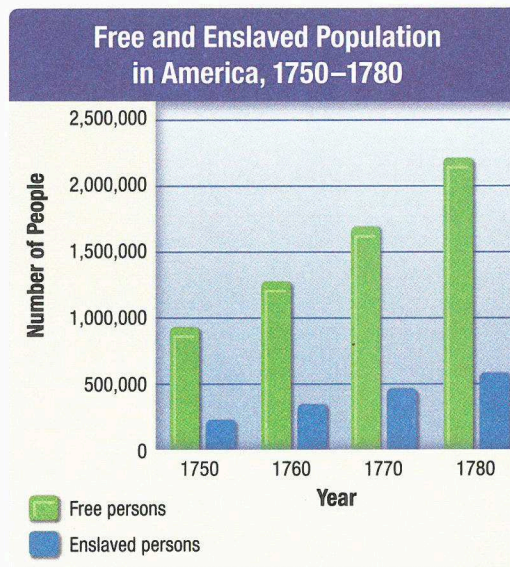
faster than by hand. As a result, cotton, which had been expensive, became much cheaper to use. So business owners built factories to

make cloth. Then plantations needed more workers to keep up with the demand for cotton from the factories.



SLAVERY in the South

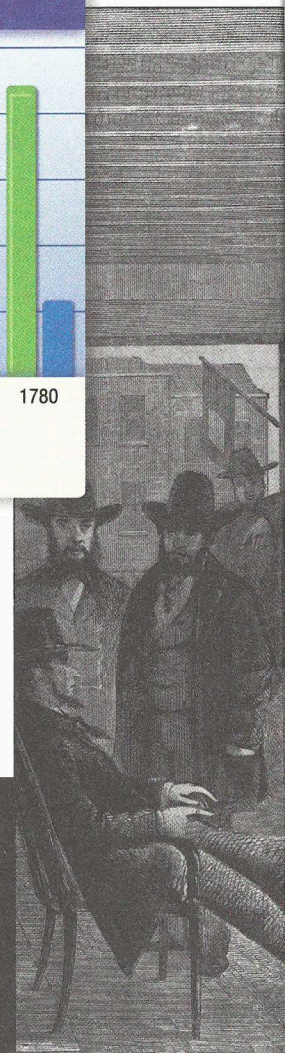
Between 1500 and 1800, the Portuguese, Spanish, British, and Dutch brought almost 10 million enslaved Africans to the New World. Most of these people were taken from West Africa. About 500,000 were taken to Britain's mainland colonies, which became the United States. In the South, colonists needed workers for their plantations (large farms where cotton and other crops were grown). European workers were hard to find. Many Native Americans didn't want to do that kind of work (and many had died from the Europeans' diseases). By the late 1600s, planters decided they needed the forced labor of enslaved Africans.



▲ **THIS BAR GRAPH** compares the populations of free people (both black and white Americans) and enslaved people. The graph

covers the years from 1750 (when America was a British colony) to 1780 (the early United States of America).

▶ **WHEN SLAVEHOLDERS NEEDED MONEY,** they could sell some of the people they held in slavery. They could also hire them out to work for others. The sale or trading of people took place at public slave markets. Husbands, wives, parents, and children were often separated and sold to different buyers.



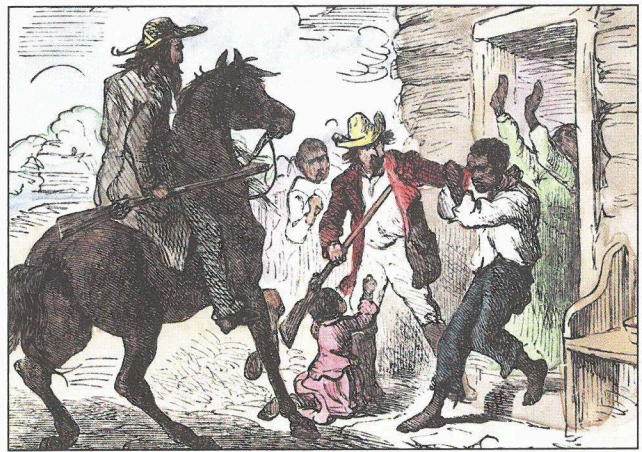
▼ **BY THE 1790s**, many northern states refused to return runaways. Southern lawmakers wanted that to change. The U.S.

Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. This law allowed slaveholders and slave hunters to go after runaways even in free states. It became a crime to help fugitives or prevent their capture. But in some states, like Vermont, strong antislavery feelings made it almost impossible for slaveholders to get runaways back. Many runaways went to Canada to avoid being caught.

\$150 REWARD

RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of the 2d instant, a negro man, who calls himself *Henry May*, about 22 years old, 5 feet 6 or 8 inches high, ordinary color, rather chunky built, bushy head, and has it divided mostly on one side, and keeps it very nicely combed; has been raised in the house, and is a first rate dining-room servant, and was in a tavern in Louisville for 18 months. I expect he is now in Louisville trying to make his escape to a free state, (in all probability to Cincinnati, Ohio). Pres- sibly he may try to get employment on a steamboat. He is a good cook, and handy in any capacity as a home servant. Had on when he left, a dark cinnamon coat, and dark striped cassinet pantaloons, new—he had other clothing. I will give \$50 reward if taken in Louisville, 100 dollars if taken one hundred miles from Louisville in this State, and 150 dollars if taken out of this State, and delivered to me, or secured in any jail so that I can get him again.

Bardonia, Ky., September 24, 1838. **WILLIAM BURKE.**

▲ **LATER, CONGRESS** passed a second, even stricter law, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. It set heavy fines for those who helped runaways. They could even go to jail. This law

made life harder for all people of African descent. Even those who were free were not considered citizens and were denied the right to speak in their own defense.

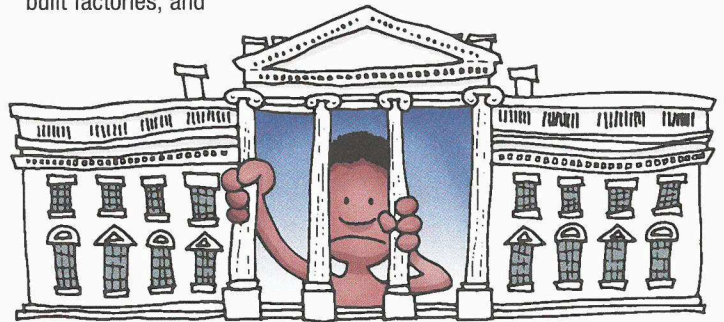
So slave hunters could just grab them along with fugitives. Victims had little chance to show they had been falsely taken or mistaken for someone else.



▲ **IN THE NORTH**, the cold climate and poor soil conditions were not suited to plantations. So the North built factories, and

industry and trade became important. Enslaved people were not needed for the workforce. By 1804, all north-

ern states had laws against slavery, and the United States was divided into free states and slave states.



▲ **NATIONALLY**, however, slavery was legally protected and defended. That's partly because slaveholders

controlled the White House, the Senate, and the Supreme Court. In 1860, all U.S. enslaved people combined were

worth at least \$3 billion. They were worth more than all other money-making "goods" in the country, except land.



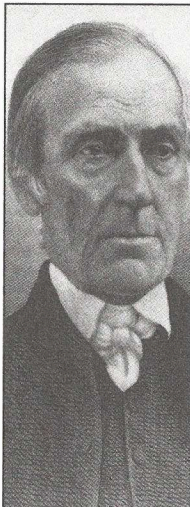
◀ **BORN IN MARYLAND,** Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery in 1849. She then made 19 successful trips back to Maryland to lead others to freedom. She was called Moses, after the biblical Moses, who led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. Slaveholders offered rewards totaling \$40,000 for her capture. She was fearless – and never lost a passenger.



▲ **CONDUCTOR JOHN** Fairfield came from a wealthy slaveholding family in Virginia. But he was against slavery. To help enslaved people escape, he put on different disguises. He would pretend to be a slave trader, a slaveholder, or a traveling salesman. His southern accent helped him fool slaveholders. Fairfield once sneaked 28 enslaved people over the roads near Cincinnati, Ohio, by hiring a hearse and pretending the group was a funeral procession.

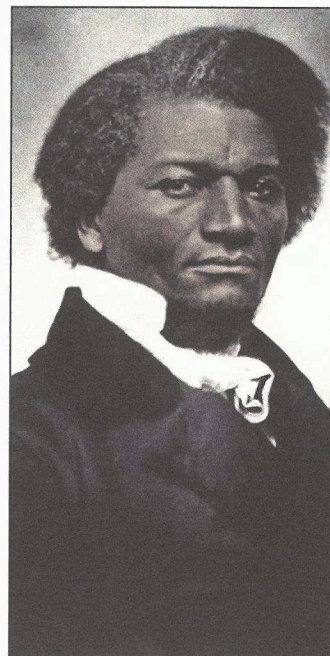
HEROES AND HELPERS

Who were the conductors and stationmasters risking their lives to help others? Some were ordinary farmers and shopkeepers. Others were respected ministers and merchants. Most were people of African descent. They were either free people living in the North or formerly enslaved people who risked getting caught again when they returned south to help others escape. Enslaved people who stayed behind also played an important role in helping others reach freedom.



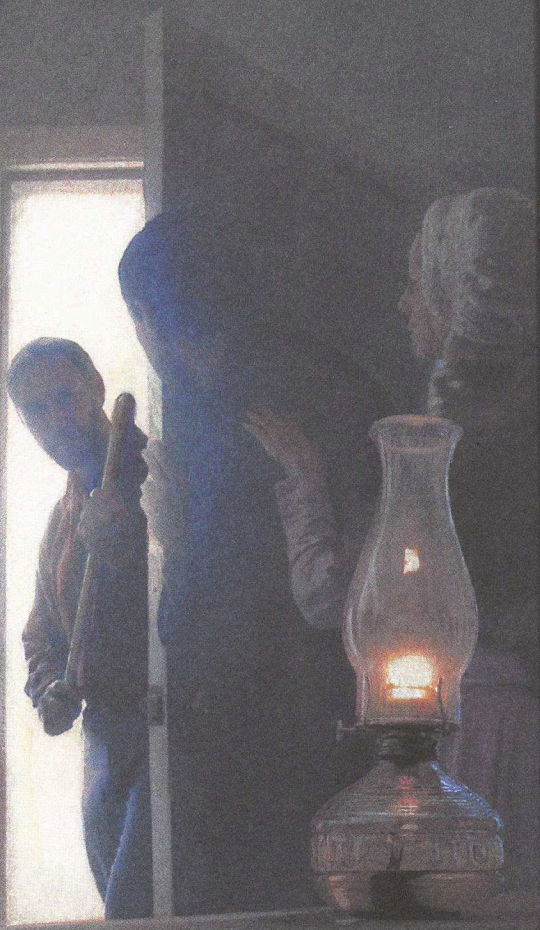
◀ ▲ **MEMBERS OF A** religious group called the Society of Friends, or Quakers, were among the first

Americans to speak out against slavery. They believed no person should be owned by another. Quaker businessman Levi Coffin (far left) raised money for the Underground Railroad and became known as its “president.” William Still (near left) was its historian. In 1872, he published *The Underground Railroad*, one of the first records of the secret network.



◀ **FREDERICK DOUGLASS** was born into slavery in Maryland. He was illegally taught to read and write by the slaveholder’s wife and by local schoolboys. He ran away at 21, disguised as a sailor. In the North, Douglass became a famous writer, speaker, and abolitionist – someone who works to abolish, or do away with, slavery. Thousands read his antislavery newspaper, *The North Star*. His home in Rochester, New York, was a stop on the railroad.

ELIJAH LOVEJOY published an anti-slavery newspaper in Alton, Illinois. Three times, angry supporters of slavery wrecked his printing press. Each time, he bought a new one. In 1837, he was killed trying to protect his fourth press from rioters. Elijah’s brother, Owen Lovejoy became a stationmaster in Princeton, Illinois. He built a secret room behind a fake wall in his home. Once freedom seekers were safely inside, a desk covered the opening. Other houses had tunnels that led outside and hiding places in attics, cellars, and closets.



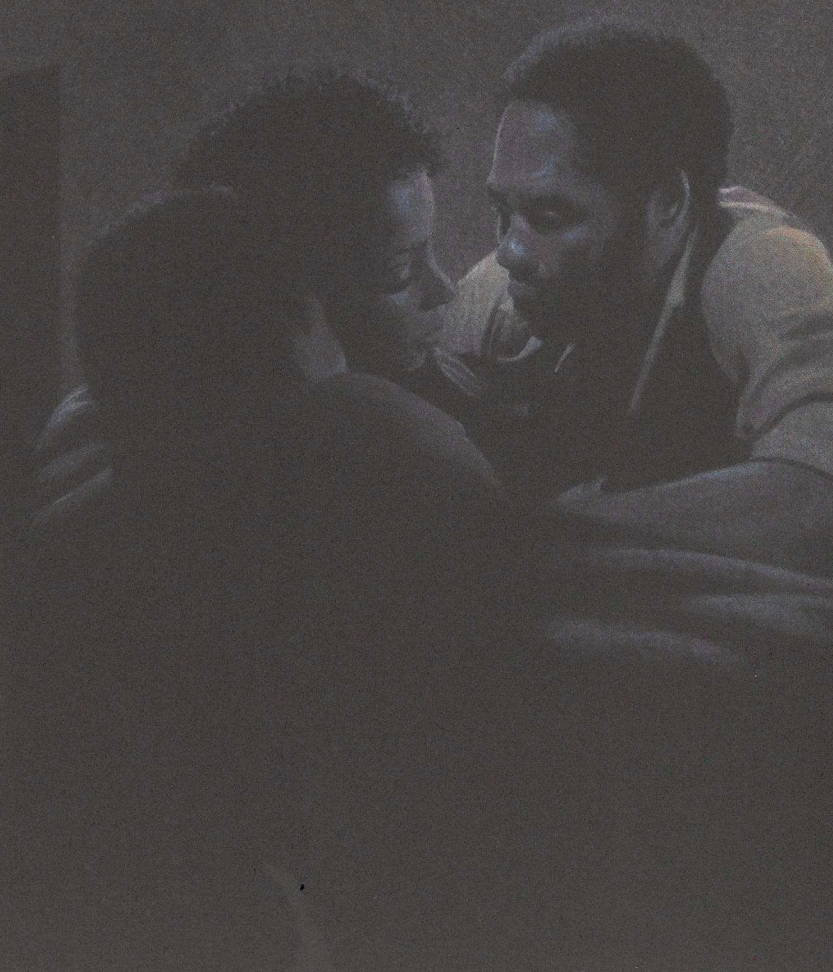
CONDUCTOR CALVIN Fairbanks was a minister. He disguised runaways instead of himself. He dressed boys in girls' clothing and girls in boys' clothing to fool slave hunters looking for

a specific runaway. Women formed sewing groups (above) to make disguises for runaways. Fairbanks spent 17 years in jail for his work on the Underground Railroad.

THINK PIECE!



Frederick Douglass's fiery speeches drew huge crowds. "I appear . . . this evening as a thief and a robber," he said in one. "I stole this head, these limbs, this body from my master, and ran off with them." What do you think he meant? Do you think he was right to run away, even though it was against the law to do so? Why or why not?

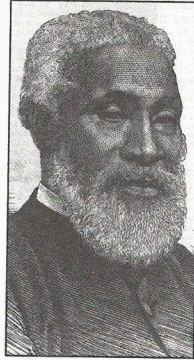


ESCAPE!

Every enslaved person wanted to be free, but few got the chance to taste freedom. Runaways had little hope of reaching free territory. Most escapes failed. If they got caught, runaways were beaten, jailed, returned to angry owners, or sold. Slaveholders saw enslaved people as valuable property and watched them closely. Many enslaved people could not leave the plantation without written permission from the slaveholder. Once on the road, they could be stopped and questioned by anyone who saw them.

In parts of the South, enslaved people weren't allowed to ride trains. They couldn't cross bridges without a special pass. Runaways usually traveled at night, on foot, with nothing to eat but scraps of food they found or stole as they went. As they walked through swamps, they risked being bitten by poisonous snakes. If they didn't find food, they starved. Until they reached the North, many lived on fruit and corn, often unripe, taken from farms and fields.





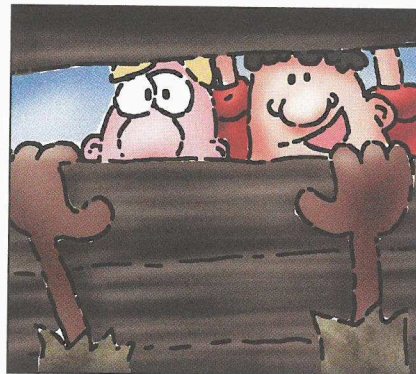
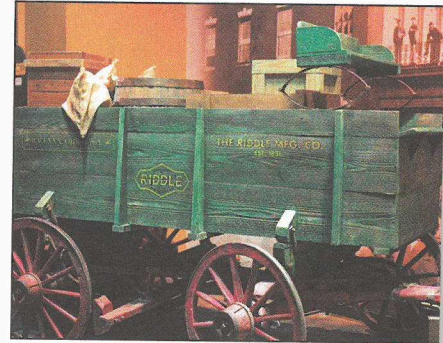
▲ **JOSIAH HENSON** was an enslaved person who was promised freedom if he earned \$350. Henson worked hard and made the money. Then the slaveholder raised the price to \$1,000. When Henson found out that the slaveholder planned to sell him away from his wife and four children, he decided to run away to Canada. He escaped with his family in 1830.



▲ **AN ENSLAVED** person carrying food or clothing made people suspicious, so runaways took almost nothing with them. Many left without blankets, bringing only the work clothes they were wearing. As they moved north, they faced rain, snow, and sleet.

► **SOME LUCKY RUN-**aways traveled north on real trains or stagecoaches. Some sneaked onto steamships, usually with help from the ship's captain. Most traveled by wagon or on foot. This wagon (right) had a false bottom. Runaways lay down or crouched on the real floor. The wagon driver

covered the space with a false floor, then put straw or sacks of grain on top of it.



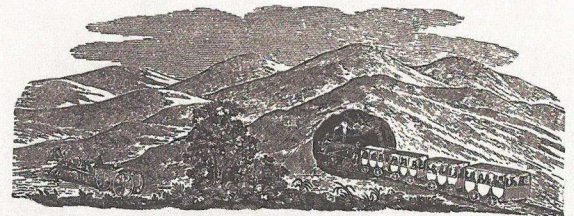
▼ **FRIGHTENED AND** tired, runaways felt better when they reached a safe house. They were still in danger, but they knew they could count on some food and rest. The next day, they got clean clothes from the stationmaster and

directions to the next stop on the way north. Ads for the Underground Railroad appeared in northern cities. This one (below), from 1844, pretends to advertise a real railroad. "Seats free," it says, "irrespective of color."

SOMETIMES RUNAWAYS had to cross deep or wide rivers. So they used boats, wooden rafts, and even large logs. Many slave hunters owned dogs specially trained to hunt for runaways. Sometimes, runaways jumped into swamps and streams. That made the dogs lose their scent, and they would be thrown off the runaways' trail.

▲ **HELD IN SLAVERY** in Virginia, Henry "Box" Brown earned his nickname the hard way. He had a carpenter build a wooden box just big enough to sit in. Brown got inside, carrying food and a tool for making airholes in the wood. A friend

nailed the box shut and mailed it to the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. The trip took 26 hours. Brown spent part of that time upside down. He made it safely. Society members knew he was coming and quickly opened the box.



LIBERTY LINE.
NEW ARRANGEMENT--NIGHT AND DAY.
 The improved and splendid Locomotives, Clarkson and Lundy, with their trains fitted up in the best style of accommodation for passengers, will run their regular trips during the present season, between the borders of the Patriarchal Dominion and Libertyville, Upper Canada. Gentlemen and Ladies, who may wish to improve their health or circumstances, by a northern tour, are respectfully invited to give us their patronage.
SEATS FREE, irrespective of color.
 Necessary Clothing furnished gratuitously to such as have "fallen among thieves."
 "Hide the outcasts--let the oppressed go free."—Bible.
 For seats apply at any of the trap doors, or to the conductor of the train.
 J. CROSS, Proprietor.
 N. B. For the special benefit of Pro-Slavery Police Officers, an extra heavy wagon for Texas, will be furnished, whenever it may be necessary, in which they will be forwarded as dead freight, to the "Valley of Kansas," always at the risk of the owners.
 Extra Overcoats provided for such of them as are afflicted with protracted chilly-phobia.



Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman recalled that when she was about to be sold, never to see her family again, she had this thought:

“ I had reasoned [this] out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a *right* to, liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have [the other]; for no man should take me alive; I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted. ”

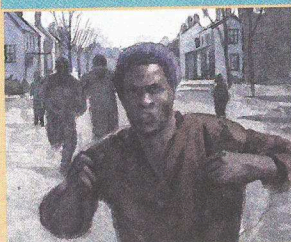


North to FREEDOM

The Underground Railroad was not one route to freedom, but many. These routes were dirt trails or paths through woods, over fields, and across rivers and swamps. Not many runaways could swim. But they often looked for water crossings. When escapees went into water, the dogs chasing them lost the scents that helped track them. Along these routes were farmhouses, barns, and churches. There, conductors hid runaways for a day or a week, until they could get safely to the next station on their way to freedom. The road to freedom went as far north as Canada.

▼ TO REACH

Canada, runaways had to go across or around the Great Lakes. Slave hunters knew this. So they waited in lakeside towns near Niagara Falls, New York, and Detroit, Michigan. They kept a close watch on ships sailing from these places.



◀ **JOSIAH HENSON** was a runaway who became a conductor. In 1842, he set up the Dawn Settlement in Dresden, Canada. There, formerly enslaved people learned new skills and trades that helped them start their new lives.

GENEVA, CASE

Western Reserve, and Oberlin are colleges in Pennsylvania and Ohio. Their students and teachers helped runaways get safely to Canada.

THINK PIECE!

Many people, both black and white, were involved in two movements in the 1800s: abolition (the fight to end slavery) and women's rights. Why do you think women's rights and African Americans' rights went together?



MOST ESCAPEES
 who went to Canada settled in towns close to the U.S. border. They still faced prejudice, or unfair treatment because of their race. But in Canada, men of African descent could vote, serve on juries, and hold public office. Families could live wherever they wanted.

OHIO HAD MANY
 stops and safe houses for runaways. The Ottawa people of Ohio were one of the first groups to help runaways. Many Quakers moved to Ohio, and so did many Southerners who were against slavery.

IN THE STATES
 along the North-South border (Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, Missouri, and Delaware), slavery was legal. But they were close to free states, where it was illegal. More runaways escaped to freedom from the border states than from any other area.

PENNSYLVANIA
 and New York State had many Underground Railroad routes, because many Quakers lived in Pennsylvania and New York was on the border.

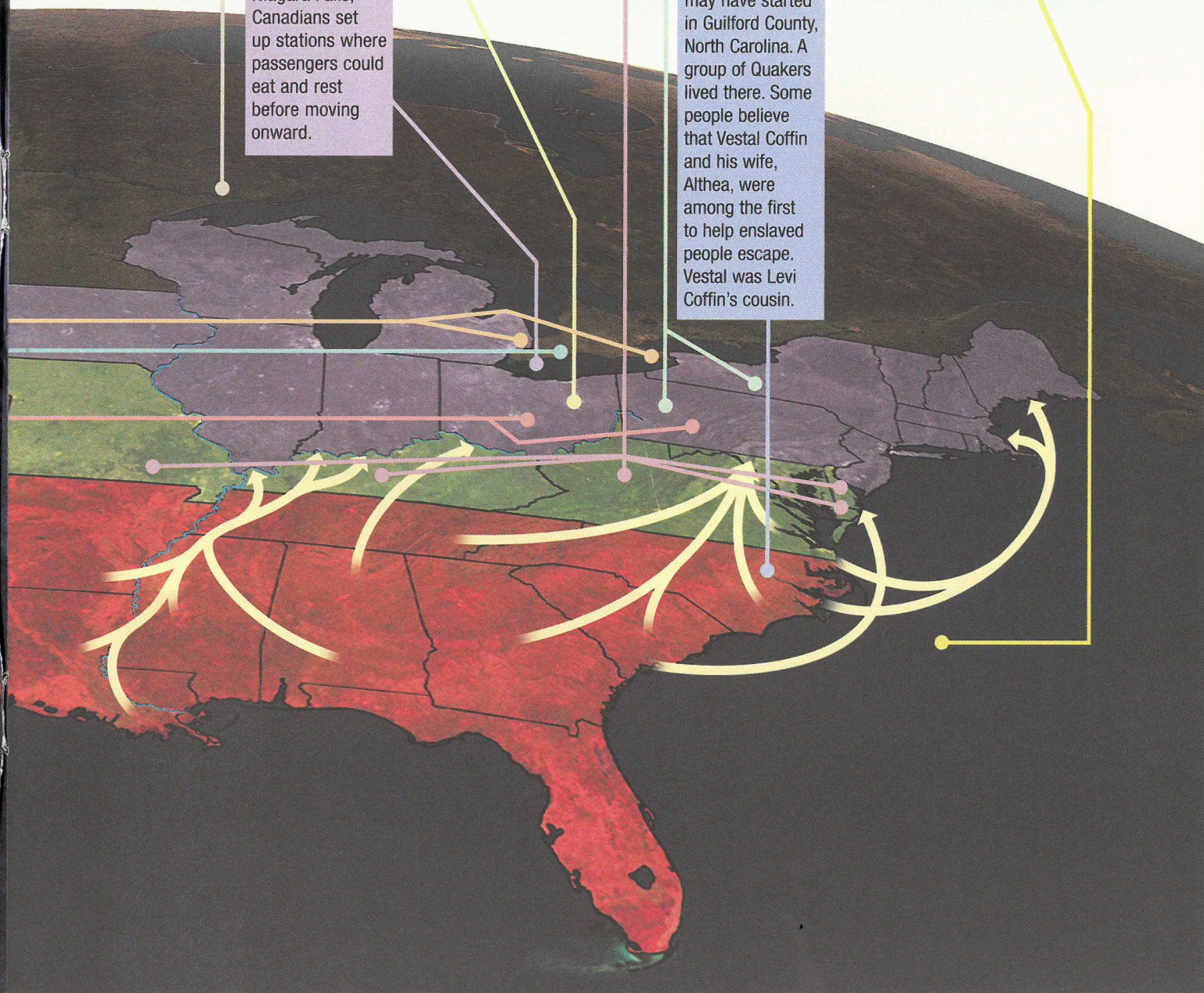


▲ **ENSLAVED PEOPLE**
 who lived near the Atlantic Ocean could take a coastal route to freedom. Some would hide on board ships that were going north. Sometimes northern boat captains helped them.

ALONG THE CANADIAN
 side of Lake Erie and around Niagara Falls, Canadians set up stations where passengers could eat and rest before moving onward.

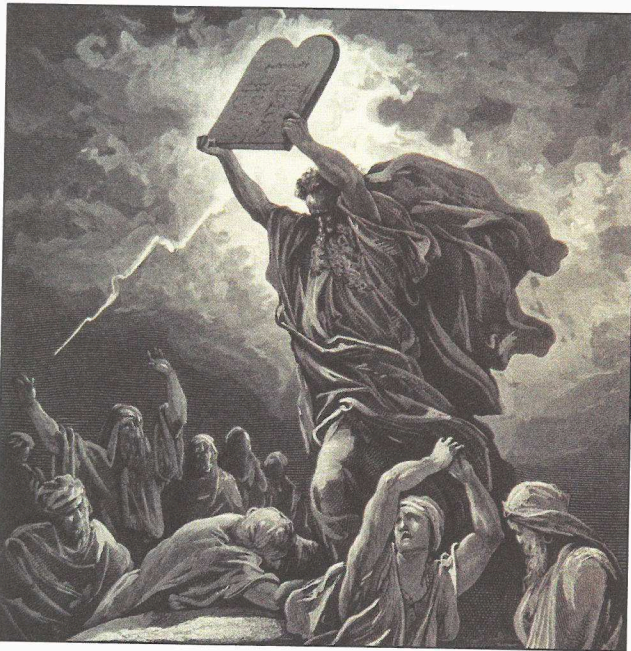


▲ **THE UNDER-**
 ground Railroad may have started in Guilford County, North Carolina. A group of Quakers lived there. Some people believe that Vestal Coffin and his wife, Althea, were among the first to help enslaved people escape. Vestal was Levi Coffin's cousin.



Stars, Songs, and Secret Signs

Enslaved people planning their escape became good at looking and listening and not saying a word. They communicated through songs. They went north without using a map or compass (an instrument that tells direction). Often they left at night. If they took off while it was dark, they sometimes got many hours away before the slaveholder knew they were gone. Runaways shared secrets with the conductors who helped them escape.



◀ **ON THE PLANTATIONS**, enslaved people often sang religious songs called spirituals. These songs shared their sadness, but also their hope for a better life. Sometimes messages were hidden in the words of the songs. Other songs spoke about their need to resist and escape. One such song was “Go Down, Moses.”

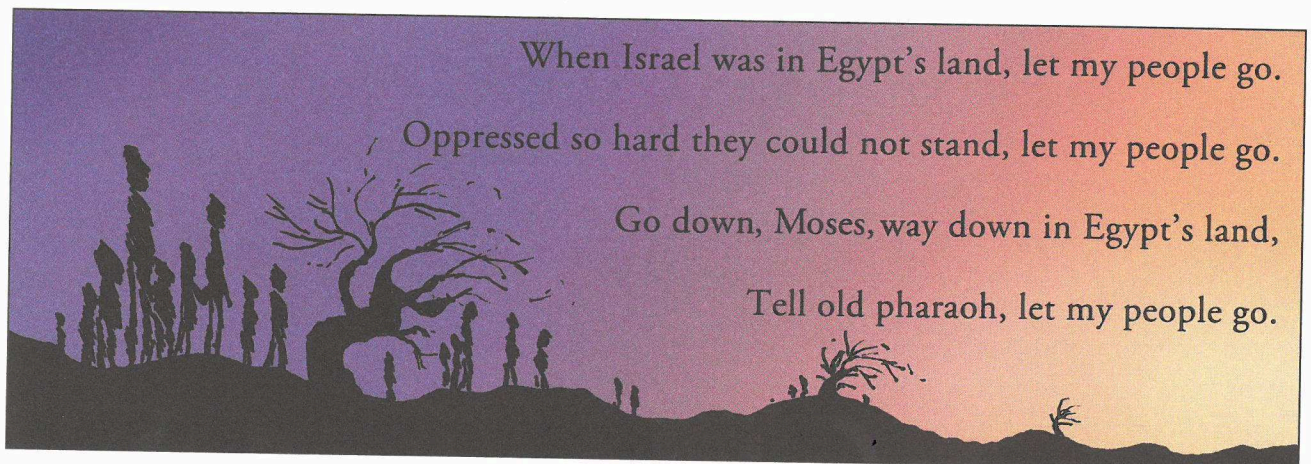
▼ **WHEN ENSLAVED** people sang “Go Down, Moses,” they thought of their own slav-

ery. In the song’s lyrics (words), “Egypt” stood for the South and “pharaoh” stood

for slaveholders and overseers. The song expressed their hope that they would escape

slavery with the help of God, like the Hebrews of biblical times.

TRAVELING AT NIGHT, conductors and runaways learned to use the North Star as a compass. They first searched the sky for the star group known as the Big Dipper. It helped them find the North Star. By always traveling north, runaways got to the free states. When clouds covered the North Star, runaways sometimes got lost.

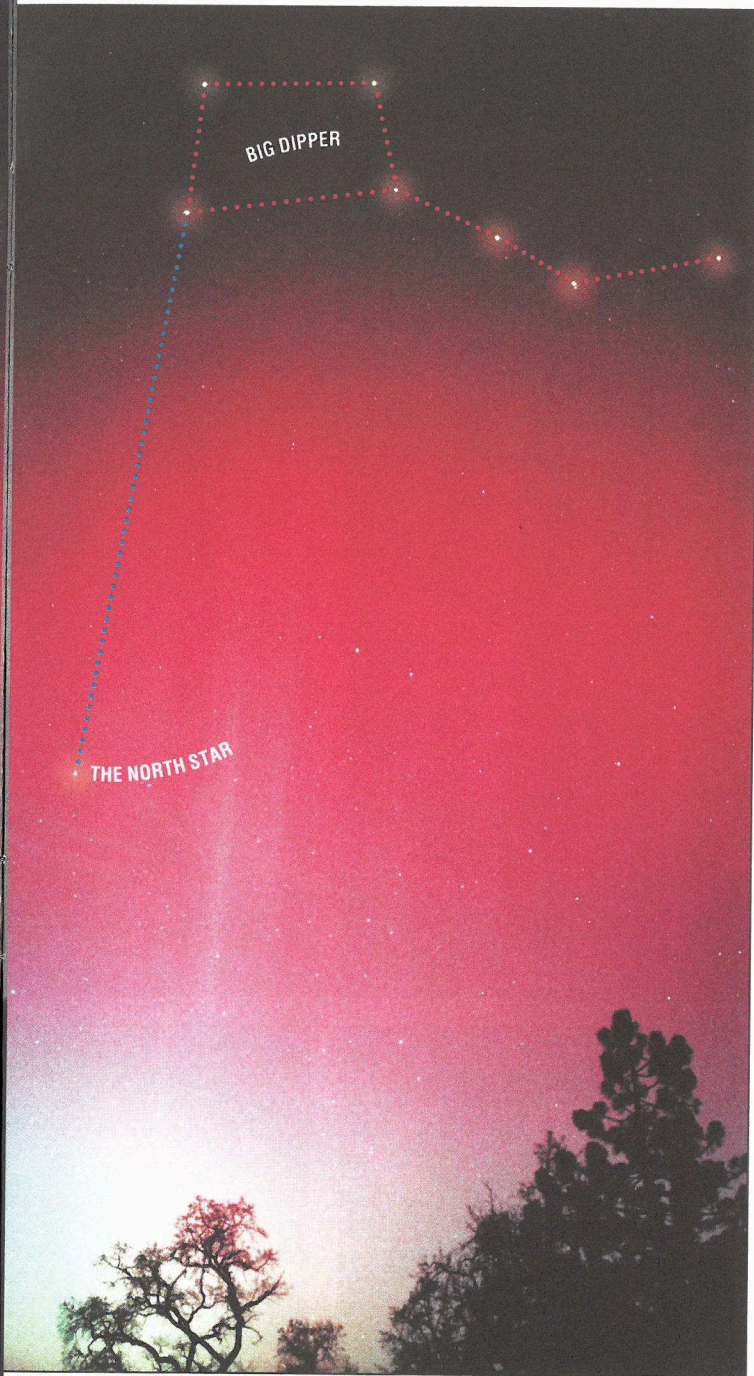


When Israel was in Egypt’s land, let my people go.

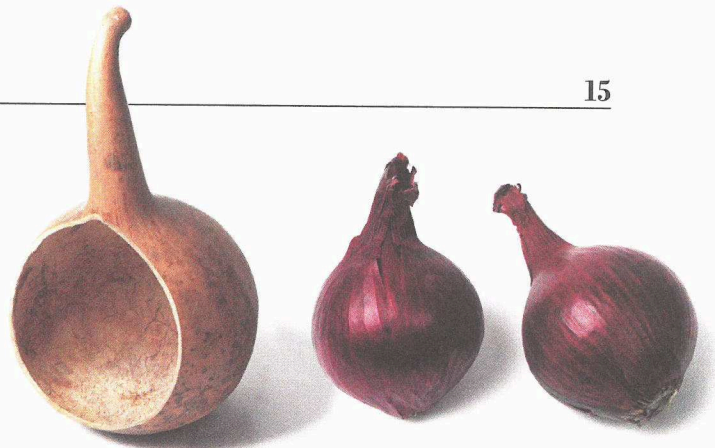
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt’s land,

Tell old pharaoh, let my people go.

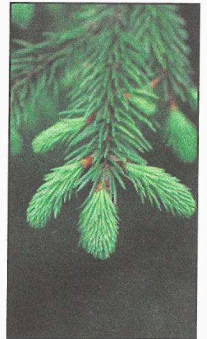


► **RUNAWAYS HAD** another way to find north. On a dark or cloudy night in a forest, they would run their hands up and down the sides of trees. Moss grows best on the north side of a tree, so this helped them go in the right direction.



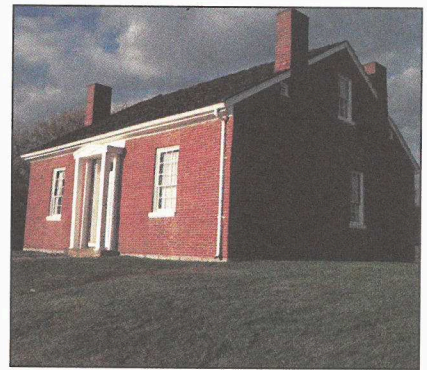
▲ **THE WORDS TO THE** song "Follow the Drinking Gourd" have directions for escape hidden in them. The "drinking gourd" is a code name for the Big Dipper, and the "old man" is an Underground

Railroad conductor. The song also says to stay close to riverbanks, including one along the Tombigbee River. "Another river" is the Tennessee River, which meets the "great big" Ohio River.



▲ **RUNAWAYS USED** a simple trick to fool slave hunters' dogs: They rubbed their bare feet or shoes with onion or spruce pine branches. This covered up their own scent with a different smell.

▲ **OWNERS OF SAFE** houses made sure the people who came to their doors late at night weren't slave hunters. They listened for a certain number of knocks on a door or window. Or they waited to hear a password, such as "baggage," which meant escaping people. Another secret phrase was "load of potatoes." That meant escapees were hidden under farm produce in a wagon. And "bundles of wood" meant fugitives were to be expected.



▲ **AT SOME STA-** tions, homeowners put a lighted lantern or candle in a window. That meant it was safe to come to the door. This house (above) was the home of John Rankin, a Presbyterian minister in Ripley,

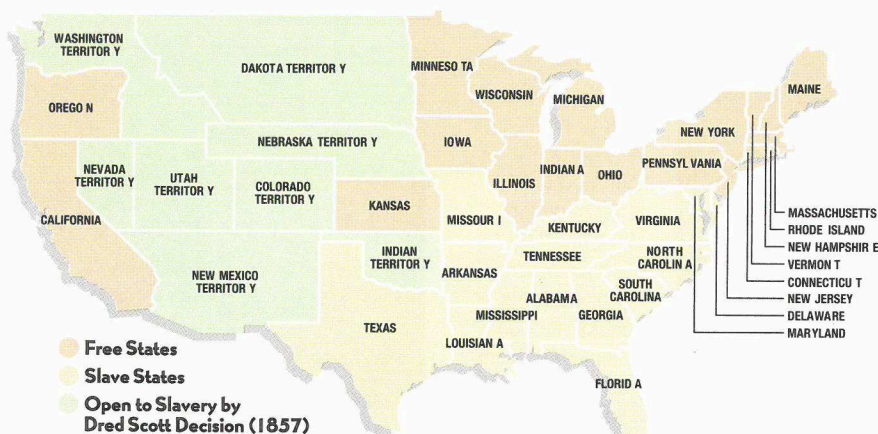
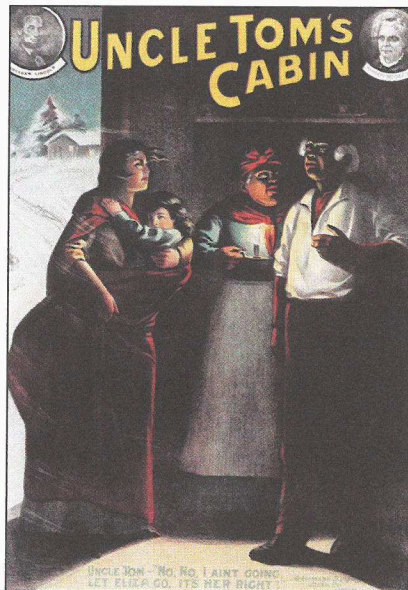
Ohio. Rankin and his wife, Jean, and their neighbors hid more than 2,000 enslaved people on their way to freedom. As many as 12 escapees hid in the house at one time.

FREE at Last

By the 1850s, Americans were sharply divided over the issue of slavery. In the North, many worked to end it. Northerners joined abolitionist (antislavery) groups. They gave out leaflets on the streets. They held fairs and concerts to raise money to help enslaved people escape. The Underground Railroad and attempts by Northerners to disobey the Fugitive Slave Acts made Southerners angry. By 1860, many Southerners felt that the only way to protect slavery and the rights of southern states was to secede from (leave) the United States. They planned to form a separate country. President Abraham Lincoln said their actions were illegal. He sent the U.S. Army to stop them. That led to a bloody fight between the North and the South. The Civil War started in 1861 and lasted four years. When the Union (northern) Army finally won, African Americans throughout the United States became free.

▼ **WHEN HARRIET** Beecher Stowe's book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852, it made thousands of Americans want to

work to end slavery. In the North, the book was a huge success. It sold over 300,000 copies the first year.



Free and Slave States, 1861

▲ **IN 1861, 11** southern states left the United States and formed the Confederate States of America. The states were: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida,

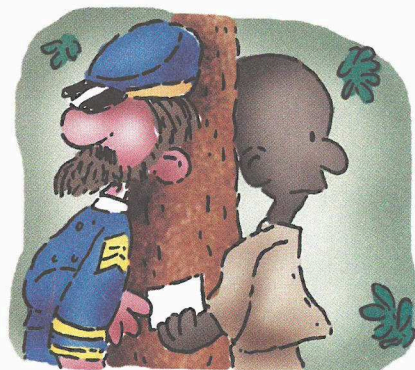
Alabama, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Arkansas, Virginia, and Tennessee. The western part of Virginia did not support slavery. It voted to stay with

the Union and, in 1863, became the state of West Virginia. The Confederacy was broken up in 1865, after it lost the Civil War.



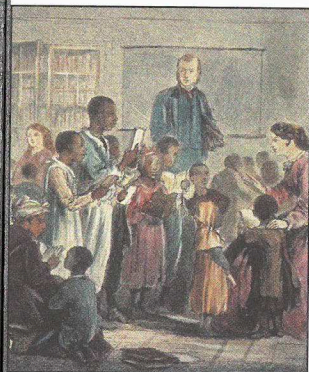
◀ **ALTHOUGH HARRIET** Beecher Stowe had never been south of Kentucky, she had witnessed a slave auction and other horrors of slavery. She based *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on real events in the lives of enslaved people and fugitives she interviewed or heard about. The book showed how horrible and cruel slavery was. Readers in countries around the world read it. It was translated into more than 50 languages.

WHEN THE CIVIL WAR began, more than 200,000 enslaved Africans ran away from southern plantations. Many joined the Union Army and helped defeat the Confederacy.

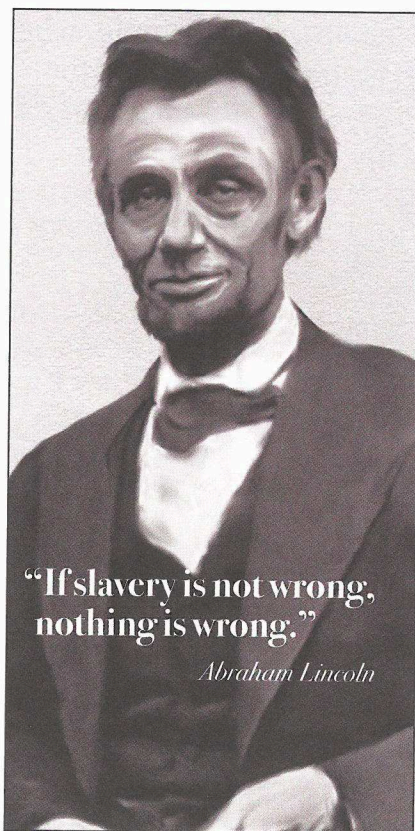


▲ **HARRIET TUBMAN** and other formerly enslaved people served as scouts, spies, or nurses. They gave key information to northern spies. They told Union spies about roads and trails through the South. They

taught them how to use the North Star as a compass. They also taught them where to find swamps, forests, and rivers to hide in. In return, Union soldiers fed and protected runaways.



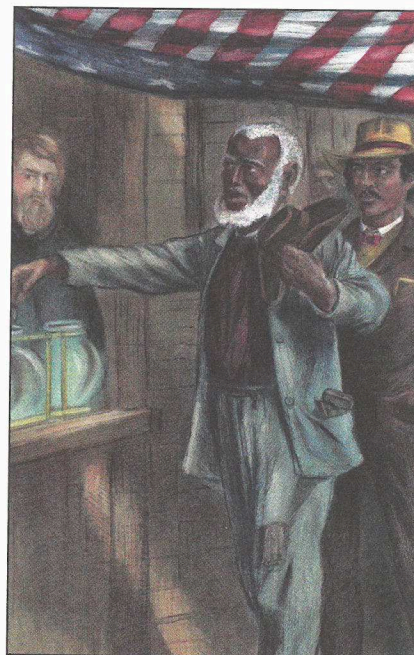
▲ **DURING THE CIVIL** War, soldiers of African descent helped formerly enslaved people learn to read and write. After the war ended, the United States government started schools to teach formerly enslaved people. Most schools had volunteer teachers from the North.



**“If slavery is not wrong,
nothing is wrong.”**

Abraham Lincoln

▲ **In 1862,** President Abraham Lincoln officially freed all enslaved people living in the Confederate States. This famous declaration is called the Emancipation Proclamation. The law officially went into effect on January 1, 1863. But fighting was still going on in the South. So at first the new law could be enforced only in places where Union soldiers were in control.



▲ **THE 13TH** Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution in 1865. It outlawed slavery in the U.S. The 14th Amendment (1868) gave citizenship and civil rights to people of African descent, including those formerly enslaved. The 15th

Amendment (1870) said that no U.S. citizen could be denied the right to vote on account of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (slavery). At last, African American men had the rights of other male American citizens.