

Ohio's Role in the Underground Railroad

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The Roots of Slavery in America

In America slaves were bought and sold for 250 years in a lucrative human trade that eventually divided the nation. The Underground Railroad became a major player in helping slaves escape slavery.

The Underground Railroad was a **human train** that did not run on rails.

Because of its location just a river's width away from slaveholding Kentucky, Ohio evolved into a major route on the Underground Railroad.

What you Should Know about the Underground Railroad

- ▶ It was **not underground**, and it was **not a railroad**, although the vocabulary selected to talk about helping slaves escape came from the railroad. Think of it as an **extended metaphor**.
- ▶ It was also called the “**Freedom Train**,” or the “**Gospel Train**.” In Ohio the term used was **Underground Railroad**.
- ▶ The group that worked the Underground Railroad was the **Ohio Anti-Slavery Society**, individuals who banded together in 1835 in Zanesville to fight for abolition of slavery.
- ▶ Despite Ohio being a free state, there was plenty of protest and fear about the abolitionist movement
- ▶ Although much of the protest against the abolitionist movement was racist in nature, the excuse was made that escaping slaves from the south would take away the jobs in Ohio

Learning About the Underground Railroad

Vocabulary You Should Know:

- Slaves were called **cargo** or **passengers**.
- Hiding places or safe houses were called **stations**
- Guides leading the escaping slaves were called **conductors**
- People helping the escaping slaves, but not guiding them, were called **agents**
- People providing financial resources for these activities were called **stockholders**

Safety for runaway slaves

- ▶ Very few cities in Ohio offered 100% safety to runaway slaves. However, Oberlin, Columbus, Zanesville, Mechanicsburg, Urbana, Chillicothe, Xenia, Hillsboro, Springfield were communities who helped the runaway slaves.
- ▶ The main point of entry in Ohio for runaway slaves was Ripley, Ohio, located on the Ohio River.
- ▶ The safest destination for runaway slaves was in Canada. Export locations from Ohio to Canada were Toledo, Sandusky, Cleveland, Fairport Harbor, and Ashtabula Harbor.

Homes in Ohio Used for the Underground Railroad

- ▶ 1. Harriet Beecher Stowe House--Cincinnati
- 2. John P. Parker House--Ripley
- 3. John Rankin House--Ripley
- 4. Village of Mt. Pleasant Historic District--Mt. Pleasant
- 5. Wilson Bruce Evans House--Oberlin
- 6. Rush R. Sloane House--Sandusky
- 7. Daniel Howell Hise House--Salem
- 8. Col. William Hubbard House--Ashtabula
- 9. Reuben Benedict House--Marengo
- 10. Samuel and Sally Wilson House--Cincinnati
- 11. James and Sophia Clemens Farmstead--Greenville
- 12. Spring Hill--Massillon
- 13. Putnam Historic District--Zanesville

Historian Wilbur Siebert believed approximately three thousand miles of Underground Railroad trails existed in Ohio.



From *The Mysteries of Ohio's Underground Railroads*
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*Ohio's
Underground
Trails*
by
Wilbur H. Siebert

Protests of Slave Catchers

- ▶ John Price, a 17-year old **fugitive slave** from a Kentucky plantation owned by John Bacon, was living in Oberlin at the time of his arrest by two slave catchers and two federal marshals on September 13, 1858.
- ▶ By late afternoon some 200 people from Oberlin and Wellington surrounded the Wadsworth Hotel where Price was being held. Then from outside, someone placed a ladder up to the room's window and a group of Oberlin citizens climbed in the window and another group came in through the door. Price was surrounded and ushered away from his captors. Several days later Price continued on the Underground Railroad to Canada and was never heard from again.
- ▶ 21 men from of the crowd who helped rescue Price were arrested. They were sent to the **Cuyahoga County Jail** for about a month where they remained rather than posting bail. When the slave catchers and marshals were then charged with kidnapping, both sides agreed to drop the charges.

The Role of Harriet Beecher Stowe



Harriet Beecher Stow's Home in Cincinnati, Ohio



Growing up Beecher

- ▶ **Born in 1811, Litchfield, Connecticut, the 6th of 11 children of a well-known protestant preacher, Lymann Beecher, and his wife, Roxanna Foote Beecher.**
- ▶ **Expectations were high for the Beecher children:**
 - ▶ All seven sons became ministers, then the most effective way to influence society
 - ▶ Oldest daughter Catharine pioneered education for women
 - ▶ Youngest daughter Isabella was a founder of the National Women's Suffrage Association
 - ▶ Harriet believed her purpose in life was to write. Her most famous work exposed the truth about the greatest social injustice of her day - human slavery

Harriet's education

- ▶ The Beechers took in boarders from Tapping Reeve's law school. Debates at the family table included the children learning to argue persuasively.
- ▶ Harriet's formal education was at Sarah Pierce's Academy, one of the earliest to encourage girls to study academics.
- ▶ In 1824, Stowe became first a student and then a teacher at Hartford Female Seminary.
- ▶ Harriet continued her writing, spending many hours composing essays.

Background of Harriet Beecher Stowe

- ▶ **The Beecher family moved to Cincinnati in 1832.**
- ▶ **In 1836 she married widower Calvin Stowe, a professor at the seminary where her father served as President. She and Calvin had 7 children.**
- ▶ **She wrote for local and religious periodicals, and also wrote poems, travel books, biographical sketches, and children's books, and adult novels.**

Harriet's Literary Friends

- ▶ **She met and corresponded with other famous writers:**
 - ▶ **Ada Byron, Lady Lovelace, daughter of Lord Byron, (she was poet and mathematician—recognized as the first “computer program” writer—this in 1843!)**
 - ▶ **Oliver Wendell Holmes (Old Ironsides, a “fireside poet”)**
 - ▶ **George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans, Silas Marner, the Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch)**

Harriet becomes an abolitionists

- ▶ Kentucky was a slave state, and Ohio, right across the border, was a free state, although not everyone felt the same way as Harriet.
- ▶ Thousands of runaway slaves passed through Cincinnati on their way north to freedom.
- ▶ Harriet became friends with John Rankin of Ripley, Ohio, who had a stop on the “Underground Railroad.”
- ▶ Harriet’s father, Lyman Beecher, was considered one of the “conductors” of the Underground Railroad!

Harriet Gets a First Hand Accounting of Slavery

- ▶ While living in Cincinnati, she heard many stories from the runaway slaves and Underground Railroad conductors.
- ▶ These stories became the basis for her novel, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” which was published in 1852. (The Civil War broke out in 1861 and ended in 1865.)
- ▶ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was an immediate best-seller, selling 10,000 copies in the United States in its first week; 300,000 in the first year; and in Great Britain, 1.5 million copies in one year.
- ▶ The novel is identified by an international audience as a protest novel and literary work.

Book based on stories about real runaway slaves

- ▶ Harriet interviewed many runaway slaves and heard their stories about the Underground Railroad. She based some of her characters on the real people she met.
- ▶ One such person was Josiah Henson, a fugitive slave who escaped from Kentucky to Canada via the Underground Railroad with his wife and two children.

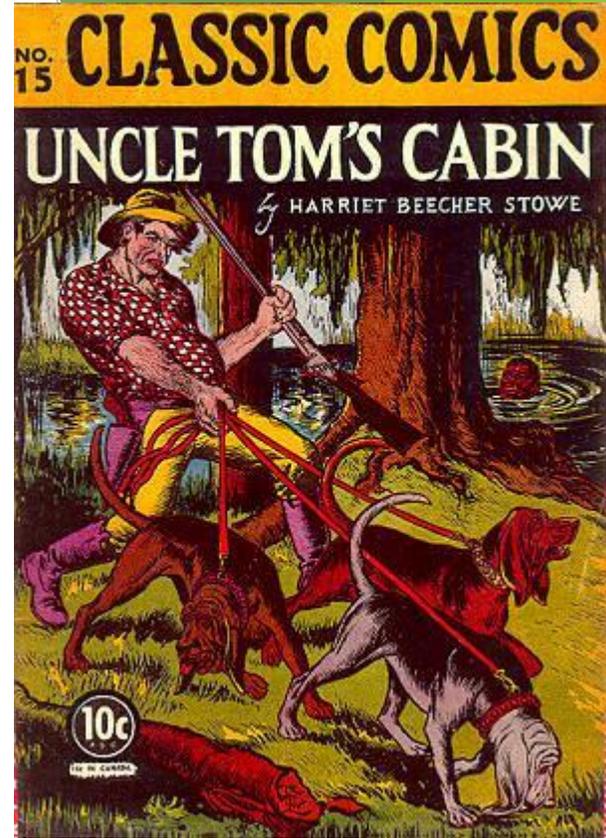
Did Abraham Lincoln actually say those words?

- ▶ Whether true or not, there are many accounts written by others (not Lincoln or Stowe) that when Abraham Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe and gave a nod to her having helped start the Civil War. According to a 1911 biography of her son, Charles Stowe, written by Harriet's grandson:

“Mr. Lincoln rose awkwardly from his chair saying, 'Why, Mrs. Stowe, right glad to see you!' Then with a humorous twinkle in his eye, he said, 'So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!'”

The Novel That Changed a World View

- ▶ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* changed how Americans viewed slavery.
- ▶ The novel pushed for change:
 - ▶ The United States needed to deliver on the promise of freedom and equality
 - ▶ Solidified the abolition movement
 - ▶ Contributed to the outbreak of the Civil War



"...the enslaving of the African race is a clear violation of the great law which commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves"

Harriet Beecher Stowe

What did Uncle Tom's Cabin Teach the Public

- ▶ Characters were white and black; from the North and from the South
- ▶ Slave owners were kind, while others were sadists
- ▶ Readers learned how plantation owners in debt used their slaves to pay off their debts by selling them, often times breaking up their families
- ▶ We see one family successfully escape.
- ▶ We see Uncle Tom sold repeatedly until he eventually lands as property of Simon Legree, a drunkard and sadist

Synopsis, continued

- ▶ Tom's deep faith gives him an inner strength that frustrates his enemies as he moves toward his fate in Louisiana, making him a character that Northern audiences would admire
- ▶ Tom's freedom comes only with death. Simon Legree, Tom's third and final master, has Tom whipped to death for refusing to deny his faith or betray the hiding place of two fugitive women.
- ▶ Tom, a noble Christian, becomes a martyr as it is recognized that he represents the true meaning of Christianity

Reaction to the Novel

- ▶ The South denounced the novel, and some states made it illegal to own a copy of it
- ▶ Southern newspapers depicted Harriet Beecher Stowe as a liar and a villain
- ▶ On January 1, 1863, Stowe attended a concert in Boston held to celebrate **the Emancipation Proclamation**. The crowd, which contained notable abolitionists, chanted her name, and she waved to them from the balcony.
- ▶ The crowd that night in Boston firmly believed that Harriet Beecher Stowe had played a major role in the battle to end slavery.

Being an “Uncle Tom”

- ▶ In 1851, Uncle Tom was in direct opposition to the stereotypes of Negroes.
- ▶ Most whites only saw Negroes like those depicted in Minstrel Shows
- ▶ Tom was a Christ-like character who, like Christ, was a martyr
- ▶ Not everyone admired the character of Tom:
 - ▶ *For my part, I was never an admirer of Uncle Tom, nor of his type of goodness; but I believe that there were lots of old Negroes as foolishly good as he; the proof of which is that they knowingly stayed and worked on the plantations that furnished sinews for the army which was fighting to keep them enslaved* James Weldon Johnson
 - ▶ In some productions of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the character of Tom was depicted as a shuffling asexual individual, or someone who was trying to “act white.”

Today's Attitude Toward *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

- ▶ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* struck a nerve among different generations here and abroad. It has become an “American classic.” The novel has been translated into more than sixty languages.
- ▶ This anti-slavery novel remains a powerful work, read in college and high school courses dealing with literature, history, and issues of race and gender.

Others Who Supported the Underground Railroads



John Brown spent most of his youth in Ohio. His father instilled in him a hatred for slavery. John Brown believed God had selected him to lead the slaves to freedom. Many hated him because he used violence to promote his cause, including killing five slave owning men in front of their wives and children in Kansas.

Brown and 21 men raided a federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in hopes to outfit a group of former slaves to attack and force slave owners of the south to release their slaves. Brown was caught, charged with treason, and on December 2, 1859 he was hanged.

John Brown (1800 – 1859), was a prominent figure in the abolitionist movement. His family rented a house from Colonel Simon Perkins in Akron, Ohio between the years of 1844 and 1854.

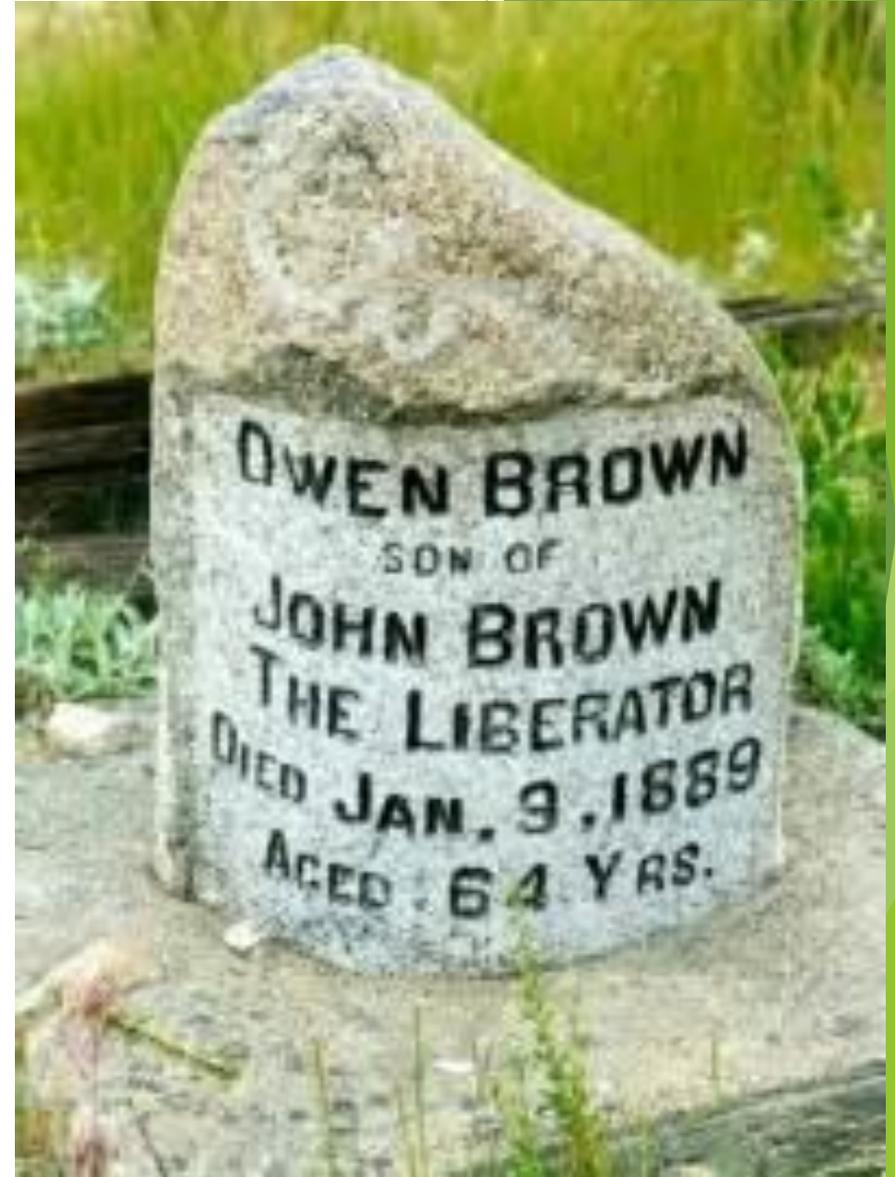
He participated in the Underground Railroad well before he began bringing escaped slaves to his home in Akron for safe harbor as he traveled between Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio. In Hudson, he and his father, Owen, provided refuge for escaped slaves and helped transport them to Cleveland. John Brown Brown publicly consecrated his life to ending slavery.

John Brown and Samuel Perkins become partners in raising sheep

- ▶ While working with Perkins, Brown did not forget his convictions and continued involvement in Underground Railroad activity while living at the house on Perkins property. It is now known as the John Brown House,. He even harbored escaped slaves at the home until they could be moved onto a station further north.
- ▶ Perkins and Brown did not agree on the slavery issue, however their business partnership was formed on mutual respect, trust and honesty. Mrs. Perkins however, did not appreciate Brown, his boys, or the continual appearance of freedom seekers on property owned by her husband.
- ▶ According to Col. Simon Perkins' oldest son, George, noted abolitionists visited Brown here including Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet. Because of the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, historians believe Brown's Underground Railroad activities became more aggressive. His travels to Pennsylvania and Virginia allowed him to pick up fugitives seeking passage to Lake Erie and Canada.[]

John Brown's son, Owen Brown

- ▶ Owen Brown was born at Hudson, Ohio, November 4, 1824, and was the third son of John Brown's first family, there being twenty children in all.
- ▶ He was an abolitionist. He fought in Kansas with his father, and participated in the raid on Harper's Ferry.
- ▶ He later became an officer in the Union Army in the Civil War.
- ▶ When he died of pneumonia in 1889 at age 64, and was buried at Little Round Top in the Meadows. Supposedly 2,000 mourners marched up Little Round Top Hill for his funeral. Later a marker was placed at his grave site reading "Owen Brown, Son of John Brown, the Liberator, died Jan. 9, 1889. Two iron ornaments (a heavy hook on the left and a ring on the right) were attached to the marker which symbolized freedom from the shackles of slavery. The marker disappeared in 2002 and was found in 2012.



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