

Letters to the Editor*

To the Editor of the *Indiana Magazine of History*:

Your excellent magazine of September, 1985 contained a well-written article by Professor Gregory S. Rose of the Ohio State University, on "Hoosier Origins and Nativity of Indiana's Population in 1850". As a native Hoosier, born in Knox County, Indiana, with antecedents going back to 1795 in that county, I enjoyed reading it.

The author, however, in describing the motives of people emigrating into the Hoosier state, omitted an important fact: that Indiana was a "free state", banning slavery from its beginning. Many persons in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky removed singly or in groups to this state to escape slavery.

I know this partly by my family history. John Niblack, Jr., born in Lexington, KY in 1791, came to Pike County in 1817 for such reason, according to the autobiography of Judge William E. Niblack of Vincennes, his son. Martha Hargrave, his wife, left North Carolina with a large family group in 1818 for the same reason, and settled in Pike County, also. Many other Southern Indiana Hoosiers came for the same reason, some bringing slaves whom were freed on arrival here, as evidenced by the records of the Indiana Presbyterian Church of Knox County, found in the State Library.

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To the Editor of the *Indiana Magazine of History*:

Anti-slavery sentiment was clearly an important factor encouraging southern migration to Indiana, as Judge Niblack states. On page 216 of my article I briefly mention the anti-slavery Quaker element among the immigrants and I refer to other sources which discuss the issue in more detail.¹ However, I could have stressed the point more, perhaps in the paragraph beginning on the bottom of page 219.

Many authors note that the prohibition against slavery in the Old Northwest helped attract southerners or that Indiana's

* Letters to the editor are printed verbatim.

¹ Gregory S. Rose, "Hoosier Origins: The Nativity of Indiana's United States-Born Population in 1850," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXI (September, 1985), 201-32.

settlers were opposed to slavery.² Numerous Quakers from the upland south migrated because of religious aversion to slavery, many deciding to move after the system solidified in the late 1700s and early 1800s and resistance seemed futile or dangerous. Such large numbers left that their "migration seemed something of a mass movement and whole communities and churches were gradually transferred to Indiana and her sister states."³ Once they arrived, some continued their anti-slavery activity as abolitionists or by helping the underground railroad.⁴ Moravians also joined the exodus, and additional southerners probably migrated due to philosophical revulsion toward involuntary servitude.⁵

Moral or religious opposition to slavery was just one of many causes of southern migration to Indiana. Some pioneers were escaping the economic impact of slavery which they had experienced as plantations expanded into the small farm districts of the upland south. The yeomen became advocates of free labor, opposed to slavery on economic grounds because slave labor could produce more at lower prices.⁶ These farmers moved through the upland south ahead of the expanding plantation frontier, finally migrating to the Old Northwest "where slavery and planter aristocracy would be less likely to follow."⁷ Other reasons including fresh soil, availability of relatively inexpensive land, climatic similarities, and the funneling influence of transportation routes

² R. Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840* (2 vols., Bloomington, Ind., 1951), II, 474-76; Howard H. Peckham, *Indiana: A Bicentennial History* (New York, 1978), 47; Richard Lyle Power, *Planting Corn Belt Culture: The Impress of the Upland Southerner and Yankee in the Old Northwest* (Indiana Historical Society Publications, Vol. XVII; Indianapolis, 1953), 38, 146; Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), 224.

³ John D. Barnhart, "Sources of Southern Migration into the Old Northwest," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXII (June, 1935), 59-61. See also Jacob Piatt Dunn, Jr., *Indiana: A Redemption from Slavery* (Boston, 1905), 391-92; Harlow Lindley, "The Quakers in the Old Northwest," *Mississippi Valley Historical Association Proceedings*, V (1911-1912), 61-67; Stephen B. Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery: A Study in Institutional History* (Baltimore, 1896), 245-85.

⁴ Lindley, "Quakers in the Old Northwest," 67; Peckham, *Indiana*, 65-66; William E. Wilson, *Indiana: A History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1966), 180-82.

⁵ Elfrieda Lang, "Southern Migrants to Northern Indiana before 1850," *Indiana Magazine of History*, L (December, 1954), 350-51.

⁶ John D. Barnhart, "Southern Contributions to the Social Order of the Old Northwest," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XVII (July, 1940), 242-43; Peckham, *Indiana*, 47; Power, *Planting Corn Belt Culture*, 146.

⁷ Barnhart, "Southern Contributions to the Social Order of the Old Northwest," 238; John D. Barnhart, "The Migration of Kentuckians across the Ohio River," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly*, XXV (January, 1951), 29, 31.

also encouraged migration to southern Indiana.⁸ It was these factors which probably attracted some southerners, since not all were opposed to slavery. At times during Indiana's territorial and early state history petitions were circulated or legislation introduced to alter or repeal prohibitions against involuntary servitude.⁹

That many southerners migrated to Indiana to escape slavery is generally accepted, but precisely which motives powered individual migrations is harder to determine. This is where personal histories like that of Judge Niblack's family become important, for they contain the reasons for migration expressed by the actual movers. Early materials such as the church records mentioned by Judge Niblack, letters and reminiscences of pioneers, and the biographies contained in the county histories of the late 1800s might provide similar information. I have not examined these sources thoroughly enough to discuss individual motivations beyond what other researchers have revealed, but one might expect to discover the full range of anti-slavery inducements to migration, from religious abhorrence to economic concerns to simple racism.¹⁰

Among the southern migrants to Indiana were Blacks who also sought a close and accessible free state. Some freed persons decided to leave the south as restrictions limiting property ownership and movement increased. Some came as slaves and were freed upon arrival in Indiana, while others migrated with Quaker families who had formerly owned them or who had purchased their freedom.¹¹ But Blacks were not always welcome in Indiana, for some southerners who migrated to escape the economic and social impact of slavery did not want Blacks living among them.¹² One outgrowth of this view was the prohibition against contin-

⁸ Buley, *The Old Northwest*, II, 474; William O. Lynch, "The Westward Flow of Southern Colonists before 1861," *Journal of Southern History*, IX (August, 1943), 326-27; Rose, "Hoosier Origins," 219, 225-28.

⁹ John D. Barnhart, "The Southern Influence in the Formation of Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXIII (September, 1937), 261-76; Buley, *The Old Northwest*, I, 66-72, II, 5-6n, 616; Dunn, *Indiana*, 384-89, 426-35, 441-42; Robert LaFollette, "Interstate Migration and Indiana Culture," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XVI (December, 1929), 350-51; Peckham, *Indiana*, 38, 133.

¹⁰ Peckham, *Indiana*, 135-36.

¹¹ Barnhart, "Sources of Southern Migration into the Old Northwest," 61; Dunn, *Indiana*, 436-41; Lindley, "Quakers in the Old Northwest," 62, 65-66; Adolph Rogers, "North Carolina and Indiana: A Tie That Binds," *Indiana Magazine of History*, V (June, 1909), 53.

¹² Barnhart, "Southern Contributions to the Social Order of the Old Northwest," 240-43; Barnhart, "Sources of Southern Migration into the Old Northwest," 61; Peckham, *Indiana*, 67-68, 127.

Blacks as Percent of Total Population

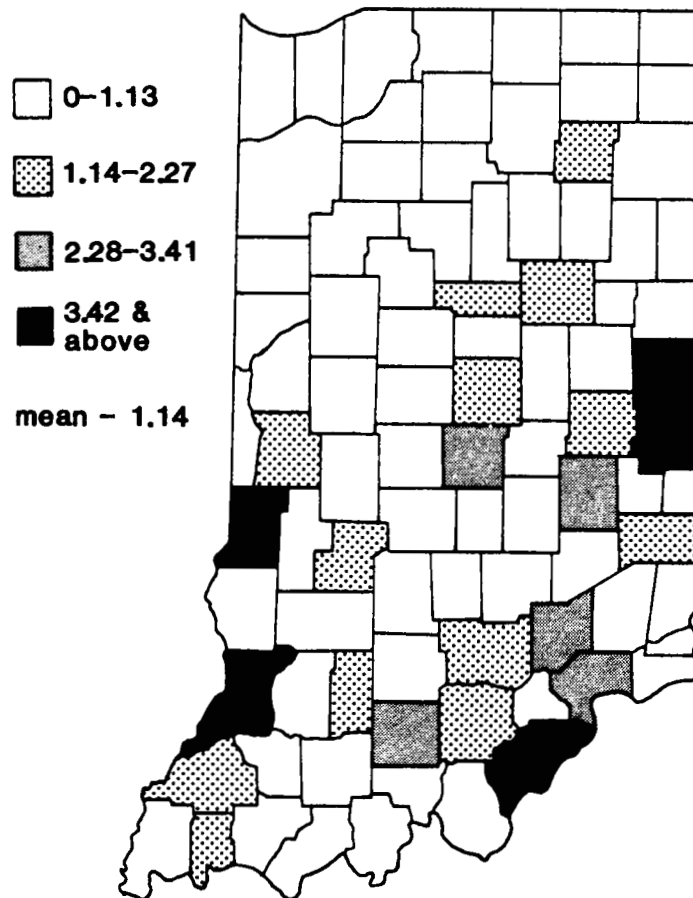


Figure 1

ued immigration by free Blacks which appeared in the Constitution of 1851.¹³

By 1850 Indiana contained 11,262 Blacks who formed 1.14 percent of the total population. Most lived in the southern half of the state, the region also dominated by southern natives (Figure 1).¹⁴ The heaviest concentrations appeared in counties containing major urban areas or having many Quaker settlers: in Clark County (Jeffersonville) 582 Blacks were counted, in Floyd (New Albany) 574, in Knox (Vincennes) 530, and in Vigo (Terre Haute) 748; two of the major Quaker counties, Randolph and Wayne, had 662 and 1,036 Blacks respectively. I am now researching the 1850 manuscript census to discover the nativity of Blacks in each Indiana county. It is apparent from the 29 counties finished thus far that most Blacks not born in Indiana were from the south (North Carolina and Kentucky are the two leading states) and that the nativity of Blacks was similar to that of the surrounding whites. The strong correlation between Black concentrations and counties with mostly southern natives may provide further evidence for the anti-slavery motivation behind some southerners' migration to Indiana. Blacks living near southern whites who objected to slavery may have moved with them to Indiana; this seems especially likely in the Quaker counties. I hope to report the complete results of my study in future publications.

Gregory S. Rose

¹³ Peckham, *Indiana*, 135-36; Wilson, *Indiana*, 102-103.

¹⁴ In the census tables they are listed as "free colored." U.S., *Seventh Census, 1850* (Washington, D.C., 1853), 755-56; Rose, "Hoosier Origins," 214-16, 219-20.