

UNNAMED ANTI-SLAVERY HEROES OF OLD NEWPORT.

[A paper read by Dr. O. N. Huff, of Fountain City, at a meeting of the Wayne County Historical Society, September 23, 1905.]

A NUMBER of weeks ago I listened to a beautiful sermon delivered in this church, the minister using as a basis for her discourse the two words "and others."

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Hebrews enumerates the many great deeds of faith of the patriarchs and prophets, and then exclaims, "And what shall I more say, for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and of Barak and of Samson and of Jephtha, of David also, and of Samuel and the prophets," who through faith did great and mighty things. "And others had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments."

In recent accounts of anti-slavery days in Old Newport, which extended over a series of years, or until Abraham Lincoln with one stroke of his mighty pen broke the shackles from all slaves in the United States, everything centers around Levi Coffin, and other names are rarely mentioned. Newspaper correspondents come long distances to see the house in which he lived, and to get photographs of the same and write long articles of the brave and courageous things he did for the poor slaves seeking freedom. I would not for one moment lessen in the slightest degree the grand and noble work of Levi Coffin, but I would at least say, "and others," who for the sake of humanity "suffered cruel mockings, yea, moreover, bonds and imprisonments," and persecutions and religious ostracism. The work of helping fugitive slaves began very early in the history of the old town, but was not thoroughly organized until Levi Coffin took his position at the helm, and by his very prudence and boldness, gave confidence to all those disposed to engage in the dangerous work.

In the year of 1840 Arnold Buffum visited Newport in the interest of the anti-slavery cause. He was a Friend from Massachusetts—a man of great power and fine presence—and by his eloquent and persuasive speech did an immense service to the cause of abolitionism. Soon after this there began the organ-

ization of anti-slavery societies. The first State society was held at Newport and was attended by delegates from various parts of the State. Daniel Worth was made president. A number of State societies were held at Newport and at Greensboro, Henry county.

The interest grew in intensity. The advocates of emancipation of slaves became very bold in all they said and did, and the opponents to the so-called abolitionists and their methods equally bold and unyielding. The church itself was shaken to its very foundation, and the climax finally came in the Yearly Meeting of 1842, when the meeting for sufferings reported eight of their number as disqualified to fill the stations they occupied in that body.

“Immediately after the last session of the yearly meeting a large number of anti-slavery Friends convened in the meeting-house to confer upon the situation. Before they had opportunity to discuss the condition of affairs, John Maxwell walked into the ministers’ gallery and in the name of the trustees demanded of those present that they immediately leave the house. He first called them Friends, then as if correcting himself, he said he did not know whether they were Friends or not; he would call them people. Another Friend then proposed that as they were so arbitrarily denied the use of the house for the purpose which brought them together, that they meet at Newport, nine miles north, the next morning at 9 o’clock. It was united with and the people retired. Next morning at 9 o’clock there was a large assembly gathered at Newport and continued in conference till 11 o’clock, when it adjourned till 2 o’clock to give place to the regular week-day meeting. From 2 o’clock this conference continued until near sunset.

“Entire harmony prevailed; the spirit of love and prayer overshadowed the meeting, under the influence of which devout supplication went up to the throne of mercy and grace for Divine counsel and aid in this hour of sore conflict.”

From that hour on the public attention was called to Newport more than ever before as the center of the anti-slavery movement in this section of the country. Most of the citizens of the town of whatever denomination were in sympathy with the work, and under the perfected organization everything moved

along in excellent harmony for the care of the fugitive slaves. Levi Coffin could not have accomplished so much if there had not been so many faithful helpers. There were times when it was wiser and safer to divide the number of slaves until they could safely travel to the next station. It was often necessary to raise money for them, for there were unavoidable expenses. Oftentimes they were almost naked and shoeless, so that clothing and shoes had to be supplied. There was a sewing society organized where the good women met to prepare clothing for the fleeing fugitives. The trains bearing these fugitives nearly always traveled in the night, so wagons and horses had to be supplied, and reliable conductors who would safely pilot them to the next station. All these things could not be done by one man, and Levi Coffin was never hindered in his work by lack of efficient helpers. He aided many scores of slaves on to freedom, an average of about one hundred each year while he lived at Newport, and he left the place and the work with great reluctance, but was finally persuaded to go to Cincinnati in 1847 to take charge of the wholesale store in that city, which kept only goods produced by free labor.

This was fifteen years before the emancipation proclamation, yet the work went right on at Newport during all those years, and no slave was ever turned away. "I was an hungered and ye fed me, naked and ye clothed me, homeless and ye took me in."

A number of free colored people of Old Newport were quite active and reliable in caring for the fugitives and for any service in their power to give. Chief among them were William Bush, William Davidson, Douglas White and James Benson, but a number of others were equally ready to lend a helping hand. I have been told William Bush was the chosen captain of the forces organized to meet the famous Kentuckians who threatened to burn the town and other dreadful things. While these Kentuckians were in the center of town and trying to gather some clew to their missing slaves, they offended a colored man by the name of Cal Thomas who had a gun on his shoulder, and he declared he would shoot and shoot to kill, but he was quieted and led away.

Eli Osborn, a friend who was always active in the anti-slavery

cause, was standing by and he told the Southerners that he did not believe in fighting, but if they would get down off their horses he would be glad to play a game of marbles with them. Eli Osborn a number of times harbored slaves in his home, and in his work of hauling between Cincinnati and Newport, had opportunities of carrying the escaping fugitives in his wagon. Linden Osborn, his son, who is still a living citizen of Fountain City, tells of aiding from southwestern Ohio to Newport the famous slave, John White, of whom Levi Coffin writes in his book. And this was not all that Linden Osborn did.

Perhaps the man who next to Levi Coffin did the most in directly aiding fugitive slaves previous to and after 1847 was William Hough, who lived just across the creek where Elwood Boren now resides. Time and again did he care for fleeing slaves and contribute liberally of his money in aid of the work. His daughter, Mary H. Goddard, writes me that she well remembers one morning when her two older sisters prepared breakfast for seventeen runaway slaves. Levi Coffin speaks in his book of William Hough's house as a "noted stopping place on the underground railroad." His daughter speaks of the time when a number of Kentuckians came with a search warrant to search her father's house. "It was a bright moonlight night," she says, "and they could be seen very plainly. The man with the search warrant read it aloud. We listened and heard father say: 'Now, I can tell thee, thee will not find thy darkey, for he is not here in my house, but thee may look all thee wants to.' So then, brother Daniel went with the old gentleman all over the house, carrying the light. When they came to the attic over the old kitchen my brother opened the little attic door and said: 'Here is where we keep our runaway darkies, but there are none in there tonight,' when the old gentleman put in his head, looking all around. Then, when they came to our bedroom door he was going to come in, but brother Daniel said: 'This is my mother's bedroom. You can't go in there.' And the old man replied: 'Maybe he is under the bed.' This was the last of the search warrant, and father again said to him: 'Didn't I tell thee he was not here?'"

Mrs. Goddard says they were in search at this time for the famous Louis Talbert, the slave who escaped from the South

and afterward made a number of trips back to the South and piloted many away from the land of bondage to freedom. He was finally captured at Indianapolis, then on his way South to make another effort to lead others from slavery to a free country. His old master was glad to capture him, and declared he would make an example of him, for he said "Talbert had led away \$37,000 worth of slave property." His mistress plead so earnestly for him that he was only punished by being sold into slavery farther south, where it would be much more difficult to escape. On the way down the Mississippi river he leaped from the boat and made his escape in the darkness, and after many trials and hardships he again came in the night to William Hough's house. His daughter says: "I remember so well one night we heard some one hallooing at the north side of the house, and my father said: 'Who is there?' And he answered: 'Louis Talbert.' He then told us how his mistress begged for his life and of the final decision that he must be sold into the market farther south. I saw him once after I went to Cincinnati to teach," she continues. "He came to the Franklin-street school to see my brother. After this we never heard of him again, supposing they had caught and killed or sold him."

At one time or other Louis Talbert attended school at the Union Literary Seminary, which was taught for many years by Ebenezer Tucker, a prominent educator and anti-slavery man. In his history of Randolph county he speaks of the times the Kentuckians were after Talbert. He says: "The hunters came to Richmond, got assistance, and sixteen men came in the night on horseback to Newport. Louis had been there but had left. They found no fugitives. Three men started at midnight on foot to come to the institute to tell Louis to get out of the way. They came just at daylight and asked: 'Is Louis Talbert here?' 'No, why?' 'If he is, he must make himself scarce; they are after him; sixteen men came into Newport last night and will be right up here.' Louis had 'vamoosed' already. They did not come after him or find him anywhere else." Tucker further says that after Talbert was captured at Indianapolis and his friends supposed he was done for, it was just six weeks from that date, "his black face popped in at the door of the institute." "Why, Louis, we thought you down in New Orleans by

this time." "Oh, no. I was never born to be sold down the river."

Daniel Hough, son of William, in a letter which I hold, written in 1874, says: "One time I conducted one very rainy day sixteen runaway slaves to Winchester and out to William Rhinehard's," and he also remembered "some very interesting runaways and their stories." The daughter says: "I remember the old slave woman who slept with the hogs to keep from freezing, who afterward came to my father's house. I remember Picayune and the meeting of Henry and his family. Henry was a slave and he stayed at my father's house until his family, who were free, came on. They met upstairs in our house. My mother was upstairs when they met. I remember we wanted to know if she saw them. She said: 'No, I looked the other way.'"

William Hough's father, Jonathan Hough, and brothers, Hiram, Levi and Moses, were all active in the anti-slavery cause. Jonathan lived with the youngest son, Moses Hough, and family, and fugitives were repeatedly cared for in their house. Jonathan Hough was one of the early pioneers in the settlement of New Garden township, and entered the land comprising the farms where William E. Elliott and Elwood Boren now live. Israel Hough lived just north of William Hough, and his house was searched also by the noted Kentuckians.

Benjamin Thomas was a true and tried hero in the interest of the colored race. His home was always welcome to the escaping black man and many were made to feel that "a friend in need was a friend indeed." It was Benjamin Thomas who gave 120 acres of land northeast of Spartansburg for the establishment of a school for the education of the colored people. This was the Union Literary Seminary referred to in this paper. Besides the free colored pupils, Mr. Tucker says as many as ten fugitive slaves attended the school at one time. William F. Davis, now living in Fountain City, tells of conducting a train carrying seven "runaways" from Newport to the home of Ebenezer Tucker.

Daniel Puckett, Dr. Henry H. Way and Benjamin Stanton were three very prominent characters in those stirring times in Old Newport. They were three of the eight who were disqual-

ified by the meeting for sufferings in Indiana Yearly Meeting of 1842 for the active part they took in the abolishment of human slavery. They were each always ready with voice or pen or personal deeds to do whatever lay in their power to promote the interests of the fleeing fugitives or in arousing a public sentiment against the curse of human bondage. Daniel Puckett was a minister in the Society of Friends. Dr. Way was a practicing physician and was many times called upon for professional services to those seeking freedom who by great exposure and fatigue became ill or disabled in any way. He was a brave and true man, a fine debater and true counselor. Benjamin Stanton was editor of *The Free Labor Advocate*, whose pen was ever ready in favor of justice and human rights. They were all prominent in the separation which took place in the Society of Friends because of slavery, and Benjamin Stanton was clerk of the first yearly meeting held by anti-slavery Friends. Daniel Puckett accompanied Arnold Buffum to some of the neighboring meetings when he was speaking for the formation of anti-slavery societies, and Jonathan Hough went with him to Winchester and other places in Randolph county.

Dr. Hiram Bennett was a man of fine ability, who gave up his profession to accept the position of lecturer for the first anti-slavery society formed in the State, at a salary of \$500 a year. He was an excellent speaker and traveled over a large territory, and, like all speakers against slavery, suffered much persecution and opposition.

When Levi Coffin was summoned before the grand jury at Centerville, where he gave answers which are so often quoted, he was accompanied by Dr. Henry Way, Samuel Nixon and Robert Green, who had been called for the same purpose, namely, to convict them, if possible, of aiding escaping slaves. Samuel Nixon kept a public house a number of years and often had as guests the men who were in search of runaway slaves, yet he did much in the cause of freedom and against slavery. Like many other members of the Society of Friends who left the South to escape the influences of slavery, he left the State of Virginia in 1827 or 1828 and settled in New Garden township, and a little later in Newport. Robert Green was a good man who was always ready for any service in his power to give. Samuel Charles

was another prominent Friend who was proscribed by the body so-called, but he always remained true to his convictions in the interests of human freedom. Harvey Davis, Harmon Clark, William R. Williams and Jonathan Unthank were among the number who were relied upon for help for these destitute people; to receive them into their homes, or with horses and wagons and conductors, pilot them to a nearer station to the land of freedom, and each no doubt could have told thrilling incidents that were a part of their own experiences.

And what shall we say of all the good women who were ready to get up at any time of night to receive these unfortunate people into their homes; oftentimes destitute of sufficient clothing, possibly wet and covered with mud, hungry, and occasionally sick or injured. Think you it did not require a deep conviction of duty and a heroic courage to meet such additional labors to their already full household cares? Nothing less than love of justice and pity and sympathy for the oppressed (the mother heart often appealed to) could win such sacrificing labor under such adverse circumstances. Their names should be placed on the honored rolls of those who stood true in the cause of human liberty.

There was an organization of young men who obligated themselves for certain duties in aid of the colored people. They sometimes would hire speakers. Another duty which must have required much fortitude was to take regular turns and ride to the "settlement" beyond Spartansburg to teach in the Sabbath school. Among their number were Zeri and Moses Hough, Daniel and Jesse Hill, Thomas and Isaac Woodard, Ira Marine, Calvin Thomas, Daniel Thomas and others.

John Lacey was another reliable worker, and his son, William Lacey, did more than any one was ever able to find out. He belonged to a sort of secret service who patrolled the banks of the Ohio river watching for escaping slaves and directing them to places of safety. He was the man who assisted Eliza Harris, of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," up the bank of the river near Ripley, O., after crossing it in midwinter with her child, on the floating cakes of ice. He confided to a very few how he watched with thrilling interest her dash for liberty on the Kentucky side with her pursuers in hot chase after her. When she reached the

river she hesitated, for it seemed hopeless, but when she realized that she was certain to be captured and separated from her child she clasped her boy more closely and leaped upon a cake of floating ice, and from that on to another, and another, and another. At times she seemed to be sinking and appeared as though she must be lost, but she would place her boy on the nearest floating ice and drag herself onto the same, and with renewed courage continued her daring escape, while Lacey on one side and her would-be captors on the other side watched her with dazed interest and consternation. Finally, with both her and her child nearly frozen, their clothing wet to the skin with the ice-cold water, and almost exhausted, she reached the Ohio side and was assisted up the bank by William Lacey and directed to a place of safety and protection. In her farther flight to Canada she was shifted from the Sandusky line to the Indiana line, which passed through Newport, and she was at the home of Levi Coffin a number of days. Her name will live for centuries in the story of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and the man who assisted her up the river bank at Ripley was at one time a resident of Old Newport.

To still further bear testimony against the traffic in human slavery, many of these good people decided that they could not use the products of slave labor and maintain consciences void of offense, so there were established "free-labor stores" or depots where such goods could be obtained. This was the cause of Levi Coffin going to Cincinnati in 1847. He was chosen to manage the wholesale or distributing store for free-labor merchandise. The store at Newport was kept by Joel Parker, an active anti-slavery man. These goods were necessarily more expensive and oftentimes not so attractive, but that did not prevent these heroes of human liberty from bearing testimony against the degrading influence of slavery.

Nathan Thomas, son of Benjamin Thomas, made several trips to the South in search of cotton, sugar and other products that were not produced by slave labor. He was a prudent but valiant worker in the anti-slavery organization. His wife was the widow of Zeno Reynolds. Her name before marriage was Williams, and she was one of the first teachers in the school established for colored people by the gift of Benjamin Thomas.

After Levi Coffin removed to Cincinnati he frequently sent

"runaways" by the Newport route through West Elkton and the points in Union county. At one time he brought in his own carriage two valuable slaves, John and Mary. At Daniel Clark's, south of Richmond, he overtook four other slaves whom he started from Cincinnati two nights before, but they had not traveled so rapidly, moving along at night. From Daniel Clark's they came on to Newport in broad daylight, much to the fear of James Haworth, for Coffin had urged Haworth to get his carriage ready and drive with him to Newport, for they must hasten on because such valuable property would soon be vigorously sought for. When they drew near Richmond, Haworth suggested that they pass around the city, because then, as now, it was not fully alive to public duty, and could hardly be trusted. As they came near to Moffitt's mill on the east fork of Whitewater, which was run at that time by Benjamin Fulghum and William Kenworthy, they saw these two men with others at work near the mill. When they got opposite, Coffin sang out at the top of his voice the words of an old anti-slavery song:

"Ho! the car Emancipation,
Moves majestic through the nation."

The men stopped work to cheer the train on its way. It arrived safely at Newport, Coffin, with John and Mary, stopping at the home of my father, Daniel Huff, while Haworth with his four moved on to William Hough's, just over the creek. The latter were in greater danger of pursuit, and they were hastened on by the Greenville route, and John and Mary a day later by the Winchester route.

There is still one other prominent worker that I must mention. Pusey Graves was a very brilliant and earnest man who began in early life to make speeches against slavery and gave lectures in the cause, and at the time James G. Birney was a candidate for President, Pusey Graves was a candidate for Congress on the same ticket. I can not do better than to quote a letter received two days ago from his son, Charles B. Graves, who is now one of the judges on the Supreme bench in the State of Kansas. He says:

"My father, Pusey Graves, was a very enthusiastic and active anti-slavery man. In his young days he attracted some atten-

tion by making anti-slavery speeches on the streets of Richmond. During the year when a candidate for Congress for the district of which Wayne county was then a part, on the ticket with James G. Birney for President, he made a very active campaign and was greeted with stale eggs several times. I have heard my mother tell of the condition of his clothes when he came home. He also traveled over the southern part of Indiana with a colored man named Lester, an ex-slave, whom father taught to read. This colored man was a great natural orator and made impressive and eloquent addresses.

"My father's home was a well-known stopping-place on the underground railroad. Fugitives often stopped there while we lived in Newport. Many passed through our house, and when I was a boy there some colored person was being taught to read whenever opportunity offered. When the notorious slave-hunting posse came to Newport four of the fugitives slept in my father's house, and afterward were employed by him to cut and rive "cooper stuff" out in the woods about three miles northeast of town, where they camped until the excitement died out. Pusey Graves and Dr. Stanton, I think, and perhaps others, bought a printing press, wrote articles and set type at night and printed an anti-slavery paper for some time, but of course they could not keep it up. We kept a copy of the paper until he returned from California, and I think he sent it to the Indiana State Historical Society. These are only a few of the events which I remember and have received as a part of the history of the family. My mother's father, John Mitchell, was on the road often with his team carrying fugitives north. Levi Coffin was a leader among the abolitionists, and they relied upon him for advice and cooperation, and like all leaders he was accredited with not only his own acts, but with much that justly belonged to others. While he was a great power and deserves much credit, still there are others, who, in a more humble way, did actual personal service and gave relief to fugitives that would, if known, compare favorably with the work of this great leader."