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## THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN INDIANA.

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[An article by Dr. O. N. Huff, of Fountain City, dealing in part with the Underground Railroad in eastern Indiana, appeared in this magazine in September, 1907 (Vol. III, pp. 133-143) under the title, 'Unnamed Anti-Slavery Heroes of Old Newport.']

THE mystery connected with the Underground Railroad, the secrecy with which its business was conducted, the results of which were so far-reaching and so novel, have ever lent a charm to the history of this wonderful system which had its beginning in the Southland and ended at the boundaries of the Queen's domain; while the remarkable character of its dusky passengers, the story of their escape from bondage to freedom over this mysterious route, has added a touch of romance which strongly appeals to the imagination.

It has been impossible to trace to a definite beginning this unparalleled system—this unexplainable, mysterious corporation, organized without officers and without authority, in direct violation of the laws of both the Northern and the Southern States; but we know that it grew and flourished in defiance of all restraining authority; that it spread over the North, rapidly gaining in power until it became a strong factor in the liberation of slaves, and only ended when the stroke of a mighty pen proclaimed the freedom of all the bondsmen within the limits of the United States.

It has been maintained by those actively engaged in the cause that the Underground Railroad had its origin in the slave States, and that a portion of the system lay south of the Mason and Dixon line. However that may be, it is certain that in the South there were those who sometimes assisted the fugitives to cross

the line, hiding them in wagons, stowing them away in secret places on steamboats, or conducting them through the country at night, to the Ohio river. Once across the river the fugitives found friends who were willing to aid them on their way to Canada,—that "City of Refuge" toward which these dusky forms stole their way through southern swamps, over mountains and through valleys, in the dark hours of the night, guided by the far-off glimmer of the north star, that headlight of the wonderful engine of the Underground Railroad.

The danger to the life and property of those who aided in the escape of slaves was very great, both in the North and the South. In some of the Southern States the penalty for stealing a negro was death; while a heavy fine was inflicted for feeding or harboring a runaway slave. In the North the penalty for aiding in their escape was severe. The law imposed both fine and imprisonment on the offender, and sometimes exacted the payment of the full value of the slave assisted to escape.

Many of those engaged in the work of the Underground Railroad were men and women of irreproachable moral and Christian character, and, although they were acting in direct violation of the laws of the country, they were actuated by a sincere conviction that they were obeying God's command to "feed the hungry and clothe the naked," for the operations of those in the North seldom led them south of the Ohio river; their policy being to assist the fugitive after he had made his escape and not to persuade him to run away. In this they felt no condemnation of conscience. They were convinced that they were performing a heaven-appointed duty. They recognized a higher law than that made by man, and when the dictates of humanity conflicted with the laws of the country, they ignored the law, and saw the hand of Providence in each success. They were appalled by no danger, although at all times they exercised the greatest precaution, both for their own and the sake of the helpless fugitives.

In Indiana the sympathy of a large majority of the people was not with the operators of the Underground Railroad. In fact, the sentiment of a large portion of the settlers was strongly against them. Even among those who disapproved of the slave system were many who opposed the methods used by those en-

gaged in the work of the Underground Railroad, and looked upon them as no better than thieves; for, they maintained, it was worse to steal a negro than to steal a horse, for the reason that a negro was worth more than a horse.

The subject of the gradual emancipation of the slaves was agitated by many who held anti-slavery principles, and manumission societies were formed both in the North and the South—the first of the latter being at New Garden, North Carolina, which some liberal-minded slave-owners joined and advocated plans for gradual manumission. Meantime the Underground Railroad continued to spread over a large portion of the States north of the Ohio river, a number of branches passing through Indiana, and Westfield became an important station. In time, stations were established all along these routes, at distances of from ten to twenty miles apart, and a perfect understanding was maintained between those who were engaged in the work. In the *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin* the author says: "The roads were always in running order, the connections good, the conductors active and zealous, and there was no lack of passengers. Seldom a week passed without our having received passengers over this mysterious road."

The business of the road was attended with heavy expense, which increased with the constantly increasing number of passengers. Ofttimes the fugitives reached the North almost destitute of clothing, and sick from want and exposure; for these food and clothing must be provided, and they must be nursed back to health and the means for transportation secured before they could be forwarded on their way. The journeys were almost always made at night, often over almost impassable roads, along byways that were seldom traveled; every precaution to evade pursuit had to be used, for often hunters were on the track, sometimes ahead of them. Everything was done in the most secret manner, the whereabouts of the fugitives being known to as few persons as possible. Often slaves were concealed for days about the premises of a home unknown to neighbors and visitors, or even to a portion of the family.

There were a few careful managers among the colored people, but only a few; the majority could not be trusted; they lacked

shrewdness and caution and could sometimes be bribed to act as spies, or to betray the hiding places of the fugitives. It is remarkable how the movements of the slave-hunters became known to the managers of the Underground Railroad, in those days when telegraphic communication was an impossibility; and it is remarkable how the names of those actively engaged in the work and the names and location of anti-slavery strongholds became known, not only to the slave-owners, but to the ignorant slaves in the cotton fields of the South. There seems to have been an Underground Telegraph system as well as an Underground Railroad. Thus it was that Westfield came to be regarded in quite a different light from the standpoint of the fugitive slave who hoped to find friends here who would help him on to freedom, and from that of the slave-holder, who regarded it as an abolition hotbed where he could receive no justice; for it was said by slave-hunters that when a runaway "nigger" got to Westfield it was not worth while to look for him.

It is impossible to ascertain the number of slaves who, by means of the Underground Railroad, made their escape from bondage. Levi Coffin said that in 1844 it was estimated that the number then in Canada was about forty thousand. That was more than fifteen years before the beginning of the Civil War, and the number constantly increased until that period. Besides this, many of the fugitives found friends and protection this side of the line, and never crossed into Canada. How many perished in the attempt to gain their freedom none can tell. How many were recaptured and carried back to end their days in slavery will never be known.

A number of interesting incidents in connection with the Underground Railroad occurred at Westfield. It is impossible to give the names of all those who were actively engaged in the cause of the fugitive slave, for time has dimmed the memory of those who remain to tell the story. It will be remembered that in the beginning the movement was very unpopular, both within and without the Friends' church, the members of which composed a large portion of the community in and about Westfield, and the pioneers in the anti-slavery movement were almost ostracised from the society of their neighbors and some of them were "dis-

owned" by their "meeting." To be an Abolitionist required great strength of character and a strong sense of moral obligation. To be an operator in the Underground Railroad required not only this but physical courage as well. The odium attached to the calling was very undesirable; those engaged in it often being classed with thieves and robbers. Yet, in the face of all scandal and disgrace, a few courageous men and women quietly continued the work, and endured the slights and insults of former friends and neighbors until the community experienced a revolution of sentiment. Then abolitionism became popular in this section of the country. The Society of Friends opened its doors to take back, without acknowledgment, all those who had been disowned on account of their anti-slavery proclivities, and many of those who had most bitterly opposed the Underground Railroad took up the work themselves and continued it until their services were no longer needed.

Among the pioneers in the movement should be mentioned Asa Beals, one of the founders of the village; Judah Roberts, Louis Roberts, Simon Moon, another founder of Westfield, and his sons, William and Riley; Curts Hiatt, Nathan Hiatt, Aaron and Elizabeth Lindley, Jonathan Hammer, Joel Denny, Dr. Jacob Pfaff, William Walgerman, William Frost, Border Jackson, Daniel Lighter, Samuel Johns, Milton Stanley and Ephraim Stout. Later came the White brothers, Mordacai, Lilburn and Mikajah; Elijah Talbert, Peter Rich, Levi Pennington, the Baldwin brothers, David and Isaac, and many others. North of Westfield, in the vicinity of Deming, the active workers in the Underground Railroad were Elihu Picket, Jesse, Joseph and Anna Baker, Martin Anthony, Owen Williams, John White, Daniel Hasket, Uriah Hodson, Joseph Hadley and a number of others. In the operation of the Underground Railroad the women were as active as the men and their work was just as effective. Perhaps they did not personally conduct the fugitives through the forests and swamps, but they opened the doors of their homes and took them in, sick as many of them were, ragged and dirty as they all must have been, coming in direct contact with them, and performing all sorts of disagreeable service. They cooked food for the fugitives, and spun and wove the cloth which they made into

clothing for them. The sick they put into their own dainty beds and nursed them back to health, and if the words of our Savior, "Whatsoever ye do unto the least of these, ye do it unto Me," have any meaning, surely they have entered into their reward.

Louis and Judah Roberts were born in Highland county, Ohio. When young men they were employed to work for a cousin who lived at some point on the Ohio river. There they became interested in the operations of the Underground in which their cousin was engaged. In 1834 they moved to Indiana and settled near Westfield. Soon afterward some fugitives were shipped from their old neighborhood on the Ohio river to their home in Hamilton county, and thus a branch of the Underground Railroad was established through Westfield. In the beginning the nearest station north of Westfield was New London, in Howard county, a distance of fifty or sixty miles in these days of gravel roads and excellent facilities for travel, but much farther in those times when the blazed pathway lay through the dense forest and almost impassable swamps. The use of any sort of vehicle was not to be thought of, the only means of travel being on horseback or on foot.

Fugitive slaves were shipped to Westfield from many points. They came from Lafayette, Darlington and Thorntown; from Mooresville, and various points in Henry county, and from Indianapolis. Sometimes they came singly; sometimes a number were together. One night two or three parties, numbering in all twenty negroes, arrived at the home of Judah Roberts, near Westfield. They were all fed and properly cared for and safely forwarded on their journey.

On the spot now occupied by the residence of Anderson Perry once stood a barn belonging to Asa Beals. It differed from the ordinary barns of that period in that it was larger, was built of frame, and had a cellar beneath it; the latter, however, was not generally known. Into this cavity many a dusky form was secreted in the darkness, food and drink given through the opening above, the trap-door securely fastened, a bit of hay or straw scattered carelessly over it; and here the fugitive remained until the time and opportunity came for smuggling him away.

A slave named George Hoard escaped captivity with his wife

and children and was traced by his master to Westfield. Here he engaged Nathan Hunt to assist him in the search for the family, which had scattered through the woods. Nathan was a staunch Quaker, and, unknown to the slave-hunter, was a firm friend to the runaway negroes; but he went with him in the hope of being able to lead him off the track. By and by they spied a little woolly head and a pair of frightened eyes hid in a pile of brush. The master roughly pulled the child out and gathering it in his arms, remarked, "Here is three hundred dollars saved." Nathan could stand it no longer. He forgot all about his advocacies of peaceful arbitration, and, with a decidedly combative instinct and much physical force, he drew the stout stick which he carried in his hand, and, perhaps with less calmness of voice than is usually employed in connection with the use of the "plain language," he said: "Thee put that child down; it is none of thine." How much moral persuasion was conveyed by the stick and the force with which it was wielded I do not know, but the child was liberated. The case came to trial and money was collected to recompense the slave-owner for the loss of his property.

A tavern was kept by Mrs. Luvica White where now stands an old shop across the alley from the residence of postmaster Charles Smith. One night a fugitive slave woman was brought here and placed in an upper room. Scarcely was this done when two strange men came and applied for lodging, which was given them. It soon became apparent that they were slave-hunters and were on the track of the woman upstairs, having traced her to Westfield. To leave her in the room would lead to almost certain discovery; but there was no way of getting her out of the house except to pass through the room in which the men were sitting. However, Mrs. White was equal to the emergency. She dressed the negro woman in her own clothes, with bonnet and veil, prepared herself for the street, and the two quietly left the house together without exciting the suspicion of the master. Mrs. White took the woman to the house of her son, Mikajah White, where now Nathan H. Clark lives. There she was secreted until the danger was past. This was about the year 1850.

Louis Talbert escaped from Kentucky and through the influence of friends became a student in the Union Literary Institute,

in Randolph county. He made two unsuccessful attempts to rescue his sisters from slavery, each time bringing with him a number of runaway slaves. Determined to make another attempt to bring his sisters out of bondage, he confided his plans to a fellow student, a young man from Westfield, who, becoming interested in his story, offered to accompany him on his perilous mission. A few months later Louis presented himself in Westfield and reminded his friend of his promise. He was taken to the house of Levi Pennington, who tried to dissuade him from his purpose; but Louis was determined and confided his plans to Nathan Willits, who agreed to go with him. Nathan, however, unwisely told a friend of their intentions; this friend told another person, who knew Louis's master in Kentucky, and wrote to him, disclosing the plot. The result was that when Louis reached Indianapolis he was confronted by his master and carried back to slavery. A short time afterward he again made his escape, again bringing a number of slaves with him. It was estimated that Louis carried off \$37,000 worth of slave property.

Perhaps the most exciting event connected with the Underground Railroad in this vicinity was the attempt to capture and carry back to slavery a family named Roads. One dark night in the year 1837 John Roads and his wife, Rhuann Maria, and their child, arrived at the home of Joseph Baker, near Deming. They were brought thither in a closely covered wagon driven by a conductor of the Underground Railroad and placed in hiding for a few days, when it was expected to forward them to Canada. John and Rhuann were the property of Mr. Singleton Vaughn, who lived in Missouri, where the slaves were born. John and Rhuann were married, and after the birth of their child Mr. Vaughn removed with them to Illinois, where they remained in his service for some months. After awhile it began to be said that, having been kept in a free State by their master for more than six months, they were, according to the law, entitled to their freedom. These rumors reaching the ears of Mr. Vaughn, he discreetly moved them back to Missouri. John in the meantime had heard of the Underground Railroad and of the friendship of the Abolitionists for the slaves, and he cherished the hope that by



the help of these good friends he might some time escape to the land of freedom.

One day a strange man came to see their master, and, by listening to their conversation, they learned that Rhuann was to be sold to a Southern planter and taken away. They at once concluded to make an effort to secure the coveted freedom. With a few simple tools and a small bundle of clothing, they stole from their cabin one dark night and started for Canada. After long days of hiding and weary nights of travel they reached the Mississippi river. Making a flimsy raft of logs, bound together with grapevines, they succeeded in crossing. Before they reached the shore, however, the child became frightened and cried so loud that, fearing it would lead to their discovery, John, driven to desperation, threatened to stop its crying by throwing it overboard; but the mother plead for the child's life, and they reached the shore without putting the terrible threat into execution. Their pursuers were close upon them, however, and they were captured and taken to jail to await trial. Through the efforts of the Abolitionists in Illinois they escaped one night, and were spirited away on an Underground Railroad car, across the prairies of Illinois, and their pursuers lost all trace of them. Believing they would be safe, some of their friends persuaded them to remain in the vicinity of Deming, Indiana. John was given employment, and after awhile was able to purchase a bit of ground, upon which he built a cabin; but he never lost the fear of being recaptured. No windows were made in his cabin, and the strong oak door was always securely barred at night and an ax stood beside his bed while he slept.

For several years they enjoyed their new-found freedom; other children were born to them and John was kept busy supplying the needs of his family. Unfortunately, a man from Strawtown, Indiana, removed to Missouri and settled near John's old master, and in an evil hour Mr. Vaughn learned the whereabouts of his slaves. He employed this man to assist him, and, armed with the necessary proofs, he started to Indiana to recover his property. Arriving at Strawtown, he procured a warrant for the arrest of the negroes, and with a posse of rough men, proceeded at night to the Roads cabin.

John was awakened and told that he must surrender himself and family and return with his master to Missouri. This he refused to do, and with his ax in hand stood at the door, threatening to kill the first man who crossed the threshold. Fearing the desperate man, who was ready to defend his liberty with his life, the men turned to the chimney, hoping to effect an entrance through the fireplace; but Rhuann, equally desperate, kept up such a fire with the broken pieces of furniture, burning her beds when all other fuel was exhausted, that they were defeated in the attempt, and the master received such a blow from a hardened piece of clay in the hands of Rhuann, after they had demolished the chimney, that they were glad to abandon the plan.

Bravely the negroes held their position until day began to dawn, calling loudly for help the while. Owen Williams and Jesse Baker, hearing their cries, started to the rescue, but were met by the armed men and turned back. The alarm spread rapidly; runners were sent to Westfield and to Deming to carry the news and to notify the people along the line.

Joseph Baker was the next to arrive upon the scene; he refused to be halted by the besiegers and was admitted into the cabin by John. Soon other neighbors began to arrive and Mr. Vaughn was questioned as to his intentions; he replied that it was his intention to take the negroes before the proper officers for identification, after which he intended to take them South. A consultation was held which led to the proposition that if Mr. Vaughn would consent to go to Westfield for trial the friends of John would advise him to surrender. This was agreed upon and the entire party, slaves, officers and master, were taken to the home of Martin Anthony, where breakfast was served.

By this time the whole country was aroused and people began to gather for miles around. Those who had horses came on horseback; those who had not came on foot. After some delay a team was procured and John and his family placed in the wagon, guarded by the slave-owner and his armed men, and escorted by the friends of the negroes to the number of one hundred and fifty or two hundred.

Arriving at a point where the road divided, one branch leading

to Noblesville, the other to Westfield, Mr. Vaughn and his men placed themselves in front of the team and demanded that the slaves be driven to Noblesville; at the same time armed men seized the horses by the bridles and attempted to turn them in that direction. This caused great excitement, the friends of the negroes insisting that they should be taken to Westfield for trial. Amid the confusion Daniel F. Jones, a young man from Westfield, sprang into the wagon, seized the reins, which the driver gladly relinquished, and warning the men to get out of the road; that they might shoot if they dared, but that he should take that team to Westfield, he gave the horses a cut with the whip which caused them to spring suddenly forward; the tongue of the wagon struck the horse of one of the officers in front, hurling him out of the road and disarming him. Deftly turning the horses into the road leading to Westfield, Mr. Jones started on as brisk a trot as the condition of the roads would permit. So swiftly did he drive that the entire cargo was spilled; or, as some one has expressed it, "the bottom dropped out of the wagon" and the negroes were lost in "Dismal Swamp," through which they passed. Here they took passage on the Underground Railroad and Mr. Jones drove the horses and empty wagon to Westfield.

Mr. Vaughn and his party proceeded to Noblesville, where he began suit against those who had assisted in the escape of the slaves. A long, protracted trial followed, which was carried to Marion county, and resulted in the finding that John and his wife, having been worked by their master in Illinois, a free State, for more than six months, they were entitled to their freedom. It cost the defendants \$600 in attorney's fees, besides much loss of time. John again entered upon the life of a free man and lived in the community until his death.

Mr. Isaac Roberts, of Westfield, has in his possession an interesting old relic of the Underground Railroad, of which the following story is told: Fifty years ago two runaway slaves, a man and a woman, were brought to the home of his father, Judah Roberts, where it was thought best to detain them for awhile. They had been two years in traveling the distance from their plantation home to Westfield, hiding much of the time in south-

ern swamps and forests. The man carried with him a scabbard in which was a dagger about two feet long, with which to defend himself should he be overtaken, and to protect himself against bloodhounds. The weapon, which is of fine workmanship, was probably stolen from some gentleman, and may have played an important part in the exercise of southern chivalry.

One day Mr. Roberts came to Westfield and found the citizens somewhat excited over the arrival of some strange men who were supposed to be slave-hunters. Hastening home, he warned the fugitives of their danger and prepared to send them to a safer refuge. The slaves were greatly alarmed, and in their eagerness to start forgot all about the dagger, which has remained in the Roberts family ever since.